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# Expository Preaching at the Dawn of the Reformation: An Evaluation of Martin Luther as Preacher in Light of Modern Expository Theory

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EXPOSITORY PREACHING AT THE DAWN OF THE  
REFORMATION: AN EVALUATION OF MARTIN  
LUTHER AS PREACHER IN LIGHT OF  
MODERN EXPOSITORY THEORY

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Randall Lyn Rozelle  
December 2017

**APPROVAL SHEET**

EXPOSITORY PREACHING AT THE DAWN OF THE  
REFORMATION: AN EVALUATION OF MARTIN  
LUTHER AS PREACHER IN LIGHT OF  
MODERN EXPOSITORY THEORY

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Read and Approved by:

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T. J. Betts (Faculty Supervisor)

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William F. Cook III

Date \_\_\_\_\_

In honor of the Lord

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## PREFACE

I love preaching. It burns inside me. Therefore, I thank my Heavenly Father for affording me the resources and opportunity to pursue an advanced degree in expository preaching at SBTS.

To the faculty and brethren at SBTS, especially to Coleman Ford and my supervisor, T. J. Betts, thank you for your constructive revisions, high expectations, Christ-like example, timely humor, continued availability, and dedication to higher learning in ministry. You graciously met and exceeded my expectations and needs throughout.

Randall L. Rozelle

Roselle, Illinois

December 2017

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

No single person is more identified with the Reformation than Martin Luther (November 10, 1483-February 18, 1546). His name consistently appears on lists that recount the most influential individuals in history.<sup>1</sup> So too, the mountain of literature that bears his name evidences Luther's profound influence on the church and the world. In fact, it seems that more books have been written about Martin Luther than any other person in history with one exception: Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>2</sup> Given the vast number of books and articles that witness to Luther as monk, reformer, theologian, professor, author, translator, hymn writer, and family man, one would expect as much (if not more) attention ascribed to Luther as preacher. After all, Luther preached thousands of sermons at the dawn of a new era in Christianity.

To that end, this thesis seeks to reintroduce readers to the preaching of Martin Luther. Not only do his sermons contain a lucrative vault of theology and gospel proclamation, they testify to the sacrifice and supremacy of Christ from the pages of Scripture. Accordingly, pastors, seminary students, and laity can celebrate, reaffirm, and apply his insightful (and often witty) exposition to their own walk with the Lord.

The sample of sermons examined herein is miniscule compared to the sum of

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<sup>1</sup>Steven Skiena and Charles B. Ward, "Who's Biggest? The 100 Most Significant Figures in History," December 10, 2013, accessed November 12, 2015, <http://ideas.time.com/2013/12/10whos-biggest-the-100-most-significant-figures-in-history>. Skiena and Ward rank Martin Luther as the seventeenth most significant individual in world history, preceded only by Queen Victoria, Julius Caesar, Karl Marx, Elizabeth I of England, Charles Darwin, Henry VIII of England, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander the Great, Aristotle, Adolf Hitler, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, William Shakespeare, Muhammad, Napoleon, and Jesus. *Time's* article was based upon their book *Who's Bigger? Where Historical Figures Really Rank* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup>John M. Todd, *Luther: A Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), xvi, quoted in James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 13.

Luther's output. For instance, although the exact number of Luther's homilies remains unknown, estimates range from 4,000 to as many as 10,000.<sup>3</sup> Still, in order to demonstrate in what ways Martin Luther conforms to the role of expository preacher, this work analyzes a diverse representation of his preaching, including his lectionary sermons, catechetical sermons, and a portion of his verse-by-verse exposition of the Fourth Gospel. Moreover, if expository preaching is considered the ultimate standard of biblical preaching, can Martin Luther, then, be deemed an expository preacher?

### **Familiarity with the Literature**

The following primary and secondary works are assessed in this project.

#### **Primary Works**

The foundation of this thesis rests on *Luther's Works*, volume 24, and on Baker's *Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*. Volume 24 of *Luther's Works* contains verse-by-verse sermons on John 14-16 that Luther preached in 1537.<sup>4</sup> However, Caspar Cruciger, who recorded these sermons as Luther preached them, removed all indications of where his homilies began and ended.<sup>5</sup> Thus, this volume reads more like a continuing commentary than a succession of textually divided sermons.

The other footing of this study derives from the *Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, a seven-volume series published by Baker Books in 2000.<sup>6</sup> The first volume alone contains 39 sermons of Luther that total more than 800 pages. In contrast to his verse-by-verse exposition in *Luther's Works*, these volumes contain sermons from

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<sup>3</sup>James MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, vol. 4, *Vindication of the Movement (1530-46)* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 88.

<sup>4</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan and Daniel E. Poellot, eds., *Luther's Works*, trans. Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), ix.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>John Nicholas Lenker and Eugene F. A. Klug, eds., *Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, trans. John Nicholas Lenker and others, 7 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000).

Luther's lectionary preaching. Together, these sources offer a diverse sampling from Luther's preaching (early and late) that form the backbone of the argument and ensuing conclusions.

### **Secondary Works**

Although the body of literature on Martin Luther's preaching remains significantly underdeveloped, some scholars and writers began to make headway during the twentieth century. Furthermore, most of their tomes were written in English, a sorely needed modernization considering that Luther's works had largely been constrained to German and Latin scholarship for nearly four centuries. As a result, the following texts are providing inlets into the reformer's life and works (including his sermons) for contemporary, English-driven academia.

Fred Meuser's *Luther the Preacher* stands as one of the first works that speaks exclusively to the subject of Luther's preaching, yet it was not published until 1983. Fewer than eighty pages, Meuser expresses Luther's passion for preaching, his style of preaching, and his gift for preaching. Additionally, he explains Luther's methods of preaching and offers several excerpts to illustrate his point. Though concise, his book introduces the reader to the subject and pioneers a useful contribution to the field.

In the 1960s James MacKinnon authored four volumes on *Luther and the Reformation*.<sup>7</sup> His fourth volume in the series, *Vindication of the Movement (1530-46)*, contains two chapters that attend Luther's exegesis and preaching. Fred Meuser comments on MacKinnon's work, "The best treatment I have found in English is the 14-page section on Luther's preaching in James MacKinnon's *Luther and the Reformation*, vol. 4."<sup>8</sup> Not only does MacKinnon set forth Luther's high view of Scripture and his emphasis on justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, he praises Luther's

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<sup>7</sup>James MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, 4 vols. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962).

<sup>8</sup>Fred Meuser, *Luther the Preacher* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 10.

vernacular method of preaching that related God’s Word to common hearers.

A minor, though important reference for this paper is the Doctor of Ministry project by Glen Thomas entitled, “Equipping Seminary Students at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri to Understand and Practice Expository Preaching.”<sup>9</sup> Thomas graduated from SBTS in 2008 and is the first modern-day specialist in expository preaching in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS). In a portion of his work, Thomas underscores Luther’s hermeneutic and asserts that he was indeed an expository preacher. Moreover, Thomas utilizes several quotes from Luther’s sayings and works to evidence his claim.

Likewise, Ewald Plass’s *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian* is a helpful resource. The Reformer wrote on a wide range of topics, and this compilation includes more than 5,100 quotations on more than 200 subject areas (alphabetically arranged) that he addressed. Headings that prove relevant to this study include Luther’s ruminations on the Bible, the Gospel, Christ, the Languages (Hebrew and Greek), the Old Testament, the New Testament, Preachers, and Preaching. In addition, Plass includes a helpful section on the Theology of Luther.<sup>10</sup>

Another beneficial piece is “Luther the Preacher” in *The Expository Times* that was written by Peter Newman Brooks at the University of Cambridge.<sup>11</sup> Brooks not only reflects on the core principles that drove Luther’s preaching, he describes his method of delivery too. In order to sustain his observations, Brooks leverages several citations from the Reformer.

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<sup>9</sup>Glen David Thomas, “Equipping Seminary Students at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri to Understand and Practice Expository Preaching” (D.Min. project, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008).

<sup>10</sup>Ewald M. Plass, ed., *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), vii-viii.

<sup>11</sup>The article notes that the full title that would not fit due to publishing constraints was originally “The Word made Flesh, and the Word made Clear – Some Observations on Martin Luther’s Preaching Ministry.” Peter Newman Brooks, “Luther the Preacher,” *The Expository Times* 95, no. 2 (November 1983): 37.

In addition, H. S. Wilson contributes to the conversation in his *Lutheran Quarterly* article, “Luther on Preaching as God Speaking.” Wilson hones in on one of Luther’s greatest presuppositions in preaching: namely, *who is speaking?* For instance, are worshipers coming to hear a professional speak about Scripture and religion, or are they coming to hear direct verbiage from God?<sup>12</sup> Wilson contends from Luther that the latter is true.

One constructive and recent source for this thesis is *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* by Sidney Greidanus. Though brief in nature, his section on Luther proves worthwhile. In chapter 4 Greidanus contrasts the young Luther with the advanced Luther. He especially notes Luther’s departure from his training in the fourfold, allegorical interpretation of the Middle Ages to a single, historical-literal interpretation of texts.<sup>13</sup> While I disagree with some of Greidanus’s inferences about Luther, his contribution to the study of Luther and his preaching merits commendation.

The most modern tome that proves relevant for this study originates from Hughes Oliphant Old’s four-volume set on *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*.<sup>14</sup> In his fourth volume, *The Age of the Reformation*, Old contributes 40 pages to the preaching of Martin Luther.<sup>15</sup> He highlights the various kinds of Luther’s preaching, including his postils, catechetical sermons, sermons on the Gospel of John, and lectionary driven homilies. Moreover, Old speaks of Luther as an expository preacher.

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<sup>12</sup>H. S. Wilson, “Luther on Preaching as God Speaking,” *Lutheran Quarterly* (Spring 2005): 101.

<sup>13</sup>Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 112.

<sup>14</sup>Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).

<sup>15</sup>Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 4, *The Age of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 3-42.

## Void in the Literature

In his work *Luther and the Reformation*, James MacKinnon remarks, “There is no exhaustive treatise, even in German, on Luther’s preaching. . . . The accounts of Luther’s preaching in the homiletical text-books and histories of preaching are very inadequate.”<sup>16</sup> MacKinnon documented this void in 1962. Similarly, although an avalanche of exhibitions, commemorations, lectures, festivals, articles, books, and other publications emerged in 1983 to celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther’s birth, works on Luther’s preaching remained scant.<sup>17</sup> For instance, Meuser challenges his readers in *Luther the Preacher*, “Look through all the publicity of all the programs and publications of this anniversary year [1983]. If you can point out one, even one, that features a single lecture or program on Luther the preacher, you will be my guest for dinner at a restaurant of your choice. Literature on Luther the preacher is virtually nonexistent in English.”<sup>18</sup>

Not only have three decades passed since Meuser’s observation, but as Christendom stands on the cusp of 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, contemporary reflections on Luther’s preaching remain sparse. In fact, Hughes Oliphant Old’s *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* stands as the only significant publication on Luther’s preaching in the twenty-first century, and though insightful, his analysis of Luther’s preaching is comparatively brief.<sup>19</sup>

Likewise, recent tomes on Luther’s preaching fail to provide a satisfactory representation of him as an expository preacher. The following examples suffice to demonstrate this assertion. First, in his book, *Luther the Preacher*, Fred Meuser contends, “With Luther, especially after 1521, came what many interpreters call a totally new form of the sermon: *die schriftauslegende Predigt*. *Schriftauslegend* is usually translated as

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<sup>16</sup>MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, 318.

<sup>17</sup>Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*, 13.

<sup>18</sup>Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 9-10.

<sup>19</sup>Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 3-42.



“expository.” *Auslegen* literally means “to lay out,” to exhibit or display, to make something evident or plain.”<sup>20</sup> Second, Sidney Greidanus quotes from Meuser and also credits Martin Luther with what evangelical Christianity terms expository or textual-thematic preaching.<sup>21</sup> Hughes Oliphant Old likewise asserts, “Luther preached on through the Gospel of John every Saturday for years . . . Luther is at his best as an expository preacher, and here we see Luther’s expository preaching at its best.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, at least three scholars advance the conclusion that Martin Luther was, in fact, an expository preacher. However, none of these authors provides definitive evidence from Luther’s preaching to substantiate his claims. Therefore, this void in literature exposes the need to explore *how* and *in what ways* Luther can be considered an expository preacher.

### **Thesis**

Luther’s sermons do not squarely align with modern methods of expository preaching. Given five hundred years of separation, contemporary readers should not expect to see such alignment. However, on account of his later grammatical-historical and Christocentric approach to Scripture and preaching, Martin Luther was a forerunner to modern expository preaching methods. To that end, this thesis examines a sample of both lectionary and catechetical sermons from Martin Luther, as well as his verse-by-verse exposition of the Fourth Gospel. Admittedly, the challenge entails careful analysis of Luther’s sermons in their historical setting without imposing modern standards on them. Yet this prudent evaluation of Luther’s homilies yields several timeless implications for the continued practice of sound, expository preaching methods in the church today.

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<sup>20</sup>Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 46.

<sup>21</sup>Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 124.

<sup>22</sup>Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 27.

## **Chapter Summaries**

In order to clarify and advance the assertion that Martin Luther is a forerunner of modern expository preaching, the following chapters provide a thorough analysis of selected sermons and engage corresponding literature.

Chapter 2 defines and dissects the modern practice known as expository preaching. Because no universal, authoritative definition of expository preaching exists, this chapter explores definitions in the field, submits ten core tenets of expository preaching, and presents a model for faithful, expository preaching today.

Chapter 3 tracks Luther's change in hermeneutic, namely, his departure from the fourfold interpretation of the Middle Ages and its allegorical method of exegesis, to a Christ-centered, historical-grammatical approach to Scripture—the foundational premise of expository preaching.

Chapter 4 thoroughly examines several sermons of Martin Luther in order to demonstrate the expository nature of his post-1525 preaching. The first sample analyzes his catechetical preaching. The second sample explores his lectionary preaching, and the third sample probes his verse-by-verse exposition of John 14-16. Not only does such a diverse sampling help to ensure a fair representation of his work, but it also provides ample primary evidence from which to evaluate Luther as an expository preacher in his own right. As a result, this case study reveals in what ways Martin Luther can, in fact, be deemed a forerunner of modern expository theory.

Chapter 5 highlights the implications from Luther's expository methods that benefit Christ's church today. Indeed, Luther's sermons provide a well from which to draw; modern pastors, students, and laity need only to come and draw. In addition, chapter 5 discloses further areas of study in Luther's preaching that this thesis did not afford the time nor the focus to pursue.

CHAPTER 2  
DEFINING THE MODERN EXPOSITORY  
PREACHING METHOD

**Exploring Modern Expository Preaching**

In discussions of expository preaching, one question continues to evade a normative answer among evangelical academia, namely, “What is expository preaching?” Interestingly, botanists are not having this conversation; disagreement does not exist regarding the meaning of *botany*. On the contrary, even a brief exploration of contemporary books and publications on expository preaching reveals that no authoritative, universal definition exists. Rather, subjectivity reigns. And as authors and scholars continue to advance personal definitions of expository preaching, murkiness—as opposed to clarity—clouds today’s expository waters. Nevertheless, a keen study of contemporary definitions still proves fruitful for homiletics; not only does it expose important parallels and differences between definitions, but a grave shortcoming surfaces too. Chapter 2 also sets forth ten core (and non-negotiable) tenets of expository preaching, as well as a four-step model for crafting faithful, expository sermons today.

**Sampling Modern Definitions**

Haddon Robinson is “the godfather” of modern definitions for expository preaching. In fact, nearly every expository tome since 1980 references Robinson’s work. Robinson defines expository preaching as “the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and

experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.”<sup>1</sup> By comparison, Greg Heisler states,

For *Spirit-Led Preaching*, I have developed the following definition of expository preaching: expository preaching is the Spirit-empowered proclamation of biblical truth derived from the illuminating guidance of the Holy Spirit by means of a verse-by-verse exposition of the Spirit-inspired text, with a view to applying the text by means of the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, first to the preacher’s own heart, and then to the hearts of those who hear, culminating in an authentic and powerful witness to the living Word, Jesus Christ, and obedient, Spirit-filled living.<sup>2</sup>

The *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching* says, “Exposition means bringing out what is there. The word exposition derives from the Latin word *exposition*, which means ‘setting forth’ or ‘making accessible.’ Therefore, an expository sermon is a sermon which faithfully brings a message out of Scripture and makes that message accessible to contemporary hearers.”<sup>3</sup> Stephen and David Olford assert that “expository preaching is the Spirit-empowered explanation and proclamation of the text of God’s Word with due regard to the historical, contextual, grammatical, and doctrinal significance of the given passage, with the specific object of invoking a Christ-transforming response.”<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, Bryan Chapell contends, “An expository sermon may be defined as a message whose structure and thought are derived from a biblical text, that covers the scope of the text, and that explains the features and context of the text in order to disclose the enduring principles for faithful thinking, living and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text.”<sup>5</sup> David Helm states that “expositional preaching is empowered preaching that rightfully submits the shape and emphasis of the sermon to the shape and

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<sup>1</sup>Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2014), 5.

<sup>2</sup>Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit’s Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2007), 21.

<sup>3</sup>William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer, eds., *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 131.

<sup>4</sup>Stephen F. Olford and David L. Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 69.

<sup>5</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 31.

emphasis of a biblical text. In that way it brings out of the text what the Holy Spirit put there . . . and does not put into the text what the preaching thinks might be there.”<sup>6</sup> And John MacArthur says,

According to Webster, an exposition is a discourse to convey information or explain what is difficult to understand. Applying this idea to preaching requires that an expositor be one who explains Scripture by laying open the text to public view in order to set forth its meaning, explain what is difficult to understand, and make appropriate application. . . . No matter what the length of the portion explained may be, if it is handled in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the mind of that particular Biblical writer and as it exists in the light of the overall context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers, it may properly be said to be *expository preaching*. . . . [E]xpository preaching is Bible-centered preaching.<sup>7</sup>

Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix reason that expository preaching is “the process of laying open a biblical text in such a way that its original meaning is brought to bear on the lives of contemporary listeners.”<sup>8</sup> Vine and Shaddix also specify an expository sermon as “a discourse that expounds a passage of Scripture, organizes it around a central theme and main divisions which issue forth from the given text, and then decisively applies its message to the listeners.”<sup>9</sup> Ramesh Richard forthrightly acknowledges, “This is my working definition: *Expository preaching is the contemporization of the central proposition of a biblical text that is derived from the proper methods of interpretation and declared through effective means of communication to inform minds, instruct hearts, and influence behavior toward godliness.*”<sup>10</sup> So too, Albert Mohler says,

Expository preaching is that mode of Christian preaching that takes as its central purpose the presentation and application of the text of the Bible. All other issues and concerns are subordinate to the central task of presenting the biblical text. As the

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<sup>6</sup>David R. Helm, *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God’s Word Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 13.

<sup>7</sup>John MacArthur, Jr. and The Master’s Seminary Faculty, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 11.

<sup>8</sup>Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 29.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 19.

Word of God, the text of Scripture has the right to establish both the substance and the structure of the sermon.<sup>11</sup>

T. J. Betts, however, simply defines expository preaching as “text-driven.”<sup>12</sup>

Although this sampling of expository definitions could be classified as modern (post-1980), a glance at definitions from the mid-twentieth century proves beneficial too.

For instance, John Stott professes,

It is my contention that all true Christian preaching is expository preaching. . . . Properly speaking, ‘exposition’ has a much broader meaning. It refers to the content of the sermon (biblical truth) rather than its style (a running commentary). To expound Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view. The expositor pries open what appears to be closed, makes plain what is obscure, unravels what is knotted and unfolds what is tightly packed. The opposite of exposition is ‘imposition’, which is to impose on the text what is not there. But the ‘text’ in question could be a verse, a sentence, or even a single word. It could equally be a paragraph, or a chapter, or a whole book. The size of the text is immaterial, so long as it is biblical. What matters is what we do with it. Whether it is long or short, our responsibility as expositors is to open it up in such a way that it speaks its message clearly, plainly, accurately, relevantly, without addition, subtraction or falsification.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, in an interview by Mark Dever, Dick Lucas compares expository preaching to a boxer in a gym:

We’ve got to be searching the Scriptures to say: what is this passage saying? Why is it saying it? What is surprising here? It’s rather like the boxer in his gym pummeling away at it, pummeling away at it until it begins to yield its treasure. That’s an exercise at which you get better. But it doesn’t mean to say that every sermon that is expositional is going to be a great sermon.<sup>14</sup>

Given the plethora of definitions for expository preaching, Harold Bryson tenders the following critique:

So many definitions of *expository preaching* have been developed through the years that writers on preaching have grouped the definitions into categories. Donald G. Miller gives four broad categories into which many definitions of expository preaching fall. Faris D. Whitesell establishes five broad categories of expository

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<sup>11</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 65.

<sup>12</sup>T. J. Betts, interview by author, Louisville, July 18, 2016.

<sup>13</sup>John R. W. Stott, *Between Two World: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (repr., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 126.

<sup>14</sup>Dick Lucas, interview by Mark Dever, May 22, 2002, accessed January 26, 2016, <http://9marks.org/interview/expositional-preaching-dick-lucas>.

preaching. . . . There is still no generally accepted definition of expository preaching. Many definitions have been constructed, but confusion still reigns.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, Bryson adds, “Each definition seems to be correct. Because of the variety of definitions, ambiguity abounds about a clear, authoritative, workable definition of expository preaching.”<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, several similarities emerge among the aforementioned definitions, including an adherence to the biblical text, the concern for hearer application, and the necessity of the Holy Spirit’s illumination. However, one towering shortfall repeatedly stands out among the quoted authors. Not one “evangelical” definition accentuates or even alludes to Christological interpretation, fulfillment, or proclamation of the preached text, when Jesus Christ is the heart of Scripture. Hence, Christ should be the focal point of expository preaching too. Granted, Stephen and David Olford come close by including a “Christ-transforming response” in their definition, yet their definition remains a far cry from declaring Christ-centered exposition from text to hearer. Moreover, given the explosion of religious pluralism in contemporary culture, it remains too dangerous for expositors to simply assume Christ in definitions where He is not stated directly. Otherwise, a non-Christian yet Bible-wielding religion could exploit the same definition.

Conversely, one modern expositor’s words surrounding expository preaching merit commendation. Although Timothy Keller does not offer an explicit definition of expository preaching, he overtly steers the process toward Christ when he explains,

Expository preaching grounds the message in the text so that all the sermon’s points are points in the text, and it majors in the text’s major ideas. It aligns the interpretation of the text with the doctrinal truths of the rest of the Bible (being sensitive to systematic theology). And it always situates the passage within the Bible’s narrative, showing how Christ is the final fulfillment of the text’s theme (being sensitive to biblical theology).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Harold T. Bryson, *Expository Preaching: The Art of Preaching through a Book of the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 12.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>17</sup>Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 32.

Any definition of expository preaching must pivot around the Christ-centered interpretation and proclamation of a text and its intended meaning. Therefore, I submit the following definition of expository preaching: *Expository preaching is the prayer-infused, Christ-centered interpretation and proclamation of a passage's intended meaning and purpose which gives rise to Spirit-empowered application and implication in the lives of hearers today.* In other words, God has laid the only bridge from text to hearer, and that bridge is Christ.

### **Why Expository Preaching Matters**

ABC News recently covered a story about an eight-year-old boy in Illinois who was still breastfeeding.<sup>18</sup> The mom insists, "Kyle is my only son and he's very important to me . . . and he's going to be allowed to nurse until he decides to finish weaning himself."<sup>19</sup> Although critics accuse her of serving her own needs rather than her son's, she maintains, "It's not about your needs, it's about putting your child first."<sup>20</sup>

The church faces the same dilemma today. The church is inundated with "nursing Christians." Men and women, some of whom have been professing believers for years, live contently on warm milk. In fact, the New Testament testifies that nursing-believers have plagued the church for nearly two thousand years. For instance, the writers of Hebrews confront their intended audience,

About this *we* [my emphasis] have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature (Heb 5:12-14).<sup>21</sup>

The authors file a grievance with the Hebrew Christians over their lack of spiritual

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<sup>18</sup>"Mom Still Breast-Feeds 8-Year-old Son," ABC News, July 9, 2016, accessed August 26, 2016, <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=125961&page=1>.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.



maturity; they remain sucklings—underdeveloped in their walk with Christ and therefore unfit for the “solid food” of God’s Word. In fact, Paul vents the same frustration regarding the church in Corinth. Paul chides, “But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh” (1 Cor 3:1-3a).

That God earnestly desires the growth and maturity of His body, the church, is no secret. Paul exhorts the Ephesians, “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph 4:15-16). Likewise, Peter closes his second epistle, “You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:17-18).

Therefore, God commands the systematic preaching and teaching of His Word, and expository preaching functions like a two-sided utensil. While expository preaching strengthens and nourishes believers in Christ, it fends off spiritual malnutrition too. Furthermore, divine commission (e.g., “to preach”) is accompanied by divine example.<sup>22</sup> From the onset of Jesus’ public ministry Matthew records that Jesus “began to preach (*khru/ssw*), saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt 4:17). Moreover, Jesus instructs the twelve disciples the first time He sends them out, “Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And preach (*khru/ssw*) as you go, saying,

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<sup>22</sup>The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says of *khru/ssw* (to preach): “It means ‘to cry out loud, declare, announce’ . . . . A general sense is ‘to make known,’ though specifically it may also mean ‘to herald.’” Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Fredrich, eds., *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged into one volume by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), s.v. “*khru/ssw*.”

“The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 10:6-7). So too, Jesus commissions His church through the apostle Paul:

Preach (khru/ssw) the word, be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Tim 4:2-4).

Hence, by God’s design preaching remains the non-negotiable privilege and responsibility of His church, the very instrument Jesus works through to gather, strengthen, lead, and sustain His dearly purchased flock.

Modern expositors underscore the magnitude of expository preaching in their writings too. For example, Timothy Keller says, “A careful expository sermon makes it easier for the hearers to recognize that the authority rests not in the speaker’s opinions or reasoning but in God, in his revelation through the text itself. . . . Expository preaching enables God to set the agenda for your Christian community.”<sup>23</sup> John Stott attributes the decline of the Western church to the state of its preaching and to a loss of confidence in the Gospel: “Now there is no chance of a recovery of preaching without a prior recovery of conviction. We need to regain our confidence in the truth, relevance and power of the gospel, and begin to get excited about it again. Is the gospel good news from God, or not?”<sup>24</sup> Thus, Stott concludes, “So, if the Church is to flourish again, there is no greater need than a recovery of faithful, powerful, biblical preaching.”<sup>25</sup> Stott therefore reasons, “It is our responsibility to teach them with clarity and conviction the plain truths of Scripture, in order to help them develop a Christian mind, and to encourage them to think with it about the great problems of the day, and so to grow into maturity in Christ.”<sup>26</sup>

Bryan Chapell and John MacArthur use the shepherding image to accentuate

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<sup>23</sup>Keller, *Preaching*, 36.

<sup>24</sup>Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 85.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 116.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 173.

expository preaching and its indispensability in the church. Chapell states, “Preaching a sermon is an act of shepherding that requires a minister to consider every aspect of genuine structure, exegesis, and delivery as a potential tool for spiritual nurture, admonition, and healing.”<sup>27</sup> MacArthur presses harder and warns clergy: “But anything less than a commitment to expository preaching by the preacher will reduce his sheep to a weak, vulnerable, and shepherdless flock.”<sup>28</sup>

So too, Harold Bryson magnifies expository preaching as *the* critical bridge that spans the Bible’s historicity with contemporary hearers. Bryson expounds,

One of the main reasons the Bible needs exposition is because the cultural chasm that yawns wide and deep between the ancient world of the Bible and the contemporary world. God spoke his Word in an ancient world. Understanding the meaning of the Bible involves going back in time and place to that ancient world. It involves encountering a world which has long ceased to exist. Even modern translations of the Bible show a long past world. No one should detest studying the ancient world of the Bible, though, for the events of the Bible happened in history, and its word is a word of God put in classical Hebrew, some Aramaic, and common Greek words.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, Bryson endorses expository preaching as the best means to impart the enduring sufficiency of the Word.

Consequently, God’s desire for the incessant preaching of Scripture in His church looms large, especially with eternity at stake. That God has graciously bequeathed His written Word for all times and all places leaves no excuse for His sheep to be underfed or infantile in faith. Rather, the cure for church hunger begins with an undaunted commitment to expository preaching. Pointing directly toward the pulpit, Stephen and David Olford aptly exclaim, “There is no shortcut to maturity. We must depend upon the Word of God day by day. . . . That is why we must be devoted to, directed by, and dependent on the Word of God.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 85.

<sup>28</sup>MacArthur and the Master’s Seminary Faculty, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, xvii.

<sup>29</sup>Bryson, *Expository Preaching*, 5.

<sup>30</sup>Olford and Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 28.

## Ten Core Tenets of Expository Preaching

Does a set of core tenets exist for expository preaching, and if so, what are those tenets? If a fundamental core of “expository essentials” does in fact exist, then conversely, the components also function as a norm by which the expositional nature of sermons can be measured. Although some readers will challenge the view that expository preaching contains a set of core tenets that cannot be violated and remain expositional, this thesis asserts ten such core tenets. As a result, these “expository essentials” govern what necessitates expository preaching in modern pulpits.

**The inerrancy of Scripture.** Scripture testifies about itself, “The word of the LORD proves true” (2 Sam 22:31). Likewise, the psalmist insists, “The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous rules endures forever” (Ps 119:160). God Himself attests, “I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right” (Isa 45:19). Jesus affirms in His prayer to the Father, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17). And Paul charges Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed; rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). In fact, Paul reiterates in the same letter, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). Both testaments deem Scripture to be the very inspired, inerrant, and infallible word of God; hence, faithful expository preaching hinges on the certitude of Scripture’s inerrancy.

Many evangelical expositors uphold the inerrancy of Scripture as a cornerstone of expository preaching. For instance, John MacArthur asserts,

Evangelical preaching ought to reflect our conviction that God’s Word is infallible and inerrant. Too often it does not. In fact, there is a discernable trend in contemporary evangelism *away* from biblical preaching and a drift *toward* experience-centered, pragmatic, topical approach in the pulpit. Should not our preaching be biblical exposition, reflecting our conviction that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God?<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>MacArthur and the Master’s Seminary Faculty, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 23.

In the same way Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix maintain, “The effective Bible expositor will have a high view of Scripture, beginning with a clear conviction about biblical *inspiration*.”<sup>32</sup> Vines and Shaddix add, “A high view of biblical inspiration issues forth into a clear conviction regarding the Bible’s *authority*. If the Bible is inspired by God and consequently void of error, then it can be trusted as the sole authority for matters of faith.”<sup>33</sup> Likewise, Stephen and David Olford embolden preachers: “We must stand on the authority of the Scriptures . . . making the Bible the final and only rule of faith and practice. It is sufficient for all our needs.”<sup>34</sup> To summarize, expository preaching operates from the unyielding certainty that all Scripture stands as the authoritative, fixed, and flawless Word of God. As a result, expositors preach what God has declared, and they do so with unwavering conviction.

**Christocentric interpretation and proclamation.** Jesus gently reprimands the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: “‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:25-27). Three times in three verses the word *all* authenticates Jesus as *The Referent* of the entire Old Testament canon. In fact, Jesus later reiterates this declaration in the presence of all His disciples. Luke records,

Then Jesus said to them, “These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:44-

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<sup>32</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 49.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>34</sup>Olford and Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 25.

47).<sup>35</sup>

The risen Christ distinguishes Himself as the *only acceptable* hermeneutic of Scripture. To miss Jesus as the fulcrum of biblical interpretation is to dismiss His own designation and blueprint for faithful exposition.

It follows, then, that the apostle Paul proclaims, “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:22-23). Paul expresses again, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). Timothy Keller elucidates, “For Paul . . . there is only one topic: Jesus. Wherever we go in the Bible, Jesus is the main subject. . . . So Paul hasn’t preached unless he has preached about Jesus, not merely as an example to follow but as a savior: ‘Christ Jesus, who has become for us our righteousness, holiness, and redemption’ (1 Corinthians 1:30).”<sup>36</sup> In short, Paul knew no other crux for preaching than Christ and His cross.

Hence, godly expositors submit themselves to Jesus’ hermeneutic and to apostolic example, and they position Christ at center of all biblical exposition. Dennis Cahill reasons, “All Christian preaching should be gospel preaching. Not that all sermons are evangelistic or that all sermons should be based on New Testament texts, but all sermons should find their focus in the gospel, the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Albert Mohler contends, “All Christian preaching is unabashedly Christological. Christian preaching points to the incarnation of God in Christ as the stack pole of truth and the core of Christian confession.”<sup>38</sup> Timothy Keller concurs, “Every time you expound a Bible text, you are not finished unless you demonstrate how it shows us that we cannot save ourselves and that only Jesus can. That means we must

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<sup>35</sup>Cf. John 5:39, 46.

<sup>36</sup>Keller, *Preaching*, 16.

<sup>37</sup>Dennis M. Cahill, *The Shape of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 23.

<sup>38</sup>Mohler, *He Is Not Silent*, 43.

preach Christ from every text, which is the same as saying we must preach the gospel every time and not just settle for general inspiration or moralizing.”<sup>39</sup> Keller stresses again, “To preach the gospel every time is to preach Christ every time, from every passage. Only if we preach Christ every time can we show how the whole Bible fits together.”<sup>40</sup> In the same way Stephen and David Olford profess, “Certainly declaring Christ should be at the core of the preacher’s concern and ministry. The gospel message must center on Jesus Christ. . . . We are not just preaching concepts, reflections, or applications; ultimately we are declaring a Person.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, every time sermon preparation begins, Haddon Robinson reminds preachers: “At some time or other, you will have to respond to the question, ‘How does the centrality of Jesus Christ affect the way that I handle the biblical text?’”<sup>42</sup>

**Grammatical-historical exegesis.** Paul admonishes Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). “Rightly handling” comes from the Greek word *οἰοῦμαι* which means “to use correctly.” Faithful exposition therefore demands textual integrity throughout the entire interpretive process, and pastors best achieve textual integrity when they employ grammatical-historical exegesis. John Stott avers,

*Exposition demands integrity.* . . . It is sometimes graced with the rather long-winded adjective ‘grammatico-historical’, because it signifies the interpretation of a text in accordance with both its historical origin and its grammatical construction. The sixteenth century Reformers are rightly given credit for having recovered this method by rescuing biblical interpretation from the fanciful allegorizations of medieval writers. . . . They emphasize that what every Bible student must look for is the plain, natural, obvious meaning of each text, without subtleties. What did the

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<sup>39</sup>Keller, *Preaching*, 48.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>41</sup>Olford and Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 211.

<sup>42</sup>Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 13.

original author intend his words to mean?<sup>43</sup>

So too, Walter Kaiser explains, “The aim of the grammatico-historical method is to determine the sense required by the laws of grammar and the facts of history.”<sup>44</sup> Bryan Chapell also endorses grammatical-historical exegesis:

Our task as preachers is to discern what the original writers meant by analyzing the background and grammatical features of what they said. Using grammar and history to discern a text’s original meaning is called the grammatical-historical method. This method allows Scripture to speak for itself instead of having an interpreter apply meaning to a text.<sup>45</sup>

Hence, grammatical-historical exegesis has one goal when interpreting a passage of Scripture—*accuracy*. Stephen and David Olford affirm, “At the heart of expository preaching is a commitment to expose and proclaim the truth that is *there* in the text of God’s Word. A primary and fundamental concern in sermon preparation is to discern accurately the truth that is really in the text.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, an expositor labors toward literary, grammatical, contextual, historical, cultural, geographical, and theological accuracy when exegeting God’s Word. Indeed, the grammatical-historical approach demonstrates an exegete’s commitment to “rightly handling the word of truth,” at least in the preliminary stages of sermon preparation.

**One governing theme or idea.** The magnitude of this tenet cannot be overstated. Haddon Robinson accentuates, “A sermon should be a bullet, and not buckshot. Ideally each sermon is the explanation, interpretation, or application of a single dominant idea supported by other ideas, all drawn from one passage or several passages of Scripture . . . effective communication demands a single theme.”<sup>47</sup> In fact, Robinson

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<sup>43</sup>Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 127.

<sup>44</sup>Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching & Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1981), 87.

<sup>45</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 77.

<sup>46</sup>Olford and Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 102.

<sup>47</sup>Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 17.



cautions that a preacher should never give a sermon until he can express its major theme in a short, clear, and pregnant sentence.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, Bryan Chapell says, “Without a unifying theme, listeners have no means of grasping a sermon’s many thoughts.”<sup>49</sup> Chapell adds, “*How many things is a sermon about? One!* . . . Each feature of a well-wrought message reflects, refines, and/or develops one major idea . . . all the features of a sermon should support the concept that unifies the whole.”<sup>50</sup> Moreover, because hearers cannot pause live-sermons nor press “rewind,” Chapell reminds clergy, “Sermons are for listeners, not readers. . . . It is easier to catch a baseball than a handful of sand even if the two weigh about the same amount.”<sup>51</sup> Along the same lines, Fred Craddock applies a water analogy to underscore the importance of a unifying theme:

The difference between a moving stream and a stagnant marsh is constraint. Such is the difference between sermons with and without the discipline of the controlling theme. . . . If there is not a single theme, all the energies that should have been harnessed to the one task are scattered and dispersed in the frantic search for a place to stop that will give the semblance of planning to this aimless wandering.<sup>52</sup>

Craddock therefore offers pastors the following litmus test: “All this has been to say again that unity is difficult to achieve but irreplaceable if the sermon is to move. . . . The desired unity has been gained when the preacher can state the central germinal idea in one simple affirmative sentence.”<sup>53</sup>

The text of Scripture, however, *must* govern a sermon’s idea or theme. John MacArthur asserts,

The essential ingredient in dealing with central ideas, outlines, and titles in expository preaching is an understanding of the structure of the passage to be preached. The expositor should not communicate his own central idea, nor his own

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<sup>48</sup>Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 18.

<sup>49</sup>Chapel, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 43.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>52</sup>Fred Craddock, *As One without Authority* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 82.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 85.

outline, nor his own title. He is, rather, to teach the central idea, outline, and theme of the author. Failure to reflect the author's theme, outline, and central idea is a departure from true exposition.<sup>54</sup>

MacArthur reiterates, "The central idea of a true expository message reflects the central idea intended by the Bible author himself. . . . Our task is NOT to create a central theme. It is rather to 1. find the author's central theme 2. build a message around that theme, and 3. make that theme the central part of all we have to say."<sup>55</sup> Bryan Chapell concurs: "In expository preaching, unity occurs when a preacher demonstrates that the elements of a passage support a single major idea, which serves as the theme of the sermon. We want this theme to be the Bible's theme."<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, in order to help clergy develop a sermon theme, Timothy Keller offers the following advice:

Since you can't preach a text rightly unless you put it into its whole Bible context and show how it points to Christ, we might want to choose our sermon theme after answering three questions: What is this text talking about, and what is it saying about what it is talking about? What practical difference did this teaching make to the author's readers, and what difference should it make to us? How does the text point us to Christ, and how does his salvation help us change in line with the pastoral aim.<sup>57</sup>

The best way to emphasize the importance of one governing theme or idea per sermon is to close with wisdom from John Broadus, whom Bryan Chapell dubs "the father of modern expository preaching":

What now is the prime requisite to the effectiveness of an expository sermon? Our answer must be, unity. Unity in a discourse is necessary to instruction, to conviction, and to persuasion . . . but unity in an expository discourse is by many preachers never aimed at. They conceive of it as a mere series of disjointed remarks upon the successive verses. . . . Let there be unity at whatever cost. And not only this, but structure.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>MacArthur and the Master's Seminary Faculty, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 227.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 229.

<sup>56</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 46.

<sup>57</sup>Keller, *Preaching*, 223.

<sup>58</sup>John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (Philadelphia: Smith, English & CO., 1871), 304-5. Bryan Chapell is one modern expositor who dubs John Broadus "the father of modern expository preaching" (*Christ-Centered Preaching*, 85).

**An advantageous structure.** David Helm acknowledges, “Each week the preacher faces a . . . challenge: How should I arrange the material I intend to preach? What organization will I bring to it?”<sup>59</sup> Helm’s admission undoubtedly resonates with expositors. The text has been quarried. The central idea has been gleaned. Now the homilist labors to organize the blossoming message for maximum flow, interest, unity, and comprehension. To that end, if the goal of grammatical-historical exegesis is accuracy, the goal of sermon structure is clear and simple progression.

Bryan Chapell instructs, “A well-planned sermon begins with a good outline—a logical path for the mind. . . . Good outlines clarify the parts and progress of a sermon in listeners’ minds.”<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Timothy Keller accentuates the need for progression when he articulates, “Your outline has to have movement, progression, tension. . . . [I]n your sermons you must build some suspense that creates an eagerness to hear what is coming next and a sense of traveling to a destination.”<sup>61</sup> Chapell also speaks regarding a sermon’s clarity and simplicity: “The goal of good outlining is to make sure listeners can follow a sermon’s thought, not reproduce a preacher’s outline.”<sup>62</sup> In addition, Chapell highlights the importance of a sermon’s framework including an introduction, a body, and a conclusion:

Sermons typically begin with an introduction that leads to a proposition that indicates what the body of the sermon will discuss. The body includes main points and subpoints that form the skeletal outline of the sermon and structure the sermon’s explanation. The explanatory materials, which support the main and subpoint statements, as well as the sermon’s illustrations and applications flesh out the skeleton formed by the explanation’s points. A conclusion follows the body of the message, summarizing the information in the message and usually containing the

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<sup>59</sup>Helm, *Expositional Preaching*, 97.

<sup>60</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 133.

<sup>61</sup>Keller, *Preaching*, 228. For an insightful resource about the sermon as a journey toward a destination, see Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, *Communicating for a Change* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2006).

<sup>62</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 135.

sermon's most powerful appeal.<sup>63</sup>

John MacArthur even warns expositors regarding their introductions and conclusions:

If a preacher fails to gain his audience's attention with a captivating introduction, he has probably lost them for the rest of the message. If his main points are not clarified or made memorable with quality illustrations, then the effect of his message can be short-lived. If he bypasses concluding his remarks with a review or exhortation, the purpose of the message will probably not be achieved.<sup>64</sup>

Although expositors agree on the importance of sermon outlines for effective preaching, they disagree over the nature of the actual structure. As a result, two primary camps exist within modern expository preaching. One camp purports what this thesis calls an "open structure," while the other camp adheres to a "closed structure" of exposition. By *open structure* I mean this: while the text steers the homiletical outline, the text does not bind the sermon to a specific structure. Rather, the expositor is free to choose a structure that best communicates the intended purpose of the text. Conversely, a *closed structure* denotes that the structure of the text *must* dictate the structure of the sermon.

It is noteworthy that respectable preachers appear in both camps. For instance, David Helm and Albert Mohler maintain a "closed structure" approach. Helm says,

We don't superimpose our outline over the text. Rather, we bring out of the text what the Holy Spirit already put in. And this is best done in the manner in which he put it together. . . . I have defined biblical exposition as empowered preaching that rightly submits the shape and emphasis of the sermon to the shape and emphasis of a biblical text.<sup>65</sup>

Similarly, Mohler asks, "If you picked an evangelical church at random and attended a Sunday morning service there, how likely is it that you would hear a faithful expository sermon, one that takes its message and its structure from the biblical text?"<sup>66</sup> In fact, Mohler insists,

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<sup>63</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 135.

<sup>64</sup>MacArthur and the Master's Seminary Faculty, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 243.

<sup>65</sup>Helm, *Expositional Preaching*, 101.

<sup>66</sup>Mohler, *He Is Not Silent*, 50.

Because the Bible is the inerrant and infallible Word of God, the very shape of the biblical text is also divinely determined. God has spoken through the inspired human authors of Scripture, and each different genre of biblical literature—historical narrative, direct discourse, and apocalyptic symbolism, among others—demands that the preacher give careful attention to the structure of the text and allow it to shape the sermon. . . . But genuine exposition demands that the text establish the shape as well as the substance of the sermon.<sup>67</sup>

In other words, to truly be expositional in nature, the shape and substance of the sermon must derive from the shape and substance of the biblical text.

On the other hand, Harold Bryson and Timothy Keller embrace an “open structure” approach. Bryson states,

The form for sermons has never been fixed, nor will it ever be fixed. The *message* of preaching is far more important than the *method* of preaching. God uses many kinds of expositors to present his Word. . . . Some expositors employ a didactic offering while others utilize an inductive or narrative approach. Preachers select and arrange words in a sermon differently. They organize their thoughts with structural diversity. No one style of preacher and no one kind of sermon characterizes the preaching of the Word. A sermon is authentic when it brings the truth of a text in touch with contemporary needs. The issue in a sermon is not *how* God’s truth is exposed but *if* God’s truth is exposed. Biblical truth in a sermon can be exposed either explicitly with a deductive approach or implicitly with an inductive approach. *The manner does not matter but the message does.*<sup>68</sup>

Keller likewise believes, “Once you have chosen the theme, develop an *outline* around that theme that unfolds the meaning of the passage—with each point arising from insights from the text itself—and creates narrative tension toward a climax.”<sup>69</sup> While Bryson and Keller affirm that a sermon structure must draw from the text itself, they do not stipulate that their structures coincide. By extension, lest the task of sermon outlining become legalistic and oppressive, this thesis espouses “open structure” expository preaching too. The Holy Spirit not only endows preachers with creativity, but pastors exercise the freedom of the gospel. Hence, sermon structure is neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture (adiaphora) and thereby left to the prayerful discretion of the homilist.

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<sup>67</sup>Mohler, *He Is Not Silent*, 67.

<sup>68</sup>Bryson, *Expository Preaching*, 7-8.

<sup>69</sup>Keller, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 225.

**The proper distinction between law and gospel.** While the proper distinction between law and gospel could just as easily be placed under theological accuracy, this thesis regards the distinction as its own separate (and crucial) tenet of expository preaching. Martin Luther says,

The Law is the Word in which God teaches and tells us what we are to do and not to do, as in the Ten Commandments. . . . And so the Law of God convinces us by our experience that we are naturally wicked, disobedient, lovers of sins, and enemies of God's Commandments. . . . The other Word of God is not Law or commandment, nor does it require anything of us; but after the first Word, that of the Law, has done this work and distressful misery and poverty have been produced in the heart, God comes and offers His lovely, living Word, and promises, pledges, and obligates Himself to give grace and help, that we may get out of this misery and that all sins not only be forgiven but also blotted out and that love and delight to fulfill the Law may be given besides. See, this divine promise of His grace and of the forgiveness of sins is properly called Gospel.<sup>70</sup>

So too, Luther's successors assert,

We believe, teach, and confess that the law is, strictly speaking, a divine teaching which gives instruction regarding what is right and God-pleasing and condemns everything that is sin and contrary to God's will. . . . However, the gospel is, strictly speaking, the kind of teaching that reveals . . . that Christ has atoned and paid for all sins and apart from any human merit has obtained and won for people the forgiveness of sins . . . and eternal life.<sup>71</sup>

Hence, rightly dividing the law and gospel in preaching equates to hearers being sure or uncertain, comforted or fearful, strong or weak, joyful or doubtful, captive or victorious through faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Lutheran confessors state,

The distinction between law and gospel is a particularly glorious light. It serves to divide God's Word properly [cf. 2 Tim 2:15] and to explain correctly and make understandable the writings of the holy prophets and apostles. Therefore, we must diligently preserve this distinction, so as not to mix these two teachings together and make the gospel into a law. For this obscures the merit of Christ and robs troubled consciences of the comfort that they otherwise have in the holy gospel when it is preached clearly and purely.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Ewald M. Plass, comp., *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for Active Christians* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 735.

<sup>71</sup>Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 500.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 581.

**Application and implication.** Haddon Robinson states, “Application gives expository preaching purpose. As shepherds we relate to the hurts, cries, and fears of our flock. . . . [T]hey lie awake wondering about grocery prices, crop failures, quarrels with a spouse, diagnosis of a malignancy, a frustrating sex life, or the rat race where only rats seem to win. . . . [W]e exegete both the Scripture and the congregation.”<sup>73</sup> Exposition without application might inform a congregation, but it will not guide, motivate, challenge, or produce life-change in them. Thus, Bryan Chapell articulates, “So what? What do you want me to do or believe? If you cannot answer, you have not preached. . . . The healthiest preaching does not assume listeners will automatically see how to apply God’s truths to their lives; it supplies the application people need.”<sup>74</sup> Chapell adds, “Expository preaching does not merely obligate preachers to explain what the Bible says; it obligates them to explain what the Bible means in the lives of people today. Application is as necessary for sound exposition as is explication.”<sup>75</sup> Similarly, John Broadus insists, “The application in a sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion, or a subordinate part of it, but is the main thing to be done. . . . We are not to speak *before* the people, but *to* them, and must earnestly strive to make them take what we say to themselves.”<sup>76</sup> Accordingly, application functions as the indispensable “So what?” of biblical exposition. Application answers the question: “How does this unchanging truth of God’s Word apply specifically to people today?” Chapell attaches a helpful baseball analogy to application: “Without application, a preacher simply swings blindly, hoping that the ball of application will hit the bat of exposition. Home runs are more frequently hit when the batter sees the ball before swinging. . . . Preachers should exegete a text *and* their congregation to decide the response they intend before they craft

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<sup>73</sup>Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 10.

<sup>74</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 53.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>76</sup>Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 230.

the words of the sermon.”<sup>77</sup> Responsible application, however, also entails caution.

Albert Mohler counsels expositors against the two extremes of application:

Application is absolutely necessary, but it is also fraught with danger. Haddon Robinson describes the “heresy of application,” warning that many preachers are faithful in the task of exegesis, but undermine the text at the point of application. At the other extreme are preachers who never get to the task of application at all, arguing that application is an attempt to do the work of the Holy Spirit. . . . [T]he faithful preacher understands the difference between the external application of the text to life and the Spirit’s internal application of the Word to the heart.<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, faithful application rests in the power of the gospel. David Helm emphasizes, “A final check on my work is to ask a question that points me back to the heart of the Bible itself. Is the application I am making grounded in the gospel, or am I in danger of simply placing more commands on my people?”<sup>79</sup>

By extension, gospel-driven application leads to Spirit-empowered implication. While application answers the “So what?” of a biblical text, implication unfolds the “Now what?” of a passage. Implication thereby drives home the intended purpose of the text and of the sermon too. Haddon Robinson explains,

The purpose states what you expect to happen in your hearers as a result of preaching your sermon. . . . Whole books, as well as sections within books, were written to make something happen in the thinking and the actions of the readers. . . . You must first figure out why a particular passage was included in the Bible, and with this in mind decide what God desires to accomplish through your sermon in your hearers today.<sup>80</sup>

Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix similarly expound,

Every message ought to have a specific purpose aimed at a particular group of people. This purpose defines what you want the audience to take away with them—what you want them to do. . . . The purpose of your message is what you desire in terms of audience response. You know what the sermon is about, including its central thrust . . . what do you want your listeners *to do* about that subject?<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 213.

<sup>78</sup>Mohler, *He Is Not Silent*, 68.

<sup>79</sup>Helm, *Expositional Preaching*, 109.

<sup>80</sup>Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 73.

<sup>81</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 137.



As a result, Ramesh Richard argues that “by the end of the sermon the audience must have the answers to three important questions: *What* did the preacher speak about? *So what* difference does or should it make? *Now what* do I do with God’s claims in this sermon?”<sup>82</sup> Richard’s second question extracts the application, and his third question pilots the implication.

In actuality, God Himself ordains human-implication from the onset of creation. In response to His grace—the enormity of the creation-event itself—God’s first words to humanity include gospel-motivated implication. God instructs the husband and his wife: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:28). With God’s glory now on ultimate display via the life, death, resurrection, and ascended-reign of His Son, gospel-motivated application and Spirit-empowered implication continue to direct the hearts, minds, and lives of His church until Christ’s glorious return.

**Divine dependence.** Jesus promised His disciples, “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth . . . He dwells with you and will be in you . . . He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:16-17, 26). Jesus later reassures His disciples again:

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is Mine; therefore I said that He will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:7, 13-15)

Jesus kept His promise. Soon after He ascended in glory to the Father, Jesus gifts His church with the Holy Spirit. Pentecost means that the church now exegetes and expounds

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<sup>82</sup>Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 117.

Scripture in the power and illumination of the Holy Spirit. As a result, the entire expository process depends upon the presence and aid of God's divine Tutor.

Charles Spurgeon likened a pastor's divine dependence in preaching to a dormant church bell:

The preacher, no matter how brilliant, godly, or eloquent, has no power without the Spirit's help: The bell in the steeple may be well hung, fairly fashioned, and of soundest metal, but it is dumb until the ringer makes it speak. And . . . the preacher has no voice of quickening for the dead in sin, or of comfort for living saints unless the divine spirit [Spirit] gives him a gracious pull, and begs him speak with power.<sup>83</sup>

Modern expositors concur. For instance, Stephen and David Olford assert, "The preacher must depend upon the aid and the anointing of the Holy Spirit as he preaches the Word. Such prayer and dependence is not an excuse for sloppy preparation. Indeed, the preacher should have been dependent on the Holy Spirit in the study as well."<sup>84</sup> Bryan Chapell also acknowledges,

The extraordinary but regular means by which God transforms lives is through his Word, which is accompanied by the regenerating, convicting, and enabling power of his Spirit. . . . No truth grants greater encouragement in our preaching and gives us more cause to expect results from our efforts. The work of the Spirit is inextricably linked to preaching as heat is to the light a bulb emits. . . . These truths challenge all preachers to approach their task with a deep sense of dependence on the Spirit of God.<sup>85</sup>

So too, Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix affirm,

The expository preacher has a powerful ally as he seeks creatively to communicate God's Word to the person in the pew. He has been promised the assistance of the Holy Spirit. . . . The role of the Holy Spirit in Bible preaching resolves many of these problems. The Spirit can arouse in the hearers deep desires to know the truth. He has been given by our Lord to bring men to an awareness of their sinfulness, the adequacy of the work of Christ, and the desirability of salvation through Him. The power of the Holy Spirit makes preaching effective and applicable. Paul stated in 1 Thess. 1:5, "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Quotable Spurgeon* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1990), 207, quoted in MacArthur and the Master's Seminary Faculty, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 83.

<sup>84</sup>Olford and Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 180.

<sup>85</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 33.

<sup>86</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 189.

Likewise, Keith Willhite testifies, “Preaching is a transformative, spiritual exercise that absolutely depends on the power of the Holy Spirit, and no communication strategy can substitute for that dependence or that power.”<sup>87</sup>

Accordingly, an expositor best expresses his divine dependence through prayer. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, prayer brackets Jesus’ promise of the divine Helper in John 14-16. For instance, right before Jesus promises the Helper in John 14:16-17, He vows, “Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:13-14). Similarly, after Jesus’ pledges the assistance of the Helper in John 16:13-15, He assures His disciples, “In that day you will ask nothing of Me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:23-24). Both contexts invite—even wed—prayer and the guidance of the Spirit into all biblical truth. It follows, then, that contemporary homilists will act in faith upon Jesus’ words and engage in prayer from their study to the pulpit. Dennis Cahill elucidates,

The Spirit, of course, is beyond our control (see John 3:8). He shows up at unexpected times and in unexpected ways. But the preacher can at least be aware of the need for the Spirit’s help in all phases of the sermon design. We should form the sermon with conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit. . . . One way we express that dependence is through prayer. We should begin the sermon development process with focused prayer, inviting the Spirit of God into the sermon design process. Along the way we will often pray short prayers, asking for God’s help. And we will conclude, not just with a sense of relief, but with a prayer of thanksgiving for the Spirit’s involvement.<sup>88</sup>

Moreover, David Helm concedes, “In a word, we are desperate—desperate for the power of the Holy Spirit to attend our preaching. And so we pray. We pray in advance of preaching. We pray in the act of preaching. We pray even after our preaching is done.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Keith Willhite, *Preaching with Relevance without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), 132.

<sup>88</sup>Cahill, *The Shape of Preaching*, 88.

<sup>89</sup>Helm, *Expositional Preaching*, 91.

The words of Cahill and Helm not only inspire pastors to pray throughout the entire expository preaching process, but they also convict clergy for those times when they have allowed the demands of ministry to shelve the power and results that accompany prayer-soaked sermons.

**Complementing character.** Although God equips the called rather than calling the equipped, Scripture reveals that God regards the character of His servants.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, God specifies qualifications for overseers. Paul instructs Timothy,

If any aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keep his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil (1 Tim 3:1-7).

Paul also directs Titus:

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it (Titus 1:5-9).

If a gap exists between the sermon and the behavior of the preacher, the message of Christ lacks credibility for hearers.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, several prominent expositors reflect on the importance of character for expository preaching too. For instance, John Broadus declares, “Nor must we ever forget the power of character and life to reinforce

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<sup>90</sup>Cf. Abram (Gen 15:6); Moses (Num 12:3); Job (Job 1:8); David (1 Sam 13:14; 16:7); Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:6); Joseph (Matt 1:19); Mary (Luke 1:38); Anna (Luke 2:36-38); the women who accompany Jesus (Luke 8:1-3); the seven assistants (Acts 6:3); Stephen (Acts 6:8), deacons (1 Tim 3:8-13), et al.

<sup>91</sup>Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 265.



applications, to bring even dull, uninformed and unspiritual minds into interested and profitable contact with an extended portion of the Bible—of course this must be difficult.<sup>95</sup>

In fact, Jay Adams believes that inadequate preparation is the number-one reason behind the poor preaching that plagues Christ's church: "My point is that good preaching demands hard work. From listening to sermons and from talking to hundreds of preachers about preaching, I am convinced that the basic reason for poor preaching is the failure to spend adequate time and energy in preparation. Many preachers—perhaps most—simply don't work long enough on their sermons."<sup>96</sup> Timothy Keller agrees: "Understanding the biblical text, distilling a clear outline and theme, developing a persuasive argument, enriching it with poignant illustrations, metaphors, and practical examples, incisively analyzing heart motives and cultural assumptions, making specific application to real life—all of this takes extensive labor."<sup>97</sup> Likewise, Albert Mohler accentuates that there are no shortcuts to faithful expository preaching:

Expository preaching is therefore inescapably bound to the serious work of exegesis. If the preacher is to explain the text, he must first study the text and devote the hours of study and research necessary to understand it. The pastor must invest the largest portion of his energy and intellectual engagement (not to mention his time) to this task of "accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15 NASB). There are no shortcuts to genuine exposition. The expositor is not an explorer who returns to tell tales of the journey but a guide who leads the people into the text, teaching the arts of Bible study and interpretation even as he demonstrates the same.<sup>98</sup>

Consequently, expository preaching knows no alternative for toilsome work. Yes, expository preaching is demanding and oft grueling. Yet Haddon Robinson's foreword for Dennis Cahill reverberates the worthwhile recompense for hard labor where he reminds expositors, "To stand before a congregation, believing that you have a word

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<sup>95</sup>Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 317-18.

<sup>96</sup>Jay E. Adams, "Editorial: Good Preaching is Hard Work," *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 4, no. 2 (1980): 1, as quoted by MacArthur and the Master's Seminary Faculty, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 210.

<sup>97</sup>Keller, *Preaching*, 11.

<sup>98</sup>Mohler, *He Is Not Silent*, 66.

from God to tell them, ranks as one of life's glorious experiences. It's the 'mind' part that can overwhelm you. The study, the thinking, and the preparation each week make preaching a 'glorious burden.'"<sup>99</sup>

### **A Model for Faithful Expository Sermons Today**

In 2015 the world's second-largest diamond was unearthed in Botswana.<sup>100</sup> Roughly the size of a tennis ball, the 1,111-carat stone was valued at nearly \$70 million.<sup>101</sup> The largest diamond ever retrieved, however, dates back to South Africa in 1905. The massive Cullinan stone came in at 3,106-carats. Because of its sheer size, the diamond was eventually cut into nine separate stones.<sup>102</sup>

Whether diamonds are large or small, buyers often take for granted the vast amounts of time, money, and labor required to extract them from the earth's recesses. For instance, an average of 250 tons of rock are mined per diamond.<sup>103</sup> Still, annual raw diamond sales generate \$7 billion globally, proving that the excavating, crushing, collecting, sorting, cutting, and polishing are profitable and worthwhile endeavors.<sup>104</sup>

The same cost-benefit analysis holds true for expository preaching. The psalmist declares, "The Torah of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces. . . . The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous rules endures forever. . . . I rejoice at Your word like one who finds great spoil" (Ps 119:72,

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<sup>99</sup>Cahill, *The Shape of Preaching*, 8.

<sup>100</sup>"World's Second-Largest Diamond 'Found in Botswana,'" BBC News, November 19, 2015, accessed September 29, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34867929>.

<sup>101</sup>Trevor Nace, "A 1,111-Carat Diamond—The World's Second Largest—Was Found In Botswana," *Forbes News*, November 20, 2015, accessed September 29, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/trevornace/2015/11/20/1111-carat-diamond-worlds-second-largest-found-botswana/#7a25622e4e50>.

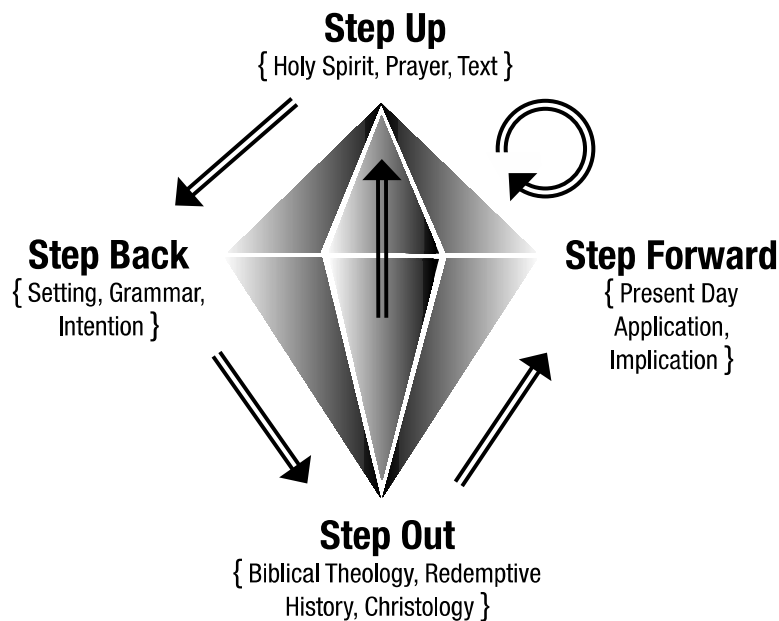
<sup>102</sup>"World's Second-Largest Diamond 'Found in Botswana,'" BBC News, November 19, 2015, accessed September 29, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34867929>.

<sup>103</sup>"Diamond Mining-How Are Diamonds Mined and Formed?" History TV, March 1, 2015, accessed September 29, 2016, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f48PopFqzNk>.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.* In final jewelry form, fine diamonds generate \$50 billion in annual sales.

160, 162). Scripture in its entirety can be compared to a lavish diamond field; even though it requires considerable time, effort, and cerebral-sweat to exhume its inner treasures, the weekly payout for pastors, congregants—and ultimately for the glory of God—is unrivaled. To that end, having defined expository preaching, argued why it matters, and asserted its ten core tenets, this thesis prescribes a simple, four-step process to craft faithful, expository sermons via The Expository Diamond.

Figure 1. The Expository Diamond.



### Step Up

The first step in any journey or life-change is the most important. Similarly, the first step in The Expository Diamond proves paramount because it summons the preacher to Step Up. The entire expository process depends upon and emerges from this homiletical move. Sadly, textual eagerness, pressing schedules, or confidence in one’s rhetorical skillset often marginalize this footing. On the contrary, when a pastor *steps up*,



he humbly acknowledges his full dependence on the Triune God throughout the expository process. So how does a preacher Step Up? From the inception of the homiletical task, he leans on the Holy Spirit, the power of prayer, and God's written Word—the text.

Jesus assures the Spirit's aid for preaching and teaching when He says, "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me" (John 15:26; cf., John 14:16-17, 26; 16:7, 13-15). The Holy Spirit bears divine truth and gives witness to Christ. Consider that even Jesus needed the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in order to begin His preaching ministry.<sup>105</sup> In the same way, Walter Kaiser reminds expositors,

With so many instructions, steps, and cautions to be kept in mind . . . exegetes are likely to throw their hands up in despair and exclaim in exasperation, "Who is sufficient for these things?" In truth, the task is enough to overwhelm almost anyone, and especially those who must gain whatever they derive from Scripture by a slow painful experience of translating, meditating, and comparing results with a number of previous commentators on the passage. That is why we must in all good conscience point to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit as the source of any confidence that we might have in our message even after we have acted most responsibly in the study and preparation of the text for proclamation.<sup>106</sup>

Therefore, pastors who step up in preaching begin by posturing themselves as F.R.O.G.S. (Fully Reliant On God's Spirit).

In addition, pastors step up in prayer. Paul exhorts Christians to take up the Word of God—the sword of the Spirit—"praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (Eph 6:18a). Paul likewise adds, "To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph 6:18b-20). Paul weds sermon preparation with prayer; he specifically petitions God to

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<sup>105</sup>See Mark 1:10-15.

<sup>106</sup>Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 235.

grant him fitting words with which to construct a message that will allow him to proclaim the mystery of the gospel boldly. To put it succinctly, Paul commences his homiletical task by stepping up. Ramesh Richard encapsulates this notion when he acknowledges, “It [preaching] is a serious exercise that must be bathed in prayer and enabled by the Holy Spirit from the preacher’s very first exposure to a text.”<sup>107</sup>

Inspired by Psalm 119, Martin Luther speaks of “three rules” for approaching Bible passages: *oratio* (prayer), *meditatio* (meditation), and *tentatio* (trial or temptation).<sup>108</sup> It is noteworthy that Luther fronts prayer for any serious rumination of Scripture. In fact, Luther advises, “You must ask that the Lord in his great mercy grant you a true understanding of his words . . . for there is no one who can teach the divine words except he who is their author, as it says, ‘They shall all be taught by God’ (John 6:45).”<sup>109</sup> Luther even retorts,

Since Holy Writ wants to be dealt with in fear and humility and penetrated more by studying with pious prayer than with keenness of intellect, therefore it is impossible for those who rely only on their intellect and rush into Scripture with dirty feet, like pigs, as though Scripture were merely human knowledge not to harm themselves and others whom they instruct.<sup>110</sup>

In short, Luther knew the significance of approaching sacred Scripture on one’s knees.

Expository preaching also necessitates that a preacher steps up to a text or texts of Scripture. Whether preaching an assigned lectionary reading, the next passage in a book of the Bible, or tracing a theme or doctrine through Scripture, the expositor—knowing his flock—prayerfully selects a text from which to proclaim God’s truth. Whichever pericope he decides, the pastor’s conviction rests on Jesus’ words: “Heaven

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<sup>107</sup>Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 18.

<sup>108</sup>Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 165.

<sup>109</sup>*D. Martin Luther Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 54 (Weimar: Hermann Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1883-1987), 69, quoted in Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 165.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*

and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away” (Luke 21:33).<sup>111</sup> Moreover, the expositor rests assured that Jesus feeds His sheep through the faithful proclamation of His Word.

### **Step Back**

Once the preacher steps up, he continues The Expository Diamond and Steps Back to the “then and there” of the biblical text. Hence, intensity and labor define the second step, for it demands careful and thorough exegesis. *Exegesis* refers to the work of biblical interpretation; it literally means “to lead out” or “to draw out” of a passage.<sup>112</sup> The goal of exegesis includes unearthing and laying bare the author’s intended meaning of the text. To expose the authorial intent of a passage, the exegete studies its *sitz im leben* or original setting.<sup>113</sup> Haddon Robinson notes, “We try to pull up our chairs to where the biblical authors sat. We attempt to work our way back into the world of the Scriptures to understand the original meaning.”<sup>114</sup> So too, Bryan Chapell explains,

Consideration of a passage’s purpose ultimately forces us to ask, Why are these concerns addressed? What caused this account, these facts, or the recording of these ideas? What was the intent of the author? For what purpose did the Holy Spirit include these words in Scripture? Such questions force us to exegete the cause of a passage as well as its content. . . .<sup>115</sup>

Such meticulous investigation enables the pastor to piece together the historical, cultural, and circumstantial context behind the passage and its book.

In addition, exegesis requires the preacher to analyze the passage’s grammar—preferably in its original language. When querying a text, the homilist notes its literary genre, placement, vocabulary, word order, features such as repetition, structure, and

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<sup>111</sup>Cf. Pss 18:30, 19:7; Isa 40:8; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16; Heb 4:12; 1 Pet 1:25.

<sup>112</sup>Walter C. Kaiser and Moises Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 19.

<sup>113</sup>*Sitz im leben* is a German phrase meaning “setting in life” or “situation in life.”

<sup>114</sup>Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 8.

<sup>115</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 49.

syntax, which probes the relationship between the words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and thematic units therein. Not only does this toilsome enquiry yield the governing idea of the passage, it often provides the *who, what, where, when, how, or why* of the text as well. Though technical and time-consuming, the preacher hereby extracts the intended meaning of the text, which later serves as fodder for contemporary application and implication.

### **Step Out**

After an expositor Steps Up and Steps Back, he is ready to Step Out. Because no pericope exists on its own, the preacher now determines how his text connects to the First and Second Testaments.<sup>116</sup> Although the Bible contains sixty-six books by forty different authors written over the course of nearly 1,600 years, it stands as one book by one Author with one main subject—Jesus Christ. As a result, the homilist employs biblical theology, redemptive-history, and Christology to interpret every passage in light of its peripheral context.

Because Scripture has one divine Author—the Holy Spirit—the canon is internally self-consistent. Biblical theology examines how the parts of the Bible relate to the whole.<sup>117</sup> Michael Lawrence expresses, “Faithful biblical theology attempts to demonstrate what systematic theology assumes: that the Scriptures are not an eclectic, chaotic, and seemingly contradictory collection of religious writings, but rather a single story, a unified narrative that conveys a coherent and consistent message . . . of the redemptive acts of God.”<sup>118</sup> Similarly, Graeme Goldsworthy explains, “Biblical theology

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<sup>116</sup>Because the terms Old Testament and New Testament are sometimes interpreted as dated vs. relevant in today’s biblically illiterate climate, I prefer First Testament and Second Testament. Not only does First and Second Testament communicate “connectedness” and “continuation” compared to *old* and *new*, but Graeme Goldsworthy even cautions, “A continual emphasis on distinction [between the testaments] leads to separation [of the two Testaments].” Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 63.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>118</sup>Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry*

involves the quest for the big picture, or the overview, of biblical revelation. . . . If we allow the Bible to tell its own story, we find a coherent and meaningful whole . . . which tells the story of creation and the saving plan of God.”<sup>119</sup> Therefore, when preparing a sermon, the pastor examines his text for themes such as creation, light, seed, mountains, sacrifice, tabernacle, temple, water, and new creation. The pastor then tracks the theme longitudinally through both Testaments. However, in order to guard against fanciful connections between texts, Walter Kaiser proposes the following system of “checks-and-balances”: “The exegete will use Biblical theology whenever a concept, word, citation, or event in the passage being exegeted indicates that there were originally both an awareness of its relations to a preceding core of faith and an intention of making a further contribution to or elaboration on that preceding core.”<sup>120</sup> Still, though, Kaiser acknowledges, “The discipline of Biblical theology must be a twin of exegesis. Exegetical theology will remain incomplete . . . without a proper input of “informing theology.” The exegete should keep on his desk a well-marked textbook of Biblical theology . . . and a theme index.”<sup>121</sup>

Redemptive history or “salvation history” in preaching “recognizes a specific history as the framework within which God has worked, is now working, and will work in the future.”<sup>122</sup> Redemptive history “implies a recognition that Yahweh, the God of Israel, and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the Lord of history,” and that He alone is piloting world history “to redeem a great multitude from every nation, tribe,

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(Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 26, 38.

<sup>119</sup>Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible*, 22.

<sup>120</sup>Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 90. Classic examples in Scripture include John’s declaration in John 1:14 that Jesus’ *tabernacled among us* and Paul’s assertion in 1 Cor 5:7 that *Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed*.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>122</sup>Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible*, 27, 88.

and language group (Rev 7:9).”<sup>123</sup> Sydney Greidanus explains,

The Old Testament proclaims God’s mighty acts of redemption. These acts reach a climax in the New Testament when God sends his Son. Redemptive history is the mighty river that runs from the old covenant to the new and holds the two together. There is a progression in redemptive history, but it is one redemptive history. . . . In other words, a single, God-guided, redemptive history is the basis, the foundation, or the unity of the Old and New Testaments.<sup>124</sup>

Moreover, Greidanus reiterates: “Accordingly, the way of redemptive-historical progression sees every Old Testament text and its addressees in the context of God’s dynamic history, which progresses steadily and reaches its climax in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and ultimately in the new creation.”<sup>125</sup> Redemptive-historical considerations are so important to the expository process that Daniel Doriani offers clergy the following assistance:

Redemptive-historical preaching (RHP) emphasizes the unity of the history of redemption and the centrality of Christ in that history. It places every passage of Scripture in its historical context and asks questions such as: Where are this event and text located in the history of redemption? What are the traits of the covenant that govern the era? What do the people know about God’s character, redemption, and ethic? How does this text add to that knowledge? RHP emphasizes the progressive, organic revelation of God’s truth, disclosed ever more fully in successive covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus, in whose death and resurrection biblical history reaches its climax. . . . RHP traces the unfolding of the plan of salvation, seeking hints of the Christ, though he may not be mentioned by name, in all Scripture, so as to proclaim him from all Scripture (Luke 24).<sup>126</sup>

Doriani also describes the effect of redemptive-historical preaching in this way:

Indeed, the Bible is one long drama that begins when God creates heaven and earth, and ends when he restores them. The intervening chapters describe God’s achievement of his aims, not humans reaching out to God. Redemptive-historical preaching exalts the God who saves with infinite mercy. It opposes moralizing application, denouncing narrative expositions that focus on human participants as exemplars of good or bad behavior. It cannot tolerate sermons (and hymns) that fail to name and honor Christ, that propound general moral or spiritual instruction that

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<sup>123</sup>Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible*, 28.

<sup>124</sup>Sydney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 48.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 237.

<sup>126</sup>Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 294.

any theist could find agreeable. It safeguards an essential of interpretation: it keeps the broad context of every Scripture firmly in view.<sup>127</sup>

Thus, Greidanus advises that “Christian preachers need only locate their preaching-text in the sweep of redemptive history to sense its movement to Christ.”<sup>128</sup>

By now the expositor should realize that biblical theology and redemptive history culminate in Christ. When exegeting a passage of Scripture, James Voelz purports the Christological Principle, or “the principle that all Scripture is Christocentric, centered on the person and work of Christ.”<sup>129</sup> So too, Timothy Keller instructs pastors regarding Christ-centered interpretation and proclamation:

To show how a text fits into its whole canonical context, then, is to show how it points to Christ and the gospel salvation, the big idea of the whole Bible. Every time you expound a Bible text, you are not finished unless you demonstrate how it shows us that we cannot save ourselves and that only Jesus can. That means we must preach Christ from every text, which is the same as saying we must preach the gospel every time and not just settle for general inspiration or moralizing.<sup>130</sup>

Likewise, Bryan Chapell explains,

The necessity of grace in balanced preaching inevitably points both preacher and parishioner to the work of Christ as the only proper center of a sermon. Christ-centered preaching is not merely evangelistic, nor is it confined to a few gospel accounts. It perceives the whole of Scripture as revelatory of God’s redemptive plan and sees every passage within this context – a pattern Jesus himself introduced (Luke 24:27). . . . In this sense, the entire Bible is Christ-centered because his redemptive work in all of its incarnational, atoning, rising, interceding, and reigning dimensions is the capstone of all of God’s revelation of his dealings with his people. Thus, no aspect of revelation can be thoroughly understood or explained in isolation from some aspect of Christ’s redeeming work.<sup>131</sup>

Graeme Goldsworthy also beseeches pastors regarding Christological preaching:

To the evangelical preacher, then, I would address one simple but pointed question, a question every one of us should ask ourselves as we prepare to preach: How does this passage of Scripture, and consequently my sermon, testify to Christ? There are two main grounds for this question. The first . . . is that Jesus claims to be the

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<sup>127</sup>Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 296.

<sup>128</sup>Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 237-38.

<sup>129</sup>James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 362.

<sup>130</sup>Keller, *Preaching*, 48.

<sup>131</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 40, 276.

subject of all Scripture. The second is the overall structure of biblical revelation, which finds its coherence only in the person and work of Christ. . . . Given these considerations of the nature of the Bible, I can think of no more challenging question for preacher’s self-evaluation than to ask whether the sermon was a faithful exposition of the way the text testifies to Christ.<sup>132</sup>

Thus, when an expositor steps out he should be equipped (and eager) to preach Christ from any part of Scripture, thereby affirming the cohesiveness of both Testaments.<sup>133</sup>

### **Step Forward**

The governing purpose and desire for modern expository preaching is to effectively communicate and connect God’s Word—especially the gospel of Jesus Christ—to contemporary audiences. Scripture testifies about its eternal relevance when it declares, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever” (Isa 40:8). Likewise, Jesus affirms, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt 5:17-18). In other words, every passage of Scripture pertains as much to today as when the Holy Spirit first inspired it. Consequently, once a homilist has stepped up, stepped back, and stepped out with a pericope, he is primed to Step Forward and expound its present-day application and implication.

Jesus exemplifies application and implication in preaching when He concludes His Sermon on the Mount:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. (Matt 7:24-27)

In fact, Jesus closes His sermon with both application (so what?) and implication (now

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<sup>132</sup>Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible*, 21.

<sup>133</sup>Vaughan Roberts, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2002), 163.



what?). He summons His hearers to not just hear His teachings but to go forth in faith and do them; as a result, Jesus promises that every disciple who hears His words and does them is anchored for this life and for eternity.<sup>134</sup> However, an individual who hears Jesus' words but does not heed them in faith and obedience will assuredly crumble at the Parousia.

The apostles include application and implication in their sermons too. For example, Peter declares on Pentecost, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself" (Acts 2:38-39). Paul's sermon at Mars Hill also culminates in hearer application and implication. Paul proclaims,

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:29-31).

The Holy Spirit clearly works through both appeals. Three thousand souls receive Peter's word and are baptized that day, and a handful of listeners join Paul and believe, including Dionysius, Damaris, and others who are present (cf. Acts 2:41; 17:32-34). As the Scriptures bear witness, the preaching of God's Word results in either repentance and faith or in continued unbelief (due to hardness of heart), but its effect is never neutral.

The Lord Himself asserts,

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it (Isa 55:10-11).

The sermon samples from Jesus, Peter, and Paul strengthen pastors to step forward with

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<sup>134</sup>In Jas 1:22-27, Jesus' half-brother reiterates the importance of being both hearers and doers of God's Word.

gospel-motivated, Spirit-empowered application and implication in preaching.

Modern expositors emphasize application and implication too. Bryan Chapell says,

Application—at least its general direction—must precede final decisions about structure, exegetical emphases, wording, and even the tone of a message, or else the preacher will be designing a highway without knowing its destination. . . . Application gives ultimate meaning to exposition. . . . This means that until a preacher provides application, exposition remains incomplete.<sup>135</sup>

Application and implication fasten “parachutes” to exposition; they communicate the relevancy of Scripture into hearers’ lives and redirect their attitudes, motives, thoughts, beliefs, behaviors, works, and word-choices to be “little Christs” in this world.<sup>136</sup>

However, when clergy neglect *So what?* and *Now what?* in expository preaching, congregants are left to grasp for meaning and application themselves (if at all), and such homiletical negligence becomes fertile soil for the heinous assumption that the pages Scripture have “no real meaning for life today.” Therefore, Ramesh Richard cautions pastors, “We cannot take it for granted that they [the hearers] have understood the application. Application is not automatic. Actually, people are not prone to apply truths to themselves. They would rather apply them to someone else!”<sup>137</sup>

Hence, preachers must work all four steps of The Expository Diamond for every sermon. Not only can they be assured that their exposition is faithful to the intention of text, but congregants will hear God’s Word speaking relevance into their lives today. Furthermore, when homilists mine their passages for *all* they are worth, God is glorified among His people and His kingdom expands.

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<sup>135</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 213.

<sup>136</sup>Martin Luther first used the words “little Christ” in reference to Christians. See Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 31, *Career of the Reformer I* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1957), 367. C. S. Lewis also compares believers to “little Christs.” See C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2012), 177.

<sup>137</sup>Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 49.

## Expository Pitfalls

Faithful exposition necessitates a word of caution too. As a homilist works the Expository Diamond—especially on a weekly basis—he must persistently guard himself against three expository pitfalls. The first pitfall skips directly from Step Up to Step Forward. Whether a preacher’s reasoning is busyness or laziness, the result remains the same: shallow, surface-level preaching. Michael Green comments, “This is the age of the sermonette, and sermonettes make Christianettes.”<sup>138</sup> It follows, then, that the first pitfall is rightly termed *The Tip-Toe*. The homilist merely prances across the topsoil of Scripture; he snubs the passage’s historical, cultural, grammatical, contextual, canonical, and Christological sub terrain. Unfortunately, a glut of stories often characterizes the depth and flow of tip-toe preaching.

The second expository pitfall plummets a sermon toward misinterpretation. Misinterpretation happens when a preacher bypasses the second step (Step Back) of The Expository Diamond and carts a text immediately to Christ. Once again, the expositor dismisses the pericope’s original setting and authorial intent. Granted, Jesus distinguishes Himself as *the* hermeneutic of Scripture (cf. Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39, 46), yet to disavow how the Holy Spirit intended a passage to function among its first recipients leaves the homilist open to misinterpret, misuse, mishandle, and misapply the text today, even with its Christology.

The third expository pitfall is deemed *legalism*. *Legalism* occurs every time a pastor misses the third step (Step Out) of The Expository Diamond and fails to interpret a passage within the larger framework of Christ’s redemptive work. Because all Scripture in its immediate or peripheral context points to the person and work of Jesus, to move

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<sup>138</sup>Dan Dumas, ed., *A Guide to Expository Ministry: Guide Book No. 003* (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2012), 18.

directly from a text's historicity to its contemporary application and implication imposes burdens and demands upon the hearers. Without the perfect obedience and sacrifice of Jesus that was promised, foreshadowed, and foretold in the First Testament and later realized in the Second Testament, audiences are left with "emulate Moses," "defeat your Goliaths," "work harder on the Ten Commandments," or "be Good Samaritans." A homily without Jesus might suit a mosque, a synagogue, a temple, or an interfaith vigil on Capitol Hill, but under no circumstances should a Christ-less sermon be found among His church on earth! Scripture is clear: "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" (Rom 3:20-22).

CHAPTER 3  
TRACKING LUTHER'S "NEW"  
HERMENEUTIC

**The Shaping of Luther's Early Hermeneutic**

Before this thesis can establish the expository nature of Martin Luther's preaching, it must first investigate his hermeneutic. Since the mid-1900s a wave of literature has emerged regarding the noticeable changes in Luther's interpretive method. Although much of this research has focused on the transformation witnessed in his lectures, Luther's *Church Postil* (sermons on lectionary readings) reveals a shift in his biblical interpretation too. Granted, Luther's early postil is tinted with medieval hues; his later postil, however—on many of the same lectionary passages—demonstrates a revised hermeneutic that exhibits a fundamental, expository approach to Scripture. To that end, this chapter expounds key components that *shape* as well as *shift* the Reformer's hermeneutic.

**Augustinian Monk**

Martin Luther's hermeneutic goes back to a thunderstorm in 1505. As Luther was walking back from Mansfeld (his hometown) to Erfurt (where he had recently finished his M.A.), a lightning bolt struck close enough to knock the 22-year-old to the ground.<sup>1</sup> Terrified, Luther later acknowledged that he had cried out, "Help me, St. Anne! I will become a monk!"<sup>2</sup> Although Hans Luther was incensed that his son and aspiring

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<sup>1</sup>James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 50.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

lawyer was about to enter a monastery, Martin “wrote to his father and declared that the thunderstorm and the vow were the will of God.”<sup>3</sup> James Kittelson reflects on Luther’s monastic decision:

Luther apparently thought very carefully about becoming a monk (technically, a friar) before taking the decisive step. He took equal care in choosing the order he would enter. There were many monasteries in Erfurt, the “city of spires” or “little Rome,” as it was called. Without making an extra pace from his lodgings, he could have become a Benedictine, Dominican, Franciscan, or a member of one of a number of other orders. But he chose the way of the Observant Augustinians, who resided in the Black Cloister on the left bank of the Gera River.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, the die had been cast for the cloister to impress upon the young friar a biblical hermeneutic that aligned itself with a medieval, Augustinian tradition.

### **The Fourfold Hermeneutic**

**Origen.** The fourfold hermeneutic (or the four senses of Scripture) that dominates biblical interpretation in the West from the time of Augustine (A.D. 354-430) through the Middle Ages (fifteenth century) originated with Origen (AD. 185-253/54) of Alexandria. Origen likened the Bible to human beings in that they possess both a corporal nature (literal sense) and a spiritual nature (spiritual sense).<sup>5</sup> He “argued that the Scriptures were to be read as moving the Christian from the physical and temporal concerns of the literal sense to the spiritual and eternal things of Christ.”<sup>6</sup> In fact, similar to a modern understanding of a person being comprised of body, mind, and spirit, Origen taught the following three senses of Scripture for its full and proper interpretation: the body is the literal sense of the text; the soul (psychical) is the moral sense of the text; and

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<sup>3</sup>Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*, 50. In a striking way—no pun intended—this aspect of Martin Luther’s story exemplifies the biblical truth that “the steps of a man are established by the LORD....” (Ps 37:23).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 51-52.

<sup>5</sup>Erik Herrmann, “Luther’s Absorption of Medieval Biblical Interpretation and His Use of the Church Fathers,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L’Ubomir Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 81.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

the spirit is the spiritual sense of the text.<sup>7</sup> Origen’s spiritual sense of the text really protrudes from Philo of Alexandria (25 B.C.-A.D. 50) and Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215), both of whom advocated “the principle that all Scripture must be understood allegorically. . . .”<sup>8</sup>

**Cassian.** Although it was Augustine who added a fourth sense (anagogy) to Origen’s three senses of biblical interpretation, John Cassian (A.D. 360-430) first names the four senses of Scripture that become the standard, interpretive model throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>9</sup> Similar to Origen, “Cassian maintains that there are two primary senses of Scripture: a historical sense (*historica interpretation*) and a spiritual sense (*intelligentia spiritalis*), but the spiritual sense can be further divided into three different senses.”<sup>10</sup> Cassian himself explains, “Now, there are three kinds of spiritual knowledge—tropology, allegory, and anagogy—about which it is said in Proverbs: ‘But you describe those things for yourself in threefold fashion according to the largeness of your heart.’”<sup>11</sup> Gerhard Ebeling explains the fourfold hermeneutic in this way:

The literal sense of Scripture denotes what the text states or reports directly. Hence it is also called *sensus historicus*. The *sensus allegoricus* explains the text with regard to the doctrinal content of church dogma, especially with reference to Christ. The *sensus tropologicus* or *moralis* provides the application for the individual believer, and the *sensus anagogicus* draws from the text the allusions concerning metaphysical and eschatological secrets. . . .<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 98.

<sup>8</sup>Walter C. Kaiser and Moises Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 219.

<sup>9</sup>Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 98, 103.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>11</sup>*John Cassian: The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, OP, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, ed. Walter J. Burghardt, John Dillon, and Dennis D. McManus, vol. 57 (New York: Paulist, 1997), VIII-XI.1, pp. 509-15, quoted in Richard Lischer, *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 183.

<sup>12</sup>Gerhard Ebeling, “The New Hermeneutics and the Early Luther,” *Theology Today* 21, no. 1 (April 1964): 38.

To take a case in point, Cassian purported that “Jerusalem can be understood in a fourfold manner. According to history it is the city of the Jews. According to allegory it is the church of Christ. According to anagogy it is that heavenly city of God ‘which is the mother of us all.’ According to tropology it is the soul of the human being. . . .”<sup>13</sup>

**Augustine.** Not only did Augustine add the fourth sense (anagogy) to biblical interpretation, but he holds the unique distinction of having written the first known “textbook” on hermeneutics and homiletics entitled *On Christian Doctrine*.<sup>14</sup> Peter Sanlon elucidates Augustine’s scaffolding for the use of allegories or the spiritual sense of the text:

*De Doctrina* teaches the theoretical framework that gave form and control to Augustine’s allegories. The most important point is that Augustine felt it was the nature of Scripture itself which drove responsible interpreters to use allegory. Specifically, it was necessary due to the Scriptures comprising an Old and New Testament: “So, although all the doings, or almost all of them, in the books of the Old Testament, are to be understood not only in their literal sense, but also figuratively. . . .” Allegory was thus an attempt to make sense of Scriptures which comprised two testaments. It was intended to be a form of reading appropriate to the text.<sup>15</sup>

Sanlon further expounds, “The rule was that a passage in Scripture demanded allegorical reading if in its literal form it did not apply to either morals or the faith; by morals, Augustine meant the love of God or neighbor; by faith, he meant truths about God or neighbor.”<sup>16</sup> “Thus,” Sanlon concludes, “Augustine’s use of allegory saw Scripture as a text which possessed both temporality and interiority. The temporal narrative aspect of it, arising primarily from the Old and New Testament, demanded allegorical reading; such a hermeneutic permitted readers to understand the interior, spiritual reality of the

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<sup>13</sup>Richard Lischer, ed., *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 183.

<sup>14</sup>Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 99.

<sup>15</sup>Peter T. Sanlon, *Augustine’s Theology of Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 57, quoted from Augustine, *doctr. Chr.* 3.32.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.



Scriptures.”<sup>17</sup> Hence, Timothy George says,

The medieval method of interpreting the Bible owed much to Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*. In addition to setting forth a series of rules . . . Augustine stressed the importance of distinguishing the literal and spiritual or allegorical senses of Scripture. While the literal sense was not disparaged, the allegorical was valued because it enabled the believer to obtain spiritual benefit from the obscure places in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. For Augustine, as for the monks who followed him, the goal of scriptural exegesis was freighted with eschatological meaning; its purpose was to induce faith, hope and love and so to advance one’s pilgrimage toward that city with foundations (see Heb 11:10).<sup>18</sup>

It follows, then, that Luther’s interpretive method could rightly be labeled “a product of his day.” However, lest modern interpreters be quick to scrutinize Luther for his early hermeneutic, Heinrich Bornkamm bids them to “remember the strange hermeneutical premises with which Luther began his work. Medieval theology, by reaching back to its origins in Augustine and John Cassian, had united the various forms of the exegeses of the ancient church into a fixed scheme [the fourfold hermeneutic].”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, one readily expects the young friar to venture into both testaments on “this famous four-horse chariot.”<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, even though medieval interpretive methods in the Augustinian order (including Luther) were fraught with allegory, at least four facets of it merit commendation: (1) its high view of Scripture; (2) its acceptance of the historical or literal sense of the text; (3) its Christological grid; and (4) its concern for faith application. Timothy George accentuates regarding the fourfold hermeneutic, “It should be noted that this way of approaching the Bible assumed a high doctrine of scriptural inspiration: the multiple meanings inherent in the text had been placed there by the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the people of God.”<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Gerhard Ebeling

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<sup>17</sup>Peter T. Sanlon, *Augustine’s Theology of Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 58, quoted from Augustine, *doctr. Chr.* 3.32.

<sup>18</sup>Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 143-44.

<sup>19</sup>Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 88.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 144.

reflects, “The text of Holy Scripture must have a presently valid meaning . . . if the text contains historical facts, trite, fortuitous, or even objectionable aspects and contradictions, then the necessity arises to inquire into the hidden, spiritual meaning in order to demonstrate the authority of the text by its edifying nature.”<sup>22</sup> So too, Erik Herrmann illumines, “The Christological reading of Scripture is the common starting point for all patristic and medieval biblical interpretation. Precisely how this was to be carried out, however, varied throughout the tradition.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Luther’s Early Postil**

Having examined the substructure of Martin Luther’s initial hermeneutic, an examination of his early sermons discloses an Augustinian imprint, especially in his sermon structure. In 1520, Elector Frederick the Wise beseeched Luther to prepare a postil for Sunday worship because most pastors were incompetent to write their own sermons.<sup>24</sup> Either clergy were content to simply read the assigned Epistle and Gospel lessons, or they supplemented the lectionary readings with a sermon by Tauler (d. 1361) or Geiler of Kaiserberg (d. 1510)—the only existent homilies in print.<sup>25</sup> To that end, Martin Luther assured Frederick in his postil’s “Dedication to Frederick, the Elector”:

[I will] labor in the interpretation of the Epistles and Gospels (which is called Postil) for the benefit of the ministers and their subjects. . . . [And] I shall do enough, if I uncover *the purest and simplest sense of the Gospel* [emphasis mine] as well as I can, and if I answer some of those unskillful glosses, in order that the Christian people may hear, instead of fables and dreams, the Words of their God, unadulterated by human filth. For I promise nothing except the pure, unalloyed sense of the Gospel suitable for the low, humble people.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, Luther defines “the purest and simplest sense of the Gospel” that he strives to

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<sup>22</sup>Ebeling, “The Early Luther,” 38.

<sup>23</sup>Herrmann, “Luther’s Absorption of Medieval Biblical Interpretation,” 81.

<sup>24</sup>John Nicholas Lenker, ed. and trans., *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1.1, *Sermons on Gospel Texts for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 3.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

“uncover” via his postil as “nothing more than the story of the little son of God and of his humbling, as St. Paul says in 1 Cor 2:2, ‘I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.’”<sup>27</sup> In 1521, Luther’s Advent Postil was published in Wittenberg in Latin.

**Sermon for the First Sunday in Advent, Matthew 21:1-9.** Martin Luther opens his sermon in a rather didactic fashion by announcing to his hearers the following three-point outline: “All the Gospel lessons thus throw light first on faith and then on good works. We will therefore consider this Gospel under three heads: speaking first of faith; secondly of good works, and thirdly of the lesson story and *its hidden meaning* [emphasis mine].”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Luther states at the beginning of section 3, “This has been said about the history of this Gospel. Let us now treat of its hidden or spiritual meaning.”<sup>29</sup> Luther continues his exposition:

Why does he [Jesus] have them bring *two* asses or not both young or old ones, since one was enough for him to ride upon? Answer: As the two disciples represent the preachers, so the colt and its mother represent their disciples and hearers. . . . These are the two asses: The old one is the exterior man; he is bound like this one, with laws and fear of death, of hell, of shame, or with allurements of heaven, or life, or honor. He goes forward with the external appearance of good works and is a pious rogue, but he does it unwillingly and with a heavy heart and a heavy conscience. . . . The colt, the young ass, of which Mark and Luke write, on which never man rode, is the inner man, the heart, the mind, the will, which can never be subject to law, even if he be tied by conscience and feels the law. But he has no desire nor love for it until Christ comes and rides on him. . . . Christ tells them to *loose* them, that is, he tells them to preach the Gospel in his name, in which is proclaimed grace and remissions of sins, and how he fulfilled the law for us. The heart is here freed from the fetters of conscience and things. . . . The colt, ridden by Christ, upon which no one ever rode, is the willing spirit, whom no one before could make willing, tame or read, save Christ by his grace. However, the sack-carrier, the burden-bearer, the old Adam, is the flesh, which goes riderless without Christ; it must for this reason bear the cross and remain a beast of burden.<sup>30</sup>

Not only does Luther’s sermon exhibit the predominant twofold sense of Scripture—the

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<sup>27</sup>Lenker, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1.1:13.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 48.

literal and the spiritual senses of the text—he liberally allegorizes the literary details of the passage in an attempt to communicate spiritual significance for his hearers.

**Sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent, Luke 21:25-36.** The editor notes that this sermon appeared in separate form and under special title as early as 1522.

Luther’s homily contains a three-point outline, with part 3 entitled: “The Spiritual Interpretation of These Gospel Signs.” Luther then proclaims under section 3:

Finally, we must find also a hidden or spiritual meaning in this Gospel. The sun is Christ, the moon is the church, the stars are Christians, the powers of heaven are the prelates or planets of the church. . . . That the sun is darkened no doubt signifies that Christ does not shine in the Christian church; that is, that the Gospel is not preached and that faith is expiring from the lack of divine service. This has come about through the teaching and works of men. The pope sits in the churches in the place of Christ and shines like dirt in a lantern—he with his bishops, priests, and monks. . . . Oh what darkness! What darkness!<sup>31</sup>

Once again, Luther displays a twofold interpretation of Scripture as well as significant allegory in his effort to connect the text to matters of his day.

**Sermon for Christmas Day, Luke 2:1-14.** Although no date is specified for this homily, a date between 1521-1523 seems likely. This time, however, Luther places “The Spiritual Meaning of the Signs, the Angel and the Shepherds” at the end of section 2 of his three-part outline. Luther says,

The angel says further: “And this is the sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.” The clothes are nothing else than the holy Scriptures, in which the Christian truth lies wrapped, in which the faith is described. For the Old Testament contains nothing else than Christ as he is preached in the Gospel. Therefore we see how the apostles appeal to the testimony of the Scriptures and with them prove every thing that is to be preached and believed concerning Christ. Thus St. Paul says, Rom. 3:21, That the faith of Christ through which we become righteous is witnessed by the law and the prophets. And Christ himself, after his resurrection, opened to them the Scriptures, which speak of him. . . . He lies in the manger. Notice here that nothing but Christ is to be preached throughout the whole world. What is the manger but the congregations of Christians in the churches to hear the preaching? We are the beasts before this manger; and Christ is laid before us upon whom we are to feed our souls. Whosoever goes to hear the preaching, goes to this manger; but it must be the preaching of Christ. Not

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<sup>31</sup>Lenker, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1.1:83.

all mangers have Christ neither do all sermons teach the true faith.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Luther preaches Christ and Christology from both testaments with bold conviction, and in this sermon, he leverages allegory as a tool to emphasize the church's call to preach Christ alone. In the process, however, Luther undoubtedly treads beyond the original intent of the gospel writer.

**Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity, Luke 5:1-11.** The editor notes that this sermon appeared in pamphlet or tract form in four different editions in 1522 and 1523; in addition, it was one of the “Three Beautiful Sermons Preached by Dr. Martin Luther at Wittenberg” in 1523.<sup>33</sup> Immediately before Luther begins the homily, he offers the following “Summary of This Gospel”:

Christ fishes with the Word, and he makes his disciples such fishermen. There are here two ships. One signifies the Jews, into which Christ the Lord enters, as he was a servant of the circumcision, as St. Paul calls him in Rom. 15:8. The other refers to the Gentiles, to whom the wink is given that they should come and help the first in order that both might be filled. In vain we teach the law, human ordinances and our own devices the whole night in the dark, only to the end that the weak conscience may be smitten with anguish and martyred. But without the Word of Christ, which is light, one never catches anything.<sup>34</sup>

Likewise, in a second sermon for the same text and day, Luther proclaims in section 3– “The Spiritual Meaning of This Draught of Fishes”:

Christ himself teaches the meaning of this history of Peter's draught of fishes when he says: “From henceforth thou shalt catch men.” Herein is represented the spiritual rule of the Church, which consists in the office of preaching. The sea, or the water, represents the world, the fishes represent men, while the outward office of preaching is represented by the hand and the net by which the fishes are caught. For as the net is let down among the waves, so the sermon finds its way among men. . . . This draught of fishes is so great that the one boat alone (hitherto representing the Church of the Jewish people) is not able to draw it up or large enough to contain it. Those in the one boat must beckon to their partners in the other to come and help them. This other boat is the assembly and Church of the Gentiles which has been established and spread by the Apostles. Thus were the two boats filled with one and the same draught of fishes, that is, with one and the same sort of preaching, and with a

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<sup>32</sup>Lenker, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1.1:150.

<sup>33</sup>John Nicholas Lenker, ed. and trans, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 2.2, *Sermons on Gospel Texts for the 1<sup>st</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Sundays after Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 131.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 132.

corresponding faith and confession.<sup>35</sup>

These four samples drawn from Luther's postil between 1521 and 1523 feature five characteristics of his early preaching. First, regardless of the assigned lectionary reading or of the festival or non-festival occasion, Luther connects every passage to the office of preaching. Second, Luther pangs himself to expound law and gospel from each pericope; while his motivation to comfort consciences with the gospel is commendable, at times he "over-squeezes" law and gospel from the respective texts. Third, Luther personally professes Jesus and exalts Him as the heart of Scripture in his preaching. In this way, even his early sermons can be deemed evangelistic in nature. Fourth, his sermon structures reflect the basic, twofold sense of Scripture—the literal sense as well as the quest for the hidden or spiritual meaning of the text. Fifth, in his attempt to glean applicable, theological significance for his hearers, Luther unabashedly allegorizes the spiritual section of his outline, a symptom of the tradition and times in which he had been schooled.

### **The Shifting of Luther's Early Hermeneutic**

Having traced the developments that shaped Martin Luther's early hermeneutic, and having surveyed several samples from his postil that bare his medieval education, this chapter examines pivotal events that slowly arouse a demonstrable shift in the Reformer's hermeneutic. To that end, the second half of this chapter (1) analyzes the impact of Luther's doctor of theology degree and tower experience on his emerging hermeneutic; (2) submits a date for the "decisive break" in his interpretive methods; (3) summarizes the core principles that underpin his evolved hermeneutic, and (4) surveys corresponding sermons from his later postil that evidence his interpretive shift.

### **Doctor of Theology**

Once Luther had entered the Augustinian cloister in Erfurt in 1505, he pursued

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<sup>35</sup>Lenker, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 2.2:164.

monastic life with the utmost devotion and vigor. In 1506 he was officially consecrated as a monk, and in 1507 he was ordained into the priesthood.<sup>36</sup> Luther continued to advance his education as well. He added a baccalaureate in the Bible and a *sententiarium* degree to his repertoire; the later degree “permitted him to teach on the first two books of Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, the standard theological textbook in all medieval universities, which he did in a series of lectures held from 1509 to 1511.”<sup>37</sup> The pinnacle of Luther’s schooling that would prove to impact him for life, however, ensued in April 1511 after he had been exiled to the Augustinian house in Wittenberg.<sup>38</sup> There, even though he retorted, “But it will be the death of me!”, Luther’s superior and vicar-general of the German Augustinians, Johann von Staupitz, prevailed upon him to pursue a doctor of theology degree.<sup>39</sup> This meant that Martin Luther would be an official preacher and professor of Holy Writ at the University of Wittenberg.<sup>40</sup>

When Luther completed his doctorate in theology in October 1512, he was appointed *lectura in Biblia* at the University of Wittenberg – a position he would occupy for life. Concerning Luther’s feat in education, Hughes Oliphant Old remarks, “Luther was as well trained in the academic disciplines of theology as anyone in Germany, or for that matter, in Christendom.”<sup>41</sup> A. Skevington Wood also observes, “When . . . he accepted the chair of Biblical Studies in the University of Wittenberg, he was virtually committing himself to the task of exposition as a life work. . . . For the remainder of his

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<sup>36</sup>Clyde E. Fant, Jr., *20 Centuries of Great Preaching: An Encyclopedia of Preaching*, vol. 2, *Luther to Massillon, 1483-1742*, ed. William M. Pinson, Jr. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1971), 5.

<sup>37</sup>George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 138.

<sup>38</sup>Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*, 79.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>40</sup>Frederick Nohl, *Luther: Biography of a Reformer* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 42.

<sup>41</sup>Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 4, *The Age of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 4.

career he delivered at least two or three lectures each week, unless prevented by sickness or his multifarious activities in the cause of the Reformation.”<sup>42</sup>

Hence, the new doctor of theology “got down to the serious work of preparing for his lectures on the Psalms (1513-1515), which were followed in turn by Romans (1515-1516), Galatians (1516-1517), Hebrews (1517) and again the Psalms (1518-1519).”<sup>43</sup> During this time, Luther began to flourish as a preacher as well. Frederick Nohl says,

Soon Luther was appointed the official monastery preacher. From then on he delivered his sermons in an old wooden chapel on the monastery grounds. . . . News of his preaching spread beyond the monastery grounds. Before long the chapel was filled to overflowing. More and more people came to hear this powerful preacher. In 1514 Luther moved out of the rickety chapel and into St. Mary’s Church, also called Town Church, where there was room for all who wanted to hear him. And by 1516 people were hearing him preach almost every day.<sup>44</sup>

The magnitude of the doctoral vow upon Luther’s conscience and upon his call to publicly preach and teach Scripture cannot be underestimated. Luther was a *sworn* theologian, charged by the Church in the “explanation of the Sacred Scripture . . . the interpretation of the Divine Law, and the instruction on the Book of Life.”<sup>45</sup> The seriousness of Luther’s vow manifests itself in nailing the Ninety-Five Theses on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg in 1517; in his debate with Johann Eck at Leipzig in 1519; and in his burning of the papal bull and corpus of canon law at Wittenberg’s Elster Gate in 1520.<sup>46</sup> Even the dramatic event at the Diet of Worms (1521) echoed Luther’s doctoral vow.<sup>47</sup> When the examiner bade Luther before Emperor Charles V, “Will you recant or not?” Luther replied, “Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence

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<sup>42</sup>A. Skevington Wood, *Luther’s Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1960), 9.

<sup>43</sup>George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 140.

<sup>44</sup>Nohl, *Luther*, 42, 44.

<sup>45</sup>Herrmann, “Luther’s Absorption of Medieval Biblical Interpretation,” 71.

<sup>46</sup>George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 142.

<sup>47</sup>Herrmann, “Luther’s Absorption of Medieval Biblical Interpretation,” 72.



from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning—and my conscience is captive to the Word of God—then I cannot and will not recant. . . . Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen.”<sup>48</sup> In fact, in 1531 Luther reflected on his vow by noting,

However, I, Doctor Martinus, have been called to this work was compelled to become a doctor, without any initiative of my own, but out of pure obedience. Then I had to accept the office of doctor and swear a vow to my most beloved Holy Scriptures that I would preach and teach them faithfully and purely. While engaged in this kind of teaching, the papacy crossed my path and wanted to hinder me in it. How it has fared is obvious to all, and it will fare worse still. It shall not hinder me.<sup>49</sup>

Even during the most turbulent years of Luther’s life—including the jeopardy of his own existence following the Diet of Worms—Luther never veered from his oath to defend and exposit the Holy Scripture above all else, especially after he discovered the gospel therein.

### **Tower Room Awakening**

The first five years of preaching and teaching following Luther’s doctorate degree proved crucial for his development as an expositor. The seed of the gospel that had been buried beneath centuries of ecclesiastical tradition and practice yearned to germinate and explode into full bloom. Hughes Oliphant Old observes of Luther, “His study of the Scriptures was very thorough and very profound. It was out of this study that his new appreciation of the gospel began to open up.”<sup>50</sup> The breakthrough—at least in part—commenced in a tower room in 1514. On the second floor of a tower that was attached to the monastery, Luther sat in a private room and mulled over Paul’s words, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone

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<sup>48</sup>Kittelton, *Luther the Reformer*, 161.

<sup>49</sup>Lewis William Spitz and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther’s Works*, vol. 34, *Career of the Reformer IV* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1960), 103, quoted in George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 139.

<sup>50</sup>Old, *The Reading and the Preaching of the Scriptures*, 4-5.

who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Rom 1:16-17). Luther even claims to have wrestled with the meaning of these verses for days and nights.<sup>51</sup> Finally, the window of the gospel opened for Luther so that the light of Christ came glaring in. At last it dawned upon Luther that the “righteousness of God” was not actively pursued and achieved via human efforts; rather, as Paul declares, it is passively declared by God and received through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

The fallout from Luther’s awakening can be likened to “the shot heard ‘round the world’” for the Reformation. A. Skevington Wood explains, “The real significance of the tower discovery lies in the realm of interpretation. Luther’s hand at last grasped the key with which the Scriptures could be unlocked.”<sup>52</sup> The interpretive key which Luther now held was nothing other than justification by faith in Christ’s work alone. Indeed, Martin Luther acknowledged, “I then went through the Holy Scripture as far as I could recall them from memory, and I found in other parts the same sense: the ‘work of God’ is that which *He works in us* [emphasis mine]. . . .”<sup>53</sup> Again Luther ruminates: “I felt exactly as though I had been born again. . . . As violently as I had formerly hated the expression “righteousness of God,” so I was now as violently compelled to embrace the new conception of grace, and thus, for me, the expression really opened the gates of Paradise.”<sup>54</sup> Hence, A. Wood contends, “Luther’s illumination . . . transformed the whole Bible for him and supplied his over-all hermeneutical clue. He had grasped the significance of one centripetal portion of God’s Word: by it he proceeded to reinterpret

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<sup>51</sup>Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 112.

<sup>52</sup>Wood, *Luther’s Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 7.

<sup>53</sup>Theodore G. Tappert and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther’s Works*, vol. 54, *Table Talk* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1967), 185, quoted in Wood, *Luther’s Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 8.

<sup>54</sup>*D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimarer Ausgabe)*, vol. 54 (Weimar: H. Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1928), 185-187, quoted in Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 112.

the rest.”<sup>55</sup> Granted, Luther’s orthodoxy centered before his hermeneutic, yet his newfound apprehension of the gospel unquestionably set in motion an interpretive shift for the entirety of Scripture.

### **Dating Luther’s Hermeneutical Shift**

Although the vast majority of scholars agree that Martin Luther had a definite shift in biblical interpretative methods, consensus eludes the conversation when an actual year is proposed for Luther’s hermeneutical turn. For example, I disagree with James Preus’s view that Luther opted for a single, literal sense of the text in 1517<sup>56</sup> because, as his early postil demonstrates, Luther’s sermons from 1521-1523 still exhibit a twofold sermon outline: the literal and spiritual senses of the text, ancestor to the fourfold hermeneutic. Conversely, Darrell Reinke accentuates that “it was Karl Holl who first pointed out that Luther rejected the fourfold allegorical method in 1518.”<sup>57</sup> So too, Gerhard Ebeling acknowledges,

Theology has tried for quite some time to study Luther’s development up to the time of the posting of the theses in 1517 by studying his early lectures. . . . During the years 1516-1518 the symptoms of a new hermeneutics came to be outwardly tangible as renunciation of the fourfold sense of Scripture, of the excessive use of allegories, of the scholastic method of glossing (commentary), and of the predominance of Aristotelian philosophy. However, the growth of a new hermeneutics can already be noticed prior to the years 1516-1518 in the midst of the involvement in the traditional hermeneutics.<sup>58</sup>

Though I concede with Preus, Reinke, and Ebeling that Luther’s lectures disclose the abandonment of the fourfold interpretation of Scripture in 1517 or 1518, his postil for Frederick the Wise evidences *complete* abandonment at a later date.

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<sup>55</sup>Wood, *Luther’s Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 8.

<sup>56</sup>James S. Preus, *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 227, referenced in Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 112.

<sup>57</sup>Darrell R. Reinke, “From Allegory to Metaphor: More Notes on Luther’s Hermeneutical Shift,” *Harvard Theological Review* 66, no. 3 (July 1973): 390.

<sup>58</sup>Ebeling, “The Early Luther,” 36.

According to Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther “did not give up *allegory* when he turned away from the scheme of the four senses of Scripture after his lectures on Romans in 1515-1516; he only pushed its importance further back and sought to free it from arbitrary interpretation through fixed norms.”<sup>59</sup> Likewise, Darrell Reinke maintains, “In 1519 Luther returned to the Psalms, and there is evidence of a new understanding of hermeneutical method. At the outset (Psalm 1.1), Luther announces the change in emphasis: ‘Our first concern will be for the grammatical meaning, for this is the truly theological meaning.’”<sup>60</sup> James MacKinnon concurs,

The second course on the Psalms (1519-21) shows a marked advance in method and content on the first (1513-15). There is much less allegorizing, and he has become decidedly more critical of the views of the Fathers. Augustine, Jerome, Athanasius, Hilary, and other Fathers may be highly edifying, but they are often enough very remote from the meaning of the text.<sup>61</sup>

In other words, Bornkamm, Reinke, and MacKinnon cite evidence from Luther’s lectures that witness a new hermeneutic emerging from 1519-21. Bornkamm, however, adds a significant piece of evidence to the matter of dating when he includes the following quote from Martin Luther: “One recognizes history when one follows the *literal sense* and refuses to be knocked off one’s feet by allegories. Otherwise Scripture becomes a ‘torn net’: everyone poked a hole in it wherever his snout pointed, and followed his own opinions, interpreting and twisting it any way he pleased.”<sup>62</sup> Martin Luther penned these words in 1527, meaning that by 1527 Luther decidedly opts for a *single, literal sense* of the text. Hence, combining the noted evidence from Luther’s lectures with his postil, Luther’s “decisive break” with medieval interpretive methods materializes sometime

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<sup>59</sup>Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 89.

<sup>60</sup>*D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimarer Ausgabe)*, vol. 5 (Weimar: H. Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1892), 278, quoted in Reinke, “From Allegory to Metaphor,” 389.

<sup>61</sup>James MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, vol. 4, *Vindication of the Movement (1530-46)* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 291.

<sup>62</sup>Spitz and Lehmann, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 34:14, quoted in Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, 91.

between 1523 and 1527, a timeframe which coincides with Bornkamm's own conclusion.

Bornkamm, arguing from Luther's lectures on Genesis, insists that Luther's hermeneutic completed its transformation in 1525:

These dates show that Luther used allegory at all periods of his life. Of course he became more cautious in his use of it as time went on. There is a sharp and definite break after 1525. In his lectures on Genesis, which have relatively few allegorical interpretations, he again more strongly than in many previous lectures kept the rule he had established after overcoming the four senses of Scripture: allegory is recommended when the text does not yield any other useful sense.<sup>63</sup>

I agree with Bornkamm that Luther's decisive hermeneutical shift transpires in 1525 because my research in Luther's postil infers the same conclusion. Luther's twofold sermon structure from the Middle Ages that speaks to the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture begins to dwindle from his preaching—though not fully disappear—in 1523. Therefore, given the trajectory of its decline from Luther's postil beginning in 1523, 1525 appears to be a prudent date for the cessation of Luther's medieval hermeneutic in both his teaching *and his preaching*.

### **Luther's Later Hermeneutic**

If the medieval hermeneutic defined—to varying degrees—the first twenty years of Luther's ministry (1505-1525), what interpretive principles did Luther exercise during the final twenty years (1525-1545/6) of his preaching (and teaching) ministry? After all, the seasoned years (second half) of the Reformer's ministry included publications such as *On the Bondage of the Will* (1525); the *German Mass* and *Order for Public Worship* (1526); the *Large Catechism* and *Small Catechism* (1529); the complete German Bible (1534); and the *Smalcald Articles* (1537), a feat as fruitful as—perhaps even more so than—his earlier years. Therefore, while it is true that the following five core principles

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<sup>63</sup>Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, 95. Bornkamm notes in a corresponding footnote that Ebeling also “refers to the clearer, but less significant break around 1529; after this date the use of allegory diminished even further. He is certainly right when he relates both turning points to the experiences which Luther gained in his struggle with the biblical interpretations of the enthusiasts (Schwarmer) and of Erasmus and those of the northern Germans.”

manifest themselves in Luther's hermeneutic prior to 1525, I contend that they cement the substructure of his exegesis until his passing in 1546.

**The rule of faith.** Perhaps the hermeneutical principle that reaches back the farthest in Martin Luther's interpretive grid is his unswerving conviction regarding the power and authority of Scripture. A. Skevington Wood elucidates on the perspicuity of Scripture for Luther:

It is crystalized in the phrase, *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. 'That is the true method of interpretation,' says Luther, 'which puts Scripture alongside of Scripture in a right and proper way.' He effectively employs the comparative technique by setting one portion of the Word beside another and allowing the plainer texts to illuminate the more difficult.<sup>64</sup>

Wood adds, "For him the rule of faith is the Scripture itself. No extraneous canon is invoked. He finds his sufficient criterion within the Word of God. Creeds and confessions are only of value in so far as they embody the rule of Scripture."<sup>65</sup> Neither the pope, nor a papal decree, nor a church council, nor a church father, nor an ecclesiastical tradition has the authority to establish doctrine—only *sola Scriptura* for Luther, thereby affirming the Bible as its own interpretive key.

**Grammatical-historical exegesis.** In 1525 Martin Luther advised in *On the Bondage of the Will*,

Let us rather take the views that neither an inference nor a trope is admissible in any passage of Scripture, unless it is forced upon us by the evident nature of the context and the absurdity of the literal sense as conflicting with one or another of the articles of faith. Instead, we must everywhere stick to the simple, pure, and natural sense of the words that accords with the rules of grammar and the normal use of language as God has created it in man.<sup>66</sup>

So too, Luther counseled in a lecture on the Song of Songs between 1530-1531:

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<sup>64</sup>D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimarer Ausgabe), vol. 7 (Weimar: H. Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1897), 97, quoted in Wood, *Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 21.

<sup>65</sup>Wood, *Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 22.

<sup>66</sup>Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1957), 221, quoted in Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 115.

I leave allegories alone. A young theologian should avoid them as much as he can. I think that in a thousand years there was no more economical allegorist than myself. Become a text critic and learn about the grammatical sense, whatever the grammar intends, which is about faith, patience, death, and life. The Word of God does not deal with frivolous things.<sup>67</sup>

In both instances, Luther parades his “newfound” focus on the grammatical features of the text including context, lexical meaning, rules of grammar—even the intended meaning that the grammar conveys.

Moreover, Luther readily expresses his fondness for—even necessity of—working in the original languages of Scripture, especially for the undertaking of preaching. Luther instructs,

It is a sin and shame not to know our own book or to understand the speech and words of our God; it is still a greater sin and loss that we do not study languages, especially in these days when God is offering and giving us men and books and every facility and inducement to this study, and desires his Bible to be an open book. O how happy the dear fathers would have been if they had our opportunity to study the languages and come thus prepared to the Holy Scriptures! What great toil and effort it cost them to gather up a few crumbs, while we with half the labor – yes, almost without any labor at all – can acquire the whole loaf! O how their effort puts our indolence to shame!<sup>68</sup>

While Luther’s words “a greater sin” are perhaps facetious, his conviction for tilling Scripture in the languages remains undeniable, especially given the divine mandate to preach. Consequently, Luther accentuates the difference between homilies prepared using the languages and those prepared without in the following way:

Although faith and the gospel may indeed be proclaimed by simple preachers without a knowledge of the languages, such preaching is flat and tame; people finally become weary and bored with it, and it falls to the ground. But where the preacher is versed in the languages, there is a freshness and vigor in his preaching, Scripture is treated in its entirety, and faith finds itself constantly renewed by a continual variety of words and illustrations.<sup>69</sup>

The Reformer’s zeal for the language and grammar of the text provides the gateway for his attention to the plain sense of the text.

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<sup>67</sup>*D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimarer Ausgabe)*, vol. 31 (Weimar: H. Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1913), 592, quoted in Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 113.

<sup>68</sup>Helmut T. Lehmann and James Atkinson, eds., *Luther’s Works*, vol. 45, *The Christian in Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1962), 364, quoted in Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 43.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*

**Plain sense of the text.** The more Luther continues to distance himself from the fourfold hermeneutic, the more he begins to stake his interpretation on the literal, ordinary, and plain sense of the text. Luther's hermeneutical shift becomes especially clear in his response to Jerome Emser. Similar to Origen, Emser argued from 2 Corinthians 3:6 that Scripture encompassed both a literal meaning and a spiritual meaning. Luther counters Emser in 1521:

Although I, too, labored under that error for a time, and I desire to take this opportunity to show clearly how Origen, Jerome, Dionysius, and some others were in the wrong, and how Emser builds his house on the sand. . . . Emser's "spiritual sense" is not valid, but the other sense is the highest, best, strongest; in short, it is the whole substance, essence, and foundation of Scripture, so that if the literal sense were taken away, all the Scriptures would be nothing. The spiritual sense, which Emser magnifies, is not valid in any controversy. It does not hold water. . . . They were right aforesaid who prohibited the books of Origen, for he paid too much attention to the spiritual sense, which was unnecessary, and he neglected the necessary literal sense. For that means the destruction of Scripture and will never make sound theologians. Such are developed only by the one, true, original, and native sense of the words.<sup>70</sup>

Luther continues his retort:

The Holy Spirit is the plainest writer and speaker in heaven and earth, and therefore his words cannot have more than one, and that the very simplest sense, which we call the literal, ordinary, natural sense. That the things indicated by the simple sense of his simple words should signify something further and different, and therefore one thing should always signify another, is more than a question of words or of language . . . we are not . . . to say that Scriptures or the Word of God have more than one meaning. . . . It is much surer and safer to abide by the words in their simple sense; they furnish the real pasture and right dwelling-places for all minds. Some, however, because they did not understand this matter, ascribed a fourfold sense to Scripture, the literal, the allegorical, the anagogical, and the tropological, for which there is no foundation whatever. It is, therefore, not well named the literal sense. . . . They do much better who call it the grammatical, historical sense.<sup>71</sup>

In other words, Luther chastises Emser—along with his own early hermeneutic—as he now insists on the plain and lucid meaning of the words of Scripture as the *only proper way* to interpret the Spirit-inspired text.

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<sup>70</sup>Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther with Introduction and Notes*, vol. 3, trans. A. Steimle (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1930), 346-60, quoted in Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, 189-91.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 191-92. Interestingly, while Luther here in 1521 singles out the plain sense of the text, his preaching from 1521-23 still evidences a separate, spiritual meaning. See pp. 58-60.



**Christology.** Fant assesses the Christology in Luther’s preaching by noting, “One question, and one question alone, determined Luther’s judgment on a sermon: did it deal with Christ? If it did not, or if it treated him lightly, then the sermon was better not preached. Therefore most of Luther’s sermons came from the Gospels; the Epistles occupied far less of his attention and preaching.”<sup>72</sup> Hughes Oliphant Old concurs,

The preached Word has authority because it is the Word of Christ. This Christological focus of Scripture is an important dimension of Luther’s understanding of the ministry of the Word. For Luther the heart of Scripture is the gospel, the good news about Christ’s victory over sin and death. To preach the Bible aright is to bring all the parts of the sacred book together into this central message of salvation in Christ. . . . It is this gospel, this authoritative, saving Word of Christ, which is the focus of the sermon.<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, A. Skevington Wood concludes, “Luther’s interpretation of Scripture is at once Christocentric and Christological. It is Christocentric in that he regards the Lord Jesus Christ as the heart of the Bible. ‘Take Christ out of the Scriptures and what will you find remaining in them?’ he asks Erasmus.”<sup>74</sup> Wood adds that for Luther

The Christocentric orientation of Scripture is raised to a major hermeneutical principle. ‘If, then, you would interpret well and truly, set Christ before you,’ Luther advises, ‘for He is the man to Whom it all applies.’ And again, in his lectures on Romans: ‘There a great stride has been made towards the right interpretation of Scripture, by understanding it all as bearing on Christ.’<sup>75</sup>

Luther himself preached in a sermon on John 5:39-43 in Halle in 1545:

Here Christ would indicate the principal reason why the Scripture was given by God. Men are to study and search in it and to learn that He, *He*, Mary’s Son, is the One who is able to give eternal life to all who come to Him and believe on Him. Therefore he who would correctly and profitably read Scripture should see to it that he finds Christ in it; then he finds life eternal without fail. On the other hand, if I do not so study and understand Moses and the prophets as to find that Christ came from heaven for the sake of my salvation, became man, suffered, died, was buried, rose,

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<sup>72</sup>Fant, *20 Centuries of Great Preaching*, 9. Fant appears to be right about most of Luther’s sermons coming from the Gospels and Epistles. For instance, Baker’s seven-volume set on the *Complete Sermons of Martin Luther* contains 320 postils, of which 236 sermons use Gospel texts; 75 sermons expound a reading from Acts or the Epistles; and 9 sermons utilize an OT pericope.

<sup>73</sup>Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 40.

<sup>74</sup>Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 26, quoted in Wood, *Luther’s Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 33.

<sup>75</sup>Wood, *Luther’s Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 33-34.

and ascended to heaven so that through Him I enjoy reconciliation with God, forgiveness of all my sins, grace, righteousness, and life eternal, then my reading in Scripture is of no help whatsoever to my salvation . . . for if I do not know and do not find the Christ, neither do I find salvation and eternal life. In fact, I actually find bitter death; for our good God has decreed that no other name is given among men whereby they may be saved except the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12).<sup>76</sup>

Admittedly, Luther's Christological interpretation of Scripture stretches back to Augustine and other Fathers, yet his preaching evidences his unswerving conviction that all Scripture points to—or finds its meaning and fulfillment in—Christ. In sum, then, Luther is led to see Christology as *the* essential hermeneutic for Scripture and therefore the chief end of all preaching.

**Law and gospel distinction.** Gerhard Ebeling remains the first known scholar to assert that the distinction between law and gospel is what toppled Origen's literal and spiritual sense of the text for Luther. Ebeling states,

The traditional structure of the twofold sense of Scripture is thus principally destroyed. Luther does continue to use the allegorical method in a limited way as a means of decorative *application*. But, in the correct understanding, the one, plain, grammatical sense is the truly theological one which includes within itself the duality of law and gospel in its orientation to the substance of Holy Scripture; or, to say it more exactly, the basic task of theological hermeneutics occurs in the distinction between law and gospel.<sup>77</sup>

Likewise, Erik Herrmann explains,

Luther did, in fact, grow ambivalent toward the traditional four-fold approach to the Bible, but not because it made the Scriptures say too much. For Luther it did not say enough. He acknowledged that such traditional reading practices may indeed find Christ in the Scriptures, but ultimately neither the *Quadrigena* nor a 'prophetic-literal' sense could offer clear guidance for the *meaning* and *significance* of Christ for the reader. This was the heart of Luther's hermeneutical problem: When suffering from a 'bruised conscience', who is Christ *pro me*—'for me?': the teachers of mysteries, the giver of a new law, the exemplar of humility or some other virtue, the coming judge? At best, the traditional approach begged this deeper question; at its worst, it complicated and compounded the problem. Eventually, Luther came to understand that the key to finding the true significance of Christ—his meaning in salvation history and his relevance for the individual—was not a matter of literal versus

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<sup>76</sup>Ewald M. Plass, comp., *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for Active Christians* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 69-70.

<sup>77</sup>Ebeling, "The Early Luther," 44.

spiritual interpretation but learning to distinguish law from gospel.<sup>78</sup>

The essence of Herrmann's argument is that the gospel comforts heavy-laden consciences—as Luther himself experienced—for the kernel of the gospel is “God *for* sinners in Christ Jesus.” Only the proper distinction between law and gospel rightly interprets and applies Scripture for hearers. In fact, Luther bluntly states the necessity of law and gospel distinction in his sermon on Galatians 3:23-24 (1532):

This difference between the Law and the Gospel is the height of knowledge in Christendom. Every person and all persons who assume or glory in the name of Christian should know and be able to state this difference. If this ability is lacking, one cannot tell a Christian from a heathen or a Jew; of such supreme importance is this differentiation. This is why St. Paul so strongly insists on a clean-cut and proper differentiating among Christians of these two doctrines, the Law and the Gospel. To be sure, both are God's Word: the Law, or the Ten Commandments, and the Gospel. But everything depends on the proper differentiation of these two messages and on not mixing them together. . . .<sup>79</sup>

### **Luther's Later Postil**

Having examined the base principles behind Martin Luther's seasoned or later hermeneutic, an examination of his later postil marks his changed approach to Scripture. Luther preached the following sermons between 1532 and 1534, a time at which his homilies were transcribed by Rodt of Zwickau.<sup>80</sup>

**Sermon for the First Sunday after Trinity, Luke 16:19-31.** This sermon first appeared in eight pamphlet editions in 1523-24, providing a timeframe for when Luther likely preached it. Under the influence of his early hermeneutic, Luther explained “the bosom of Abraham” in the following way:

First, what is the bosom of Abraham, since it cannot be a natural bosom that is meant? To answer this, it is necessary to know that the soul or spirit of man has no rest or place where it may abide, except the Word of God, until he comes at the last day to the clear vision of God. Therefore we conclude that the bosom of Abraham signifies nothing else than the Word of God, where Christ was promised, Gen.

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<sup>78</sup>Herrmann, “Luther's Absorption of Medieval Biblical Interpretation,” 85.

<sup>79</sup>Plass, *What Luther Says*, 732.

<sup>80</sup>Lenker, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1.1:3.

22:18, to Abraham, namely: “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Likewise on the other hand the hell here mentioned cannot be the true hell that will begin on the day of judgment. For the corpse of the rich man is without doubt not in hell, but buried in the earth; it must however be a place where the soul can be and has no peace, and it cannot be corporal. Therefore it seems to me, this hell is the conscience, which is without faith and without the Word of God, in which the soul is buried and held until the day of judgment, when they are cast down body and soul into the true and real hell.<sup>81</sup>

Luther still endeavors to spiritualize (allegorize) various details of the text. However, when Luther preaches the same pericope in 1535, a different hermeneutic stands out.

Luther expounds the text:

O how badly the man was treated on earth, having had no one to take care of him! But now he has many angels who tend to him and carry his soul into Abraham’s bosom. I would gladly let such nursemaids as Lazarus had carry my soul. . . . There lies the rich skinflint in hellish fire and torment; he looks up and sees a sight that is different from the one he saw before. . . . He sees poor Lazarus, whom he disdained before his gate, now lying in Abraham’s bosom, just like a mother holds her child in her arms. This is an altogether different sight . . . now he sees that Lazarus is someone special in the eyes of God. Previous to this he saw nothing in the poor man but pus, sores, ridicule, and disdain; but now he sees him residing in pure glory and bliss. He would so much like to be out of the torments of hell.<sup>82</sup>

Luther no longer attempts to allegorize Abraham’s bosom or the location of hell; rather, he preaches the plain sense of the text in the most tender manner.

**Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity, Luke 5:1-11.** When Luther preached this text in 1523, he prefaced his sermon: “There are here two ships. One signifies the Jews, into which Christ the Lord enters, as he was a servant of the circumcision, as St. Paul calls him in Rom. 15:8. The other refers to the Gentiles, to whom the wink is given that they should come and help the first in order that both might be filled.”<sup>83</sup> Moreover, Luther explained the spiritual meaning of the catch in this way:

Herein is represented the spiritual rule of the Church, which consists in the office of preaching. The sea, or the water, represents the world, the fishes represent men, while the outward office of preaching is represented by the hand and the net by

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<sup>81</sup>Lenker, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 2.2:26-27.

<sup>82</sup>Eugene F. A. Klug, ed. and trans., *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 6, *Sermons on Gospel Texts for Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost, Trinity, and the Fourteen Sundays after Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 234-35.

<sup>83</sup>Lenker, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 2.2:132.

which the fishes are caught. For as the net is let down among the waves, so the sermon finds its way among men. . . . Thus were the two boats filled with one and the same draught of fishes, that is, with one and the same sort of preaching. . . .<sup>84</sup>

However, when Luther preaches this text in 1533, a stark difference stands out. Luther proclaims,

There are two main points to this Gospel. First, it tells of how with one word Christ wonderfully blessed these weary fishermen. They had fished all night, supposedly the best, most suitable time, and caught nothing! At noon, however, siesta time, they caught a great shoal of fish. What a reassurance both for those disciples and for us, namely, that he will never let us perish from hunger, as also Psalm 37:25 assures us: "I have been young and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread." He who truly trusts God will have enough. . . . Second, not only did Christ provide an abundant catch of fish for Peter and those with him in the boat, but he also ministered to them spiritually, when they were filled fear and dread over this astounding miracle. How can this be? we miserable sinners and this holy man! Into this crisis situation Christ spoke a word of comfort for all of them, and especially for Peter, Do not be afraid! But then not only this gracious word, also a mysterious prediction: Henceforth you will be a fisher of men. Here he bestows a glorious office upon Peter, namely, out there in the future there was a whole world of fish to be caught, and he was to be the kind of fisherman who would catch emperors, kings, princes, nobles and commoners, rich and poor. These, then, are the two main themes concerning which our dear Lord Christ discourses in this Gospel.<sup>85</sup>

Luther preaches on Luke 5:1-11 again in 1534:

In the first place, the Evangelist says that the people crowded upon the Lord Jesus for they wanted very much to hear God's Word. That is the reason why they flocked to him in great numbers and crowded around him to the point that there was no more room for him on the shore. Now, then, he noticed two boats lying at the edge of the lake; the one belonged to Simon, the other to John. He got into the boat which belonged to Simon and preached from it. It was a simple solution on this large lake—the Lord Jesus preaches from the boat on the lake, while the people stand on the shore and listen to him. Accordingly, these people are lauded for gladly having heard God's Word; and we in turn should be roused by their example, also, gladly to hear God's Word and diligently to cling to it. For without God's Word our entire existence and all that we do is empty and meaningless. But whoever has God's Word and hears it diligently receives great benefit.<sup>86</sup>

Luther does not allegorize the two boats, nor does he apply special meaning to the hand and the net as some kind of preaching. On the contrary, Luther confines himself to the historical details of the text and to what Jesus longs to teach His disciples through the

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<sup>84</sup>Lenker, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 2.2:164.

<sup>85</sup>Klug, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 6:284-85.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 302.

miraculous catch of fish.

**Sermon for the First Sunday in Advent, Matthew 21:1-9.** When this sermon emerged in 1521 as the very first sermon in Luther's Advent Postil, it was laden with allegory and the spiritual (or hidden) meaning of the text. For example, Luther says that Jesus "comes to the Mount of Olives to indicate that he comes out of pure mercy. For olive oil in the Scriptures signifies the grace of God that soothes and strengthens the soul as oil soothes and strengthens the body."<sup>87</sup> In addition, Luther interprets the old ass as the exterior man that is bound with laws and fear of death, while the young ass represents the inner man that can never be subject to law and upon which Christ comes and rides.<sup>88</sup>

By contrast, in 1533 Luther expounds on Matthew 21:1-9:

As the prophet Zechariah states, this poor Beggar-King possesses might different from that which any ruler or king ever possessed, or ever exercised upon earth, no matter how great and mighty these rulers were or ever could be. His might is equivalent to his name, *JUSTUS ET SALVATOR*, not a rich, splendid, magnificent king before the world, but Righteous and Saviour, that is, the one who would bring righteousness and salvation with him, and assail sin and death. He would be known as sin's foe and death's destroyer, the champion over sin and death for all who believe in him and receive him as their King, not offended by the poor, borrowed donkey. These believers will have their sins forgiven, and death will not harm them, for they will have eternal life and not die. . . . This King . . . extirpates sin and knocks death's teeth out; he disembowels the devil and rescues those who believe on him from sin and death . . . [E]ven though poor and lowly and comes riding a donkey, [He] prevails not only over *one* sin, but over *all* my sins, and not only over mine but *all the world's sins*. He comes not only to heal my illness but to take away death. . . .<sup>89</sup>

With the allegories and spiritual sense now removed from Luther's treatment of the text, he masterfully weds the natural sense of Matthew's words with picturesque language. Luther proclaims the humble Savior and eternal rescue Jesus came to effect for all who "believe in him and receive him as their King."

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<sup>87</sup>Lenker, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1.1:20.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>89</sup>Klug, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 5:26-27.

## The Efficacy of God's Word

The journey through the shaping and shifting of Martin Luther's hermeneutical approach to Scripture warrants a final reflection. In a seismic way, Luther's shift buttressed what would eventually morph into an ecclesiastical—and especially soteriological—revolution. In conversations about the incubation of the Reformation, however, what receives comparatively less attention compared to other factors is the responsibility of God's Word itself for the events that ensue in Wittenberg and beyond. In short, above all other historical factors, why not “blame” Scripture for instigating the Reformation. After all, even in one of the darkest periods of Church history, the Bible still asserts: “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout . . . so shall My Word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa 55:10-11). The unstoppable purpose of God's Word is that “the sacred writings . . . make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). It comes as no surprise, then, that Luther “charges” or “blames” Scripture for his own, decisive reformation: “When I was a monk, I was an adept in allegory. I allegorized everything. But after lecturing on the Epistle to the Romans, I came to have some knowledge of Christ. For therein I saw that Christ is not allegory, and learned to know what Christ was.”<sup>90</sup> In making this comment, Luther “points the finger” squarely at the efficacy of God's Word for having its desired effect upon the witty professor from Wittenberg. Hence, the transformative power of God's Word itself really ignites the Reformation—first in Martin Luther and then in the protestant church it would birth.

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<sup>90</sup>*D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimarer Ausgabe)*, vol. 1 (Weimar: H. Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1883), 136, quoted in Wood, *Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 25.

CHAPTER 4  
A CASE STUDY OF LUTHER'S PREACHING

**Martin Luther's Expository Preaching**

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones forthrightly acknowledges, “We are so interested in Luther the theologian that we tend to forget Luther the preacher. Luther was a mighty preacher.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, Luther's preaching is powerful enough for James MacKinnon to assert, “Judged by the effects of his preaching, [Luther was] assuredly the greatest of preachers since the Apostle Paul.”<sup>2</sup> Though many scholars would likely take issue with MacKinnon's sweeping deduction, what they cannot deny is the profound influence the Reformer's preaching continues to exert in the modern era. Take, for instance, Ewald Plass, Peter Brooks, Fred Meuser, Sydney Greidanus, James MacKinnon, John MacArthur, and Hughes Oliphant Old. These contemporary authors label Martin Luther an expository preacher, yet none of them discuss *how* or *why* they infer that conclusion. That is, would Plass, Brooks, Meuser, Greidanus, MacKinnon, MacArthur, and Old classify Luther's early (pre-1525) *and* late (post-1525) homilies as expositional, or only a parcel therein? To that end, having established Luther's historical-grammatical, Christ-centered hermeneutic in chapter 3, this chapter examines in what way or ways Luther's catechetical, lectionary and verse-by-verse preaching (all post-1525) can be deemed expository in nature.

Admittedly, however, two limitations must be acknowledged before

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<sup>1</sup>D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers*: 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 331.

<sup>2</sup>James MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, vol. 4, *Vindication of the Movement (1530-46)* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 317.



proceeding to Luther's sermons. First, this thesis recognizes the danger of *anachronism*—of applying modern expository standards on Luther that would have been foreign to his homiletical context. Therefore, this chapter allows Luther's sermons to be heard in their historical context, and only then to draw from Luther principles or insights that can direct the task of expository preaching today. Moreover, such a three-pronged case study (catechetical, lectionary, and verse-by-verse exposition) ensures a faithful representation of Luther's actual preaching, whereas a random and narrow sampling could easily be manipulated to cast a vision of Luther as preacher that is closer to one's own construction. The second limitation stems from the fact that Luther rarely wrote out full sermon manuscripts. Hence, the majority of Luther's existent sermons were recorded by scribes such as Rorer, Roth, Cruciger, or Veit Dietrich, who, as Luther preached in German, made notes in Latin and later expanded the notes back into German.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the question naturally looms, "To what degree do Luther's existent sermons reflect their initial wording and delivery, especially if they have undergone a third translation into English?" James MacKinnon says, "In Luther's day the student was far more dependent on the prelections of his teacher, and was concerned to take as copious notes as possible. On the whole, the best of the reporters have succeeded remarkably well in conveying both the characteristic style and the content of his message."<sup>4</sup>

In actuality, though, Luther himself provides the greatest measure of reassurance regarding the trustworthy nature of his reconstructed sermons. For instance, following a sermon that he had preached on November 24, 1532, Luther quipped about the editorial skills of Magistrate Caspar Cruciger: "I think he made it a better sermon than the one I preached."<sup>5</sup> In other words, Luther alleviates any concern per the accuracy of

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<sup>3</sup>Peter Newman Brooks, "Luther the Preacher," *The Expository Times* 95, no. 2 (November 1983): 38.

<sup>4</sup>MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, 285, 308.

<sup>5</sup>Brooks, "Luther the Preacher," 38.

the recorder's work. Similarly, Luther said of Cruciger's editorial work as he preached verse-by-verse through John 14-16, "I am still studying Christ's sermon. This is the best book I have written. Of course, I did not write it; Cruciger did. *The Sermon on the Mount* [*Luther's Works*, 21] is also good, but this one is the best."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, editor Jaroslav Pelikan immediately comments after Luther's preceding quote: "Even though he did not always trust Cruciger's theology, Luther seems to have been deeply appreciative of his editorial and literary work."<sup>7</sup> Thus, while this thesis acknowledges the second limitation, it proceeds with confidence that Luther's existent sermons remain true to the spirit and substance of their original oration.

### **Luther's Catechetical Preaching**

Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert note in the "Editors' Introduction to the Large Catechism,"

The material in the Large Catechism originated as sermons by Martin Luther on the basic texts of Christian teaching. Already in the Middle Ages, some regional synods in Germany had called for regular preaching on the "catechism" (usually defined as the Ten Commandments, Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer, and sometimes the Ave Maria). The Ember Days, four times of fasting spread throughout the church year, were often designated for this purpose.<sup>8</sup>

Luther completed the Large Catechism (or sermons) in 1529, but the 1530 edition of Luther's Large Catechism added his longer preface.<sup>9</sup> In the expanded preface, Luther candidly explains the necessity for and aim of his catechetical preaching:

This sermon has been designed and undertaken for the instruction of children and the uneducated. Hence from ancient times it has been called, in Greek, a "catechism"—that is, instruction for children. It contains what every Christian should know. Anyone who does not know it should not be numbered among Christians nor admitted to any sacrament, just as artisans who do not know the rules and practices

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<sup>6</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan and Daniel E. Poellot, eds., *Luther's Works*, vol. 24, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John Chapters 14-16* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), x.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 377.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 378.

of their craft are rejected and considered incompetent. For this reason young people should be thoroughly taught the parts of the catechism (that is, instruction for children) and diligently drilled in their practice.<sup>10</sup>

The Reformer names children as the primary audience for his catechetical preaching—a tall task for such a learned scholar as Luther, yet his preaching reveals that he was able to transmit the core teachings of Scripture in a way that even young minds could readily understand. In fact, Luther states near the end of his preface,

The reason we take such care to preach on the catechism frequently is to impress it upon our young people, not in a lofty and learned manner but briefly and very simply, so that it may penetrate deeply into their minds and remain fixed in their memories. Therefore we shall now consider the above-mentioned parts one by one and in the plainest manner possible say about them as much as is necessary.<sup>11</sup>

**The First Commandment.** Luther begins his sermon on the first commandment:

“You are to have no other gods.” That is, you are to regard me alone as your God. What does this mean, and how is it to be understood? What does “to have a god” mean, or what is God? Answer: A “god” is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart. As I have often said, it is the trust and faith of the heart alone that make both God and idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true one. . . . Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your God. The intention of this commandment, therefore, is to require true faith and confidence of the heart, which fly straight to the one true God and cling to him alone. What this means is: “See to it that you let me alone be your God, and never search for another.” In other words: “Whatever good thing you lack, look to me for it and seek it from me, and whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, crawl to me and cling to me. I, I myself, will give you what you need and help you out of every danger. Only do not let your heart cling to or rest in anyone else.”<sup>12</sup>

Three characteristics of Luther’s introductory words stand out. First, the reader senses the pastoral tone with which Luther preaches. Second, Luther defines “a god” for his intended audience in a simple, inductive manner. Third, although Luther does not provide the context or the setting of the Exodus (or Deuteronomy) passage, he does explain the

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<sup>10</sup>Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 383.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 386.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 386-87.

plain sense of the passage, including obedient application to the text.

The Reformer continues his exposition by citing several negative examples of false gods that plague both the church and the world. For example, he mentions trust in money and possessions, pomp in one's learning and education, as well as invoking the saints in time of need.<sup>13</sup> Luther, however, saves the most significant "false god" for last; he applies the commandment to the spiritual setting of his flock who—along with himself—had been misled by Roman theology for decades, even centuries. Luther declares,

There is, moreover, another false worship. This is the greatest idolatry that we have practiced up until now, and it is still rampant in the world. All the religious orders are founded upon it. It involves only that conscience that seeks help, comfort, and salvation in its own works and presumes to wrest heaven from God. It keeps track of how often it has made endowments, fasted, celebrated Mass, etc. It relies on such things and boasts of them . . . desiring to earn everything by itself or to merit everything by works . . . just as if God were in our service or debt and we were his liege lords.<sup>14</sup>

Luther decries "good works" and "works righteousness" as the vilest offense against the first commandment; the tendency for Luther's hearers to track their merits before God must have been difficult for them to cease.

Near the end of his exposition on the First Commandment, Luther points his hearers to the good news of God:

We are to trust in God alone, to look to him alone, and to expect him to give us only good things; for it is he who gives us body, life, food, drink, nourishment, health, protection, peace, and all necessary temporal and eternal blessings. In addition, God protects us from misfortune and rescues and delivers us when any evil befalls us. It is God alone (as I have repeated often enough) from whom we receive everything good and by whom we are delivered from all evil.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, leveraging the transformative power of the gospel in the lives of his listeners, Luther culminates his message with real-life implication:

Let each and everyone, then, see to it that you esteem this commandment above all things and not make light of it. Search and examine your own heart thoroughly, and

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<sup>13</sup>Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 387.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 388-89.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 389.

you will discover whether or not it clings to God alone. If you have the sort of heart that expects from him nothing but good, especially in distress and need, and renounces and forsakes all that is not God, then you have the one, true God. On the contrary, if your heart clings to something else and expects to receive from it more good and help than from God and does not run to God but flees from him when things go wrong, then you have another god, an idol.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, Luther not only challenges his hearers to administer their own heart-exam, but he tells them how to go forth and diagnose their real God (or god) as well.

**The Second Article of the Apostles' Creed.** Before Luther expounds on the Apostles' Creed, he masterfully connects his previous sermons on the Ten Commandments to his ensuing sermon (or sermons) on the Creed.<sup>17</sup> Luther remarks, "Thus far we have heard the first part of Christian teaching, and in it we have seen all that God wishes us to do and not to do. The Creed properly follows, which sets forth all that we must expect and receive from God; in short, it teaches us to know him perfectly. It is given in order to help us do what the Ten Commandments require of us."<sup>18</sup> Hence, Luther's catechetical preaching (at least the Ten Commandments and Creed) had an intentional ordering. While the Ten Commandments by their biblical nature are *law*—the holy living that God desires of His redeemed people, the Creed by its nature is pure *gospel*—who God is, what He has done, and what He will do for His beloved children. As a result, his sermon series on the Ten Commandments prepares his audience theologically for his preaching on the Apostles' Creed.

Luther notes before his credal exposition begins,

But to make it most clear and simple for teaching to children, we shall briefly sum up the entire Creed in three main articles, according to the three persons of the Godhead, to whom everything that we believe is related. Thus the first article, concerning God the Father, explain creation; the second, concerning the Son, redemption; the third, concerning the Holy Spirit, being made holy. Hence the Creed could be briefly condensed to these few words: "I believe in God the Father,

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<sup>16</sup>Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 390.

<sup>17</sup>There is no indication in the Large Catechism if Luther preached the entire Creed in one sermon, or if he covered its three articles over a span of two or more sermons. Given the overall brevity of the articles, however, one sermon remains a possibility.

<sup>18</sup>Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 431.

who created me; I believe in God the Son, who has redeemed me; I believe in the Holy Spirit, who makes me holy.” One God and one faith, but three persons, and therefore also three articles or confessions.<sup>19</sup>

Luther’s ambition remains clear: he strives for clarity and simplicity as he proclaims these essential doctrines to children. In addition, Luther didactically familiarizes his young listeners with the “big idea” of each article before he explicates them in depth. In essence, Luther announces, “Here are the three main points of the Creed, or this is where we are going in our catechesis about God. Now, let us take a closer look at the three persons in the Trinity and their respective work on your behalf.” Luther’s methodology exemplifies effective pedagogy—even in the pulpit.

When Luther reaches article 2 of the Apostles’ Creed, he recites it and says,

Here we get to know the second person of the Godhead, and we see what we have from God over and above the temporal goods mentioned above, namely, how he has given himself completely to us, withholding nothing. This article is very rich and far-reaching, but in order to treat it briefly for children, we shall take up one phrase and in it grasp the substance so that everyone may learn from it, as we have said, how we are redeemed. We shall concentrate on these words, “in Jesus Christ, our LORD.”<sup>20</sup>

With children still at the fore, Luther reduces the entire article—and this part of the homily—to the meaning of “in Jesus Christ, our LORD.” Luther continues his straightforward exposition:

If anyone asks, “What do you believe in the second article about Jesus Christ?” answer as briefly as possible, “I believe that Jesus Christ, true Son of God, has become my Lord.” What is it “to become a lord?” It means that he has redeemed and released me from sin, from the devil, from death, and from all misfortune. Before this I had no lord or king, but was captive under the power of the devil. I was condemned to death and entangled in sin and blindness. For . . . the devil came and led us into disobedience, sin, death, and all misfortune. As a result, we lay under God’s wrath and displeasure, sentenced to eternal damnation, as we had merited it and deserved it . . . until this only and eternal Son of God, in his unfathomable goodness, had mercy on us because of our misery and distress and came from heaven to help us. . . . He has snatched us, poor lost creatures, from the jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and restored to us the Father’s favor and grace. As his own possession he has taken us under his protection and shelter, in order that he may rule

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<sup>19</sup>Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 432.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 434.

us by his righteousness, wisdom, power, life, and blessedness.<sup>21</sup>

Luther uses vivid words and phrases such as *captive*, *entangled*, *sentenced*, *snatched*, *jaws of hell*, *restored*, *protection*, and *shelter* to articulate the gospel and unfold the meaning of “Jesus Christ as Lord.” Furthermore, the Reformer acknowledges that “the entire gospel that we preach depends on the proper understanding of this article” and that “we can never learn it fully.”<sup>22</sup>

Luther’s preaching of the Creed is unquestionably orthodox, Christological, rightly dividing law from gospel, and evangelistic in nature. Nevertheless, one noticeable facet emerges. His entire proclamation of the Creed lacks a single Scripture reference, not one Bible verse in all three articles. This void begs the question, “Can Luther’s catechetical preaching of the Apostles’ Creed be deemed expository?” Granted, proof-texting does not automatically make a homily expository in nature, but can doctrinal sermons—drawn unmistakably from the pages of the Bible—still be regarded as expository in the absence of scriptural references? While many expositors would argue that such “verse-less” preaching could not be held expository, the broader scope of Luther’s historical and homiletical setting must be considered. First, Luther provides supporting Scripture verses when he preaches other parts (or doctrines) of the Large Catechism, meaning the absence of corroborating texts in the Creed is not a consistent pattern throughout his catechetical preaching. Second, in the 1520s and 1530s Luther preached 70 to 150 sermons per year.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, congregants may have heard him deliver as many as three homilies per week. Hence, a handful of fully scriptural, yet not text-specific sermons among thousands hardly seems to threaten Luther’s reputation as an expository preacher. Third, considering the extent of doctrinal abuse and falsehood under Rome, the miniscule literacy rate among common people, and the nonexistence of Bibles

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<sup>21</sup>Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 434.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 435.

<sup>23</sup>Brooks, “Luther the Preacher,” 38.

in German (until Luther’s complete translation in 1534), Luther pains himself to give his hearers gospel-milk rather than solid meat, especially regarding the epitome of the Christian faith—the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul utilized the same ministry approach to the church in Corinth: “I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready” (1 Cor 3:2). Consequently, although the absence of supporting texts is *not* preferential in any preaching, Luther’s treatment of the Apostles’ Creed in the Large Catechism can—as it faithfully expounds the core doctrines of Scripture—still be considered expository in nature.

### **Luther’s Lectionary Preaching**

The majority of Luther’s preaching followed the lectionary—the practice in the Western church of preaching on an assigned pericope from the ancient, one-year lectionary (the *Comes*).<sup>24</sup> The lectionary meant that Luther had to preach the same passages of Scripture anew from year to year, a most challenging task for any preacher. Accordingly, this section presents two homilies from Luther per assigned Gospel reading. Luther preached the following house postils in the early 1530s, the period when Rodt was his prominent scribe.<sup>25</sup>

#### **Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity, Matthew 6:24-34 (1532).**

Luther opens by summarizing the “big idea” of the text: “Our dear Lord spoke the words of this Gospel in order to ward off the serving of Mammon. For his concern is

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<sup>24</sup>Alexander Ring argues that the general adoption of the *Sarum Missal* at the end of the 13th century essentially established the Historic lectionary in the Western Church that Luther would have used, though the inception of the one-year lectionary can be traced back to the fourth and fifth centuries—perhaps from Jerome. The first half of the lectionary cycle revolved around the life and ministry of Jesus, whereas the second half focused on the life of His church. Alexander Ring, “The Path of Understanding: The Development of Lectionaries and their use in the Lutheran Church” (paper presented to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod General Pastoral Conference, Bloomington, MN, January 28, 1998), accessed May 09, 2017, <https://www.blc.edu/comm/gargy/gargy1/AlexRing.gpc.html>.

<sup>25</sup>John Nicholas Lenker, ed. and trans., *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1.1, *Sermons on Gospel Texts for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 3.



that Mammon and worldliness would hinder our service to him. He wants serving him to be pure, to be rendered solely to him and not to Mammon.”<sup>26</sup> Luther resumes the homily by specifying,

This Gospel, therefore, is not particularly addressed to young people; for their tastes—God be praised!—inclines more towards eating plums and cherries than for possessing money; they are more interested in a good apple than in shiny gold pieces; they are not concerned about the market price for grain. . . . So, this sermon concerns especially father and mother, and those who hold positions of authority and govern, and most of all preachers for whom things go badly in this world; some of them, due to want, are forced to be concerned about how to support themselves and their wives and children. . . . These the Lord comforts here and wants to dispel such worries, saying, Look at the beautiful lilies and roses and the birds, but particularly at the ravens, as St. Luke states (12:24). Since God so richly feeds them without their fretting or efforts, and decks out the flowers so beautifully, so will he also clothe them and provide crumbs of bread for them, so that they do not die of hunger.<sup>27</sup>

Once Luther directs his hearers to completely trust the provision of their heavenly Father, he explains what it looks like for them to serve God rather than mammon:

But what does it mean to serve God? The answer is, doing what he has commanded; for just as in the world, “to serve” commonly means nothing else than to do what someone has commanded. In other words, if I am serving my master, I am doing what my master requires. A domestic serves his master when he does what his master commands and wants. A maid serves her mistress simply and well by doing what she is supposed to do. We all understand this. . . . If, however, the servant is a scoundrel and puts off doing his master’s word and command, listening rather to what others tell him to do and serving them, he is serving two masters. This is the way we must express the matter, also, about serving God, that nothing else is meant than hearing what he says and gladly and diligently doing it. But what does God enjoin? Above all things, that a person should listen to Christ and accept the gospel. This is the only, true, well-pleasing service we can render God. For right before our eyes stands the injunction: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.” In similar manner, God commands children to honor father and mother, parents to nourish, rear, and teach their children, a wife to love her husband and attend to housekeeping, and, on the other hand, the husband to nourish and protect her, and so forth. All these things God has said and commanded. Where children now honor their father and mother, they not only honor their parents but honor and serve God, who has commanded this. Where a husband loves his wife, and a wife is subject to her husband, and each is faithful to the other, rule their

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<sup>26</sup>Eugene F. A. Krug, ed., *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7, *Sermons of Gospel Texts for the 15<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> Sundays after Trinity, the Festival of Christ’s Nativity, and Other Occasions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 7-8.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

household and treat children and servants with due propriety, they are thereby serving God. For God's Word and command stand there, requiring it of us. Therefore, when servants and maids serve faithfully and diligently do what is commanded them, they serve not only their masters and mistresses, but God in heaven who requires this of them in his Word.<sup>28</sup>

As a "master of application," Luther relates the meaning of "serving God" to ordinary vocations—children, spouses, and servants. He even corrects a presumed held belief and application of the text when he insists,

In the world's eyes it's a big deal when a monk denies himself everything, enters a cloister, leads a disciplined, austere life, fasts, prays, and so on. No lack of activity exists there, except only that God's command is lacking to do these things. Therefore, this cannot be extolled as serving God. On the other hand, when a maid cooks, washes, sweeps, and does other housework, it is looked down upon as trivial. But since there is a command from God for this, such trivial work cannot but be extolled as a service to God, surpassing by far all the holiness and austere life of all monks and nuns. For there is no command from God for this; but here is God's command to honor father and mother, and help in keeping the household. In every way, therefore, it is serving God when one does what God has commanded, and does not do what God has forbidden.<sup>29</sup>

As a final matter of application, Luther points his hearers beyond the worldly to ultimate eschatological blessing. He references Proverbs 1:8-9 and declares,

When you hear what God has commanded you in his Word, through preachers, through father and mother, through master and mistress, and act accordingly, then you possess the most beautiful pearls and most precious stones that a person can have on earth. This adornment does not glitter here on earth; however, in yonder life it will radiate as God unveils it and says, Come, you blessed of my Father! You are a pious, obedient child, a diligent, faithful servant, a pious, faithful maid, a pious, obedient citizen, a pious husband, a pious wife, a pious, faithful preacher. When God then brings to light what has been hidden, for us to see with our eyes, then we will understand that obedience to God and his Word, also in such lowly circumstances, is more resplendent than all the adornment of the world.<sup>30</sup>

Luther concludes the homily with a final word of implication and summation:

That is why we should get young hearts accustomed to esteeming God's Word and command highly in their station and calling, learning to fear God in his Word, to know what it means to serve God; in other words, to be obedient to God's Word and command, each performing faithfully and diligently the duties of his calling, and loving his neighbor. . . . Even though he does not listen like this before men, still, before God he radiates. So, let us learn from this Gospel that we must serve God in

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<sup>28</sup>Krug, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7:9.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 14.

heaven, and not Mammon. Second, that serving God means to do what God has commanded in his Word, each person in his station and calling. And third, that the good, the blessing, and beautiful adornment one receives when he serves God, as for example a maid who serves her master and mistress according to God's command, a child who is obedient to its parents, and so on, this is more beautiful adornment before God in heaven than all adornment on earth. . . . In short, it is wisdom and power at its highest, to know how one ought to serve God, and with faith in Christ to do according to God's Word and will, and ever to be found in such precious adornment. May our dear God and Father help us to achieve this through Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>31</sup>

Hence, Martin Luther unfolds the meaning of Matthew 6:24-34 for his hearers in simplistic terms, and he makes a point in the pulpit to relate the text to the specific vocations gathered before him.

**Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity, Matthew 6:24-34 (1534).** In a manner consistent with most of his preaching, Martin Luther gets right to the focal point of the text:

This is a rich Gospel and a lengthy sermon against greed. Our Lord especially loathes greed, for there is no other vice that contravenes the gospel more and does more harm to the Christian than greed. And yet it is so common that the whole world is literally engulfed by it. Day and night everybody's greatest concern is how to make a living. And this stimulates greed to the point where no one is content with what God provides and bestows. Everybody wants more and craves moving up the ladder. Whomever God has blessed with a beautiful house covets owning a mansion. And if he has a mansion, he then wants a villa with expansive grounds, and so it is never satisfied. Everyone wants to get on better and have more. . . . With this sermon the Lord endeavored to put a brake on such attitude and conduct. He gets right to the point, saying, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other," and so on. He calls the two masters by name. The one is called God, who is the true Lord, and whom we are obliged to serve. The other is called Mammon; it is not the true Lord, and, therefore, he does not want us to serve it.<sup>32</sup>

Having introduced the theme of the text, Luther underscores the difference between serving Mammon and trusting in God for even the smallest needs in life. He expounds,

He also tells us just what it means to serve Mammon. It is to be anxious about your livelihood, about what to eat and drink, about taking care of the body, and having clothes to wear. The tenor of the entire sermon is that we are to dismiss such fretting. Not only is such anxiety needless and useless; it is an obstacle to true worship of God. For this reason we are to guard against it and train ourselves to

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<sup>31</sup>Krug, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7:14-15.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

serve God and wait for His provision. He knows what we need and earnestly desires to give us what we need. All we have to do is ask him. . . . We must confess that he has already given us the best and greatest and should we not trust that he will also give us lesser things?<sup>33</sup>

Luther immediately adds the following illustration to press his point further: “If a rich man were to give you a thousand pieces of gold—something that would be painful for him to do—wouldn’t you trust him to give you a pair of old shoes? This is precisely how we treat our Lord God in heaven when we are anxious about food and drink, since he has already given us the greatest and best.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, Luther assures his hearers that the God who gave humanity His only Son would not withhold life’s other necessities from them either. However, provisions from God never warrant human laziness. Hence, Luther clarifies for his audience,

By this, however, Christ does not command that people should not work. For even birds, though they neither sow nor reap, nor gather into granaries, nor do the kind of work that man does, nevertheless, have their work cut out for them; they have to spread their wings and fly about to get their food. Similarly we, too, must work. For God has mandated that we are to work, as it is written in Genesis 3:19: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread”; again, 2 Thessalonians 3:10: “If any would not work, neither should he eat.”<sup>35</sup>

Luther also uses illustrations in his preaching to elucidate biblical truth. For instance, the following fable illustrates the folly of serving Mammon:

This is a despicable adoration of Mammon, which even the Gentiles mocked by inventing a fable of a rich king in Phrygia by the name of Midas. He was so greedy that he wished everything he touched would turn to gold. His wish was granted. When he touched his coat, table, bench, bed, doors, pillars, everything immediately turned to gold. The knife with which he ate, the bread, and the wine, all turned to gold. As a result the miser had no bread or drink and starved himself to death. He had wished well! For this reason abhor greed, and flee from it if you can. Even though you had all the gold in the world, you still need food. You cannot live on silver and gold. Yet, the world is so blind and mad that it is not satisfied with food and drink but craves gold and money as well. Just as if it did not need what God supplies richly and running over. . . .<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, Luther utilizes a vivid bedroom image as he closes the sermon with Gospel-

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<sup>33</sup>Krug, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7:16-17.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 19-20.

motivated implication:

So, in this Gospel our dear Lord Jesus Christ entices us with beautiful pictures and examples, in order that we learn to trust in God; and he promises that God will give us all we need if we but trust him and do our work. In fact, God has already demonstrated, and demonstrates every day, that he wants to provide for our needs. Through the earth, the air, and water, he daily bestows his gifts to us human beings. “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon; no man can serve two masters.” Either you will hate Mammon and love God, or you will hate God and love Mammon. The two stand juxtaposed as opposites. Indeed, the bed is narrow, so that there is room for one only; the blanket is short, so that only one can wrap himself up in it, as is written in Isaiah 28:20. God and Mammon cannot exist side by side in the heart. One must drop out, either God or Mammon. Today’s Gospel warns us, therefore, that we must learn to believe and guard against greed and serving Mammon. May our dear Lord God through Christ grant us his Holy Spirit so that we mend our ways and grow in sanctification. Amen.<sup>37</sup>

Luther presses his congregants to respond in faith to the gospel that they have just heard; after all, the human heart only has adequate seating for one—either God or Mammon. And because sinful flesh is helpless on its own, Luther includes a prayer for the Holy Spirit to produce obedience to Matthew 6:24-24 in the lives of the worshipers—including himself.

**Sermon for the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, Luke 7:11-17 (1532).** In

standard, didactic fashion Luther commences his homily by stating the two chief points (and structure) of his message: “There are two things we ought to learn from this Gospel lesson: first, as regards to faith, that we recognize our Lord Christ from his works and believe in him; and second, that we should practice Christian charity and compassion toward one another.”<sup>38</sup> Hence, Luther does not hesitate to preach Gospel narratives as paradigms for Christian faith and behavior. In fact, he continues his reasoning from the opening summation:

Let us consider the first thought. At the end of this lesson the Evangelist Luke points out how the people reacted to this happening as Christ raised the youth from the dead. Filled with fear, they praised God, and the report concerning what Christ had done spread throughout Judaea and all the surrounding regions. It is an example that reminds us to esteem God’s Word and wondrous works highly and praise him for them. . . . His works, after all, are recorded for us, in order that we might perceive

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<sup>37</sup>Krug, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7:23.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.

from them how great a Lord he is, our God, who is able to help where no one else can. There is no dilemma so great, no matter what the difficulty, that he cannot help.<sup>39</sup>

Luther also states in section two of his message,

Now, the second thing to learn here from Christ, our Lord, is how to be merciful . . . to be merciful means more than merely to empathize with people's grief and suffering. . . . He is a stranger, an unknown visitor, but when he sees the widow's suffering, he identifies with it in himself, as though it were his own, sheds tears with the widow, comforts and helps her. It is a paradigm that illustrates the love that follows upon faith; it cannot remain uninvolved because it is genuine faith.<sup>40</sup>

Luther presents Jesus' compassion towards the widow as an archetype for Christian mercy in relation to other people. Luther's paradigmatic treatment of the gospel narrative, however, raises several questions. Is hearer imitation Luke's intention for including Jesus' funeral intervention? Is emulating Jesus' mercy a plausible sub-theme to preach from this narrative? Or, is Luther teetering with characterization as he handles this text? Indeed, these questions are difficult to answer.

Near the beginning of his homily, Luther highlights the significance of the details in the passage:

He [Jesus] manifested this very plainly in the case of this poor widow, whose burden could hardly have been heavier. First of all, there was the fact that she was a widow, which was bad enough; for, as the Scripture points out, a widow's life in this world is difficult in itself, without additional grief. But then another cross is added to her misery in that her only son is taken from her through death, and even now is being carried out for burial. All hope of life is gone, and not even all the world's resources could come to her aid. To take her son out and bury him in the ground is the only advice the world can give her. No doctor, king, or emperor could help now. In that predicament Christ lets himself be seen for the kind of Lord he is. He comes to this poor widow's aid by restoring to life her only son. . . .<sup>41</sup>

Not only does Luther underscore the dire condition of the widow, but he marvelously draws his hearers into the scene (and weighty emotions) of the text. By retelling the narrative, Luther leads his congregants to see themselves as onlookers in Luke's account. Hence, as the funeral procession unfolds, the experience of the original attendees in the

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<sup>39</sup>Krug, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7:24.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 25.

presence of Jesus becomes their own.

As the homily progresses, the Reformer transitions to words of application and implication. He proclaims,

This and similar works of Christ should remind us that we must be very courageous and unafraid in times of sickness, pestilence, and life-threatening danger. At moments when the world says, All is lost, the Christian responds, Not so, God still lives, and Christ rules at the right hand of God. Psalm 112:7-8 praises the godly and pious who maintain unwavering and fearless trust in God's grace and help: "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid. . . ." Is anything impossible for our Lord God that should cause us not to rely on him with absolute trust? After all, he created heaven and earth out of nothing, and still causes the trees to bear cherries, plums, apples, and pears by his mighty power. . . . God is the one who can do absolutely everything. Our Lord Christ can restore life to the dead, call into being that which is not; in short, no matter how deep the problem, he can mend and straighten things out no matter how profound and perplexing it is. We must recognize God's power and be convinced that nothing is impossible for him, so that when things go bad we remember to be unafraid and trust that he is omnipotent . . . we must remember that we have a helper and Saviour who is almighty and who is able to help. That is true, genuine faith.<sup>42</sup>

Luther preaches the gospel of God in all its power and beauty, including the difference it continues to exert on all creation. In particular, the gospel transforms how believers respond to their own trials and suffering—with hope and unswerving faith in Jesus Christ.

Luther concludes his sermon by reviewing the two fundamental points of the text and by asking the Lord's help to respond in faith and obedience:

These are the two lessons of today's Gospel. First, the great lesson that comes with faith, not to be overwhelmed when things go evilly, especially when we must die, but to remember that in the Lord Christ we have a helper whose hand is almighty. The second lesson is that we, like Christ, must take our neighbor's misery upon ourselves and identify with his grief, whether physical or spiritual. May our dear Lord grant us his grace so that we might learn both things, joining together with the godly people here in this Gospel to praise the Lord Christ eternally for his goodness, and also learn to be compassionate toward our neighbor. Amen.<sup>43</sup>

Luther's conclusion marks a noticeable pattern in his lectionary preaching: (1) he states the main point or points of the text; (2) he expounds the main point or points; and (3) he concludes by summarizing the main point or points that he just told them. Though rather

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<sup>42</sup>Krug, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7:25.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 29.

didactic in nature, Luther's style of preaching effectively communicates the focus of the text. Moreover, given the repetitious nature of the sermon structure, Luther's hearers undoubtedly left worship with a clear understanding of the pericope's intent and aim.

**Sermon for the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, Luke 7:11-17 (1533).** Once again, Luther begins his sermon by stressing the central thrust of the text: "There is very much one could say in connection with today's Gospel. However, for the present moment we will limit ourselves to one point, undoubtedly the most important one, namely, how we should find comfort in the face of death. Certainly there is great need for such comfort and teaching."<sup>44</sup> Luther thus directs his listeners to the core idea and why it benefits them to keep listening.

Luther follows his introduction with pertinent background information to orient his hearers to the text:

Dearly beloved, we are considering here the account of a poor widow, whose husband is already dead, and whose only son now also dies, leaving her in every way very dejected and destitute. For in Judaism it was reckoned especially a great misfortune if there was no son in the family, because under Jewish law that would leave a person without an heir. That explains why this widow is distressed and troubled, for it appeared as though God were against her and had completely abandoned her, first by taking away her husband and now also her son. Her heart was very weighed down; she might well have despaired of God and concluded that he had forsaken her, allowing both her husband and son to die, thus taking away all earthly solace. Christ, our dear Lord, feels deeply for her, and with sincere compassion gladdens her heart by raising her son from the dead and giving him back to his mother, so that her joy now becomes ten times greater than was her grief before. And it is a wonder that she did not immediately keel over and succumb because of her happiness.<sup>45</sup>

Once Luther explains the dire setting of the text, he emphasizes the difference Jesus makes in the face of death for the widow's son, for Luther, and for his listeners. Luther expounds,

It is a story we ought to remember, so that by it we might learn to exercise, strengthen, and confirm our faith. For the Lord is not interested only in this woman;

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<sup>44</sup>Krug, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7:30.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.



he wants to teach all of us how powerless and insignificant death is. He pictures death that way so that we are not frightened by it but live confidently and patiently from day to day, untroubled by death, since in him we have a Lord who can readily deliver from death. . . . With all hope gone, and everyone disheartened by the death of the son, our dear Lord comes, without healing medicines, and speaks merely a word, “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!” At once the dead man arises and is alive. By this Christ powerfully proves that in his sight there is no barrier between death and life; they are neither more nor less, one is like the other to him. So, to him it is all the same, whether we live or die. Though we die, with him we are not dead. The fact is that as far as he is concerned, death is merely a word. . . . It is just as Christ states in the Gospel: “God is not the God of the dead but of the living.” Scripture, moreover, affirms God’s position: “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Therefore, although Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are dead, with God they are still alive. That is what we should learn from today’s Gospel lesson, namely, the great power God will exert upon us through Christ on Judgment Day, when with one word he will call forth from the dead all people and bless the believers eternally. He will say, “Martin Luther, Arise! And it will be so, and immediately I shall stand there. . . . Therefore, we should accept this example as sure evidence of how Christ demonstrates his power over death, in order that we might take comfort in him and not fear death.”<sup>46</sup>

The comfort of this gospel must have touched the hearts of Luther’s hearers, especially when one Reformation historian indicated that the average life expectancy in the 1500s—at least in nearby England—was “38 years and [that] 30 percent of children died before the age of ten.”<sup>47</sup>

As Luther continues his exposition, he takes a familiar sight to his churchgoers and turns it into a brilliant illustration of the text. He adds,

It follows from this, therefore, that those who lie dead and buried in the churchyard and under the ground sleep more lightly than we do in our beds. We know it can easily happen that a person sleeps so soundly that he is called ten times before he even hears. But the dead hear that lone word of Christ and wake up. The moment he speaks that one word, “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!”; “Lazarus, come forth!”; “Talitha cumi, Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise!” they hear in that very instant. And on Judgment Day, when he speaks that one word, the dead will hear in that very same moment and come forth from the graves. It is true, we sleep much more soundly in bed than we do in the churchyard! Thus before our Lord God, death is not death but a sleep. For us, when we die it is and is termed death, but before God it is but a sleep and a very light sleep at that.<sup>48</sup>

Five-hundred years later and Luther’s gospel proclamation still speaks relevancy into the

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<sup>46</sup>Krug, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7:30-32.

<sup>47</sup>Bruce Robinson, “The Human Reformation,” BBC, last modified February 17, 2011, accessed May 12, 2017, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/human\\_reformation\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/human_reformation_01.shtml).

<sup>48</sup>Krug, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7:32.

lives of Christians.

The Reformer ends his sermon in the following way:

We should learn to yearn for this Saviour, ever becoming more and more certain in confident expectation of his help and grace. We should rejoice when we hear that pestilence, death and Judgment Day are coming. If, however, we become terrified and afraid, we then are letting the “old Adam” and the flesh govern us, not the Lord Christ and his Word. For it is very sure that Christ is coming on Judgment Day and will awaken us from death. In the meantime, our bodies are to rest in the grave and sleep until Christ comes and knocks on the grave and says, “Arise, arise, Martin Luther, come forth! Then in a moment we shall rise, as if from a light, pleasant sleep, and live forever with the Lord, rejoicing. . . . So much in brief about the poor widow and her dead son! May our dear Lord God help us come to perceive the man, Christ, as this Gospel presents him to us, so that we may take comfort in him when our time comes to die. Amen.”<sup>49</sup>

Luther emphasizes the eschatological implication of the text for all believers. Jesus awakens confidence, comfort, and great joy in death’s shadow. For as Luke intended to convey through this account, Jesus and His spoken words hold complete authority over death and the grave.

### **Luther’s Exposition of John 14-16**

Martin Luther likely began his verse-by-verse exposition of John 14-16 in Wittenberg’s pulpit in June or July of 1537.<sup>50</sup> During this period Caspar Cruciger served as the amanuensis for Luther’s preaching.<sup>51</sup> The challenge, however, is that Cruciger removed all indications of where Luther began and ended his sermons; as a result, his exposition of John 14-16 reads more like a running commentary than a sermon series.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, Luther’s praise of Cruciger’s completed editorial work assures modern readers that the pages therein remain faithful to Luther’s original, sermonic exposition of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Krug, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7:34-35.

<sup>50</sup>Pelikan and Poellot, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 24:ix.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

Before Luther begins preaching through John 14-16, he writes a brief, yet helpful preface. Luther's preface provides his hearers with the historical setting for his sermons on John 14-16:

The fourteenth chapter and the two that follow it contain the beautiful sermon delivered by Christ after the celebration of the Last Supper, on the threshold of His suffering and His departure from His beloved disciples. With this sermon He wanted to comfort and strengthen them both against the present sadness occasioned by His departure and against the suffering they would endure because of the devil, the world, and their own conscience. Indeed, here we find the best and most comforting sermon preached by Christ while on this earth. And St. John should be praised above the other evangelists for recording and transmitting it to Christendom for their comfort, as a jewel and treasure not purchasable with the world's goods. It would be deplorable had we been deprived of it and had it not been handed down to us.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, Luther continues to paint the scene in the Upper Room that evening:

This sermon contains the most precious and cheering consolation, the sweetest words of Christ, the faithful and beloved Savior, words of farewell to His disciples as He is about to leave them, words such as no man on earth is able to employ toward his dearest and best friends. They show how He provides for them out of the pure, ineffable, burning love of His heart, and how He is concerned about them far more sincerely . . . [that] He forgets His own anguish and anxiety, which must have filled His heart at this time, as He Himself confided to His disciples: "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matt. 26:38).<sup>55</sup>

Luther also states why this specific sermon of Jesus remains vital for the church today:

Furthermore, here we find the true, chief high articles of Christian doctrine established and set forth in the most powerful manner. Nowhere else in Scripture are they to be found side by side in this way. For example, the doctrine of the three distinct Persons in the Holy Trinity, particularly of the divine and human natures in the eternally undivided Person of the Lord Christ; also the doctrine of justification by faith and of real comfort for consciences. . . . Therefore, it is surely fitting and proper that this sermon be diligently studied and considered in Christendom. . . . And herewith we wish to commend this proclamation to pious Christians as their highest and most precious treasure and consolation, that they may learn it and preserve it with diligence.<sup>56</sup>

**John 14:1-6.** Having prepared his congregants with the historical setting and abiding value of the text, Luther expounds,

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<sup>54</sup>Pelikan and Poellot, *Luther's Works*, vol. 24:7.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 7-8.

*Let not your hearts be troubled.* Here you see, in the first place, how heartily and faithfully the Lord looks after His dear disciples, how concerned He is about them lest they remain disconsolate in this very night when, as He had often foretold, suffering and the cross were to separate Him from them, when He was to leave them behind amid great peril, fear, and terror. Up to this time they had always felt secure, assured, and unafraid because of Christ's personal presence. They had been eyewitnesses when He proved Himself mighty before the people with sermons and signs. . . . Thus Christ admonished and consoled His beloved disciples here as men who sorely needed consolation. But these words were recorded, not for their sakes, but for ours that we might also learn to apply this comfort to both present and future need. Every Christian, when baptized and dedicated to Christ, may and must accept and expect encounters with terror and anxiety, which will make his heart afraid and dejected, whether these feelings arise from one or from many enemies and adversaries. For a Christian has an exceedingly large number of enemies if he wants to remain loyal to his Lord. . . . We should know and consider that terror will surely follow, either from the world—in the form of animosity and persecution—or from the devil himself, who shoots his cruel poisoned darts and spears of dejection, despair, or blasphemy into your heart. . . . Therefore I must see to it that when sorrows appear, I am prepared to weather the storm and draw comfort from God's Word. . . . From these and similar words and admonitions of Christ we should also learn to know the Lord Christ aright, to develop a more cordial and comforting confidence in Him, and to pay more regard to His Word than to anything else which may confront our eyes, ears, and other senses. For if I am a Christian and hold to Him, I always know that He is talking to me.<sup>57</sup>

In a pastoral tone, Luther moves from the necessity of these words for the twelve disciples to the relevancy of Jesus' words for his hearers. Yes, believers expect disheartening circumstances, but amidst such tribulations Luther holds up the promises and certainties of God's Word.

Later, after Luther reads verses 2-4, he explains,

But we will refrain from explaining the text as boldly as he [St. Augustine] did. We will interpret the words *simply* [emphasis mine], as they themselves state. Here Christ consoles His dear disciples and Christians in a three-fold manner. First of all, they should know of the many abodes for them with the Father. . . . You will not occupy earthly or human habitations and houses, but heavenly and divine ones; that is, in place of a filthy, perishable, insecure, and unstable residence, which you and all the world must soon leave anyway, you shall have only beautiful, splendid, spacious, eternal, safe, and permanent homes, which cannot be taken from you. . . . You will no longer live in the devil's realm or be separated from Me but will remain eternally with the Father and with Me, in a place of which they will never get a whiff or a taste. . . . The second consolation is contained in Christ's words: "If it were not so, I still tell you that I go to prepare a place for you." That is to say: "Even if the dwellings were not yet established, I have the power, if you believe, to make and prepare enough of them. And this is just why I leave you, to put them in order and to make them ready, although they are already there, just so that you will not fret and worry where you shall stay. In brief, you will surely have homes aplenty.

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<sup>57</sup>Pelikan and Poellot, *Luther's Works*, vol. 24:9-13.

He wants to lift up their thoughts and inspire them with courage and comfort . . . when we consider what is held in store for us . . . then we should be joyous. . . . We cannot lose. . . . In the third place, Christ says: “Though I am now departing from you to prepare a place for you, you must not worry or mourn because you no longer have Me with you. The thought that I will not abandon you, but will return to you and take you with Me should comfort you. My going and My departure are not to harm you. You must realize that they will redound to your good; for I will prepare the dwelling places with the Father and then return and Myself take you back with Me to occupy these rooms. Then you will remain with Me where I am. Thus you are assured both of the homes in heaven and of My eternal company. These must be our three comforts against the devil, the world, and every evil that may confront us. We have a Lord and faithful Savior, who ascended on high and is now preparing our home for us, and who at the same time will be remain with us.<sup>59</sup>

Luther’s exposition displays an extraordinary understanding of the gospel; he cannot over-communicate its beauty and comfort to his hearers. In addition, Luther sticks to the plain meaning of Jesus’ words, and he always relates Scripture to the lives of his hearers.

Most important, however, the Reformer elevates Christ in his proclamation. For example, when Luther expounds on verses 5-6, he says,

This is again something extraordinary; but it is the very theme which the evangelist St. John is wont to write about and emphasize, namely, that all our teaching and faith must revolve about Christ and be centered in this one Person. We must discard all other knowledge and wisdom and know absolutely no one else than “Christ crucified,” as St. Paul states, 1 Cor. 2:2. . . . Here and everywhere the evangelist John wants to warn all who would be Christians and would do what is right how to proceed in divine matters and to know what to seek and learn, namely, that in the eyes of God it is the highest wisdom and knowledge, above all knowledge and wisdom, even if this were angelic, to come to the right knowledge of Christ, to know what one has in Him and that one comes to God only through Him.<sup>60</sup>

Luther adds,

In that manner you must also look at Christ if you want to recognize Him and know who He is, not as your eyes and senses prescribe, but as His Word shows and portrays Him – as born of the Virgin, as the One who died and rose again for you and now sits enthroned as Lord over all things. Then you see not only His form, as your physical eyes do, but also the power and the might of His death and resurrection. Then you do not call Him a son of Mary and Joseph from Nazareth, as the Jews did, but our only Savior and Lord over all. . . . If I have this faith, and if this faith relies on Him beyond doubt, then I know both the way He has taken and the place where He has gone and resides. . . . And if I remain steadfast in this faith, I take the same way and road, through cross and suffering, and reach the same place to which He has gone. Therefore we dare go no farther or fix our thoughts on

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<sup>59</sup>Pelikan and Poellot, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 24:26-29.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 32-33.

anything but Christ. . . .<sup>61</sup>

In fact, Luther adjoins this graphic illustration to his Christological proclamation of verse 6:

It is very much like coming to a shore where road and blazed trail terminate, and where I see only water before me and could not cross or dare venture upon it without a firm and solid path or bridge, or a guide to lead me. With an impassable way before me and without any assistance it would avail me nothing to know the direction. If I am to cross, I must have something on which to walk safely, in the assurance that it will bear me. The same thing applies when one must pass through death from this life into yonder life. This demands more than good conduct and life, no matter how praiseworthy. For I and the works of all men are far too feeble to help me wipe out sin, reconcile God, conquer death, etc. Therefore I need a different foundation, one that is sure, or a firm and safe path and bridge on which to cross. And this is none other than this Jesus Christ, who must be the only Way on which we, as He says, enter into yonder life and come to the Father if we adhere to Him in steadfast faith.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, the evangelistic nature of Luther's preaching stands out when he now warns unbelieving listeners that tomorrow could be too late to seek Christ in faith:

When one asks about these important matters—how to come from this life, through sin and death, to eternal righteousness and life, from the devil to God, from hell to heaven—then this text is pertinent. It teaches us that there is no other way, no other safe, right, and sure highway, no other firm bridge or path, no other haven or crossing than this Christ alone. But no one should understand such a sermon to mean that this gives him a time of grace, that he may postpone walking this way until he lies on his deathbed and consider this soon enough, that meanwhile he can carouse, do as he pleases, sow his wild oats, and later, when his hour approaches, heed this verse. Do not do this, dear brother; for then it may be too late.<sup>63</sup>

In short, biblical Christology truly defines Luther's preaching and becomes the flagship of the Reformation, especially given his previous bondage to Roman theology. Luther recounts,

I myself was a monk for twenty years. I tortured myself with prayers, fasting, vigils, and freezing; the frost alone might have killed me. It caused me pain such as I will never inflict on myself again, even if I could. What else did I seek by doing this but God, who was supposed to note my strict observance of the monastic order and my austere life? I constantly walked in a dream and lived in real idolatry. For I did not believe in Christ; I regarded Him only as a severe and terrible Judge, portrayed as seated on a rainbow. Therefore I cast about for other intercessors, Mary and various

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<sup>61</sup>Pelikan and Poellot, *Luther's Works*, vol. 24:26-29.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 50-51.

other saints, also my own works and the merits of my order. And I did all this for the sake of God, not for money or goods. Nevertheless, this was heresy and idolatry, since I did not know Christ and did not seek in and through Him what I wanted.<sup>64</sup>

Once Luther began to grasp the sufficiency of faith in Jesus for eternal salvation during his rumination on Romans 1:16-17 in the “Tower Room,” Christ began to permeate his preaching, lecturing, and writings as *the* chief-end of all exposition.

**John 15:1-2.** Luther continues his fine exposition of the Fourth Gospel with Jesus’ agricultural image in chapter 15. Luther says of the passage’s context,

Everything that follows in this chapter and in the sixteenth the Lord addressed to His apostles after He rose from the supper to go into the garden. He continues to speak of the consolation that will not only be theirs after His resurrection, when they will see Him again, but will continue after His ascension into heaven and their dispersion throughout the world, where they, too, will suffer and be persecuted. He foresees how His disciples and the Christians will fare, and at the same time He takes into view both His own suffering, which is now at hand, and the suffering that will befall the disciples. . . . This suggests a vine and a vinedresser . . . a vine and its branches.<sup>65</sup>

Luther explains to his hearers,

This is a very comforting picture and an excellent, delightful personification. Here Christ does not present a useless, unfruitful tree to our view. No, He presents the precious vine, which bears much fruit and produces the sweetest and most delicious juice, even though it does not delight the eye. He interprets all the suffering which both He and they are to experience as nothing else than the diligent work and care which a vinedresser expends on his vines and their branches to make them grow and bear abundantly. . . . He says that Christians are not afflicted without God’s counsel and will; that when this does happen, it is a sign of grace and fatherly love, not of wrath and punishment, and must serve our welfare. This requires the art of believing and being sure that whatever hurts and distresses us does not happen to hurt or harm us but for our good and profit. We must compare this to the work of a vinedresser who hoes and cultivates his vine. . . . The same thing is true when the vinedresser applies manure to the stock of the vine; this, too, he does for the benefit of the vine even though the vine might complain again and say: “What pray, is this for? Is it not enough that you are hacking and cutting me to pieces? Now with this filthy cow manure, which is intolerable in the barn and elsewhere, you are defiling my tender branches, which yield such delicious fruit! Must I stand for this too?” That is how Christ interprets the suffering which He and His Christians are to endure on earth. This is to be a benefaction and a help rather than affliction and harm. Its purpose is to enable them to bear all the better fruit and all the more. . . .<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Pelikan and Poellot, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 24:23-24.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 193-94.

Luther exhibits an effective homiletical move: he begins with the plain, agricultural sense of the vine, transitions to the theology of God’s pruning, and shifts to final application—a new perspective and attitude toward Christian suffering and hardship. Luther even uses dialogue as he continues his exposition of the text:

As though He [Jesus] were saying: “After all . . . I share the fate of the vine in every respect. The Jews will throw manure at Me and will hack away at Me. They will shamefully revile and blaspheme Me, will torture, scourge, crucify, and kill Me in the most disgraceful manner, so that all the world will suppose that I must finally perish and be destroyed. But the fertilizing and pruning I suffer will yield a richer fruit: that is, through My cross and death I shall come to My glory, begin My reign, and be acknowledged and believed throughout the world. Later on you will have the same experience. You, too, must be fertilized and cultivated in this way. The Father, who makes Me the Vine and you the branches, will not permit this Vine to lie unfertilized and unpruned. Otherwise it would degenerate into a wild and unfruitful vine which would finally perish entirely. But when it is well cultivated, fertilized, pruned, and stripped of its superfluous leaves, it develops its full strength and yields wine that is not only abundant but also good and delicious. This is indeed a fine and comforting picture. Happy is the Christian who can interpret it thus and apply it in hours of distress and trial, when death upsets him, when the devil assails and torments him. . . . Then he can say: “See, I am being fertilized and cultivated as a branch on the vine. All right, dear hoe and clipper, go ahead. Chop, prune, and remove the unnecessary leaves. I will gladly suffer it, for these are God’s hoes and clippers. They are applied for my good and welfare. . . .” Then let him say: “Praise God, who can use the devil and his malice to serve our good!”<sup>67</sup>

After the dialogue, Luther provides his hearers with positive examples from Scripture (Joseph), church history (St. Ignatius and St. Agatha), and Germany to reinforce his point that God lovingly prunes the church for increased growth and fruitfulness.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, in an effort to help his hearers trust God’s complete control over the pruning of Christians, Luther emphasizes God’s love and sovereignty over the vine.

Luther asserts,

God controls the clipper and the hoe; they do not control themselves. . . . They must stop when He wants them to, and they dare not go any farther than our welfare requires. This is an especially charming picture. God portrays Himself not as a tyrant or a jailer but as a pious Vinedresser who tends and works His vineyard with all faithfulness and diligence. . . . For He does not let His vineyard stand there to be torn to pieces by dogs and wild sows; He tends it and watches over it. He is concerned that it bear well and produce good wine. Therefore He must hoe and

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<sup>67</sup>Pelikan and Poellot, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 24:194-95.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 196-98.



prune so as not to chop and cut too deeply into the stem and the roots, take off too many branches, or trim off all the foliage. “Such care,” Christ says, “My Father exercises with respect to Me and you.” Therefore let us be unafraid, and let us not be terrified by the bad manure, the prongs, and the teeth of the devil and the world; for God will not let them go beyond what serves our best interests.<sup>69</sup>

In other words, Luther underscores to his audience that God sets the boundaries for their pruning. Therefore, God’s sovereignty over believers’ lives leads to the following implication from the text:

All this must promote and serve the strengthening of a Christian’s faith and make him more resolute to resist and overcome the devil. For by such trials he is driven to seek help and comfort in God’s Word and to exercise and increase his faith by petitions, prayers, and thanks—to become all the stronger in knowledge and all the humbler, all the more patient and perfect. Thus, as has been stated before, God uses all trials and sufferings, not for Christendom’s harm, as the devil and the world intend, but for its welfare, so that it may thereby be purified and improved, and bear much fruit for the Vinedresser.<sup>70</sup>

### **A Synopsis of Luther’s Expository Methods**

From the sampling of Martin Luther’s catechetical, lectionary, and verse-by-verse expositions, at least seven expository facets consistently characterize his post-1525 preaching. First, Luther’s exposition adheres to the plain sense of the text, a trait that evidences his newfound commitment to the grammatical-historical exegesis of Scripture. His previous dependency on allegory and the spiritual interpretation of texts has dissipated. Second, Luther restores Christological interpretation and proclamation to the pulpit; he unswervingly extols Christ crucified as the sole and certain hope for lost and condemned sinners through faith alone. Third, the Reformer elevates God’s Word higher than any person, possession, element, or institution on earth; Scripture alone establishes church doctrine. In fact, not only does Luther draw from both testaments to interpret texts and shape his homiletical points and sub-points, but he repeatedly directs his hearers to the inerrancy of Scripture and the sure and certain promises therein. Fourth, Luther’s sermons exemplify the proper distinction between law and gospel. For centuries Rome

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<sup>69</sup>Pelikan and Poellot, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 24:199.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 210.

comingled the two; fasting, prayer, penance, alms, pilgrimages, masses, and other works had been added to salvation. In short, Rome spelled salvation *do*, but Luther proclaimed salvation *done*. Fifth, although Luther's preaching strays at times from the text into various (and sometimes unrelated) doctrinal matters, most of his sermons expound the central point or points of the text. Sixth, Luther's sermons—especially his textual application—evidence remarkable (and pastoral) oratory skills. Luther utilizes positive and negative examples, illustrations, stories, fables, picturesque language, dialogue, and common occurrences from German life and culture to communicate biblical truth to his hearers. In addition, Luther tailors his application to the diversity of people gathered—including spouses, children, servants, citizens, laborers, and pastors. Seventh, Luther's sermons regularly exhibit textual implication, especially near the conclusion. The Reformer exhorts his hearers to live out the Spirit-empowered “now what” of the text, whether the passage summons believers to comfort, hope, obedience, mercy, prayer, trust, or another form of godliness.

Granted, Luther's sermons do not include elaborate introductions, climactic conclusions, alternate structures, or single-themed sermons. However, to expect such features to characterize Luther's preaching would be guilty of reading modern expository standards back onto the Reformer. Thus, as the post-1525 Luther held to grammatical-historical exegesis, the plain sense of the text, the Christological interpretation of Scripture, the proper distinction between law and gospel, the inerrancy of Scripture, and the application and implication of texts, this thesis concludes that Martin Luther was in fact an expository preacher and forerunner of modern expository theory.

CHAPTER 5  
IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUND EXPOSITORY  
METHODS TODAY

**Luther's Preaching in One Word**

The expository nature of Luther's preaching bears substantial implications for the church today. Although many words could be used to describe Luther's preaching—words such as *grace*, *faith*, *Scripture*, *justification*, *orthodox*, or *Christ*—the word that best summarizes Luther's preaching is *conviction*. Martin Luther preached with conviction; he preached from the conviction that the gospel “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16). Indeed, contemporary Christianity needs to recapture five convictions that Luther brought with him to the pulpit.

First, Luther took his stand on the inspiration, inerrancy, and therefore supremacy of Holy Scripture. Or, to state it bluntly, Luther dropped his “homiletical anchor” in the Bible, and he left it there. Likewise, pastors must ask themselves in the twenty-first century, “Is Scripture *still* the eternal, unchanging, efficacious, and binding Word of God or not?” Middle ground does not exist. As Luther's sermons bear witness, he carried no qualms, uncertainties, reservations, suspicions, skepticisms, or doubts about the Bible with him into the pulpit; rather, the Reformer from Wittenberg was ready “in season and out of season to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2). Do today's clergy share the same conviction?

Second, when Luther dropped his “homiletical anchor” in the Bible, it repeatedly dug itself into and rested on Christ. Once Luther discovered Jesus *for him* on the pages of Scripture, the pure and unadulterated gospel in his sermons became infectious. The German folk had not heard such clear, Christological preaching before:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23). Is Jesus the good news of God for all mankind or not? Moreover, do modern homilies emphasize Jesus’ death, resurrection, glorification, and Parousia throughout the Bible so that contemporary hearers also cling to Christ by faith alone? Or has preaching succumb to moralism, spirituality, and other self-improvement plans?

Third, Luther elevated preaching and the office of preaching above all other offices on earth. Luther states, “Whoever seeks to become a preacher seeks the highest office in Christendom.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, Luther even considers sermons that faithfully expound Scripture to be preached by God Himself: “To be sure, I do hear the sermon; however, I am wont to ask: ‘Who is speaking?’ The pastor? By no means! You do not hear the pastor. Of course, the voice is his, but the words he employs are really spoken by my God.”<sup>2</sup> Luther’s view of preaching and preachers was revolutionary. Commenting on homiletical belief and practice in Luther’s day, Fred Meuser says,

Most sermons were rather highly structured addresses that developed some subject chosen by the preacher: a theological question, a particular virtue or sin, a problem of the Christian life. There was a rather set pattern. First was the introduction, then the question was divided into many parts and analyzed. Preachers marshaled philosophical arguments to prove their case, citing the Fathers as authorities, with points and subpoints, main teachings and subteachings, logical precision and speculative ability. Depending on the preacher, there might be more or less Scripture in a sermon. Often the saints were very prominent. However, the sermon was not taken with utter seriousness, because the sacrament was all-important.<sup>3</sup>

Luther re-centered the sermon for Christendom and gave the pulpit precedence—even placing it higher than the altar.<sup>4</sup> In today’s hectic and overbooked society, many responsibilities vie for a pastor’s time and attention, yet Luther’s conviction about the

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<sup>1</sup>Peter Newman Brooks, “Luther the Preacher,” *The Expository Times* 95, no. 2 (November 1983): 38.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Luther, *LW* 22:528, quoted in H. S. Wilson, “Luther on Preaching as God Speaking,” *Lutheran Quarterly* (Spring 2005): 102.

<sup>3</sup>Fred Meuser, *Luther the Preacher* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 46.

<sup>4</sup>Martin Luther said, “Since the health of the Christian and of the Church depends on the Word of God, the preaching and teaching of it is both ‘the most important part of divine service.’” E. Theodore Bachmann, ed., *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament I* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1960), 68.

primacy of preaching emboldens clergy to meticulously preserve and protect their sermon preparation time. No shortcuts exist for prayer, grammatical-historical exegesis, outline formation, illustration searches, or other sermon groundwork.

Fourth, Luther's catechetical, lectionary, and verse-by-verse sermons evidence the profound simplicity with which he preaches. The Reformer never uses the pulpit to showcase his education. In fact, in the sermons reviewed, Luther never makes one reference to the original languages, a striking detail for someone who translated the entire Bible from Hebrew and Greek into German. Rather, Luther states, "I like sermons couched in simple language, so that the people can understand what is preached."<sup>5</sup> Luther adds, "When I ascend the pulpit, I think only of preaching to the workmen and the servant maids, not to Jonas or Philip and the university men. They can study the subject in the Scriptures. If we preach only to them, the poor people sit and stare at us like cows."<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Luther offers pastors the following litmus test for their sermons: "The proof of a good sermon is that the common people can take it home with them."<sup>7</sup> Thus, pastors learn from Martin Luther to preach in simple words and phrases, that sermons are neither doctrinal discourses nor academic lectures.

Fifth, Luther preaches with the conviction that the Christian life—including preaching itself—is a fierce battleground against Satan and his demonic forces. For example, as Luther expounds verse-by-verse through John 14, he mentions Satan and his wiles on 121 of 186 pages of sermon manuscript. Indeed, preachers can expect heavy resistance from the prince of darkness as the kingdom of God advances through the proclamation of the gospel. However, preachers must stand firm in Luther's conviction that "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom 16:20).

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<sup>5</sup>James MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, vol. 4, *Vindication of the Movement (1530-46)* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 311.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 313.

## Where Additional Research Is Needed

Martin Luther reformed preaching as much as he reformed the church to which he preached. James MacKinnon observes,

As Luther preached it, it was an arresting and convulsing message, which it is difficult for us, who are accustomed to it, adequately to realize or describe. Perhaps we can get near to the realization of it if we try to envisage the revolutionary movement which this preacher, by the power of his spoken and printed word, started in the pulpit of the parish church at Wittenberg, and which speedily burst forth beyond the walls of this otherwise insignificant town on the Elbe, over the length and breadth of the empire into many other lands, gathering hurricane force as it went, casting down the decaying fabric of the medieval Church, and clearing the way for a new creation. Out of this new creation has sprung the mighty fabric, the immense influence of the modern reformed Churches in all the continents of the earth, the beginnings of which may justifiably be traced to that titanic preaching of the Word in the Wittenberg pulpit.<sup>8</sup>

Five centuries have passed since Luther's preaching, and he still shakes the world.<sup>9</sup>

However, due in part to his 2,000 extant sermons, a comprehensive study of Luther's sermons still evades Christendom. Moreover, without further research on Luther's preaching, not only will his sermons continue to lack fair representation in contemporary literature, but the Church's understanding of the Reformer will remain underdeveloped as well. To take a case in point, Luther's homilies exhibit several kinds of sermonic approaches. At times Luther uses the two kinds of righteousness (passive and active) to divide his sermons into physical and spiritual matters, while at other times, he uses classical argument to divide his sermons into exhortation, narration, confirmation, and refutation.<sup>10</sup> This thesis, however, did not afford the time nor the focus to explore specific structures. Hence, additional research needs to be done on Luther's sermons *and* on Luther as a preacher.

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<sup>8</sup>MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, 316.

<sup>9</sup>Clyde E. Fant, Jr., *20 Centuries of Great Preaching: An Encyclopedia of Preaching*, vol. 2, *Luther to Massillon, 1483-1742*, ed. William M. Pinson, Jr. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1971), 8.

<sup>10</sup>David Schmitt, e-mail to the author, August 11, 2015.

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## ABSTRACT

### EXPOSITORY PREACHING AT THE DAWN OF THE REFORMATION: AN EVALUATION OF MARTIN LUTHER AS PREACHER IN LIGHT OF MODERN EXPOSITORY THEORY

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This thesis examines Martin Luther as an expository preacher. Contemporary authors such as Ewald Plass, Peter Brooks, Fred Meuser, Sydney Greidanus, James MacKinnon, John MacArthur, and Hughes Oliphant Old describe Luther as an expository preacher, yet none of them clarifies *how* or *in what way* they reach that conclusion. To that end, chapter 1 introduces Luther as a preacher and the need for this study.

Chapter 2 defines modern expository theory and presents a four-fold method for creating faithful, expository sermons.

Chapter 3 tracks Luther's change in hermeneutic from a medieval, allegorical approach to a Christ-centered, historical-grammatical method. Luther's postils (sermons on lectionary readings) are used to demonstrate his hermeneutical shift.

Chapter 4 samples Luther's catechetical preaching, lectionary preaching, and verse-by-verse exposition of the Fourth Gospel to reveal in what ways he can be deemed an expository preacher and a forerunner of modern expository theory.

Chapter 5 draws implications from Luther's expository methods that can benefit the church today, as well as expressing the need for additional research.

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