

Unintentional Preaching Models

#2- Original
author's
message

#3- Theme
Fulfilled in
Christ

Biblical field

Our Lives

#1- Preacher's
Text

#4- How it
effects us

Types of Sermons

- 1-2 *Informational/SS lesson*
- 1-3 *Allegorical Inspirational*
- 1-4 *Exhortational*
- 1-2-4 *Systematic Theological Expository (Puritan)*
- 1-2-3 *Redemptive-Historical*
- 1-2-3-4 *Redemptive-Historical w/application*
- 1-2-4-3 *Preaching to the heart*

LOOK AT THE TEXT THROUGH THREE 'APPLICATION-PERSPECTIVES'

Vern Poythress in his new *God-centered Interpretation* takes John Frame's 3-perspectives of normative (prophetic), existential (priestly), and situational (kingly) and works this out for hermeneutics. He says that when interpreting the text, you do not know meaning of text unless you understand its author's original historic sense (normative), its application to hearers (existential), and its place in the history of redemption (situational). If you only use one of these three aspects, you make it an idol and it leads to distortions.

A. However, once you 'go into' the application to the hearers, you again have the three perspectives. Again, if you only use one of the aspects, you make it an idol and it leads to distortions. He calls these distortions--the '**Doctrinalist**' (mainly normative), '**Pietist**' (mainly existential), and '**Cultural-transformationalist**' (mainly kingly). I believe that if you hammer at just one of the perspectives all the time it leads to an implicit moralism that puts pressure on the will with guilt rather than on the heart with grace.

1. A 'Doctrinalist' looks to a text to see how it supports sound doctrine. This person makes the Enlightenment mistake that you can have objective knowledge without it being personal. The Reformed way to put this is that all knowledge is 'covenantal'. (See M.Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* and Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*.) Their basic gist is this: no part of revelation is given simply to be *known*. Everything that is revealed is revealed for covenant service (Deut.29:29) There is no neutrality--you are either in covenant service to God as you look at world or in covenant service to some other Lord. Thus Frame in "God in our Studies" in *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. pp.81-84 is able to say that the way the Lord has structured knowledge so that you can only understand God's truth if you know yourself, and your world, as well as the Biblical text. The three perspectives 'co-inhere'. You can't really know what a Biblical text means unless you also know how it is to affect the world and you. In short, if I don't know how to *use* a text, I don't know it's meaning--so the difference between 'meaning' and 'application' is meaningless.

Many evangelicals, especially in the Reformed camps are afraid of subjectivism and of being 'man-centered'. They want to simply "expound what the divine Biblical text says, without regard to 'felt needs' or human concerns." But that is impossible. The minute the doctrinalist starts reading a text, he is doing so with particular questions on his heart--the last Presbytery debate he was at, the last books he read, a particular cultural problem--and thus the reader finds in the Scripture the answers to the questions on his heart. If the Bible is covenantal revelation--if, in fact, if all knowledge is covenantal--done in moral commitment to some 'lord' so that no such thing as neutral, value-free 'fact'--then application to felt needs is *happening* in every interpretation and preaching. So you better do it consciously, to the people in front of you, or you will only be pleasing your self or even solving your own problems in the pulpit, and starving everyone else.

2. A Pietist tends to look at every text as it relates to people psychologically and devotionally. . The text is applied to answer the questions: how does this help us relate to the Lord? How does it help our prayer life. How does it show us how to live in the world? How does this help the non-believer find Christ? How does this help me handle my personal problems? The pietist is the best of the three at looking for ways to preach a text evangelistically and bring it to bear on the individual's heart and conscience in order to get a 'decision'. Also, the pietist is constantly aware of how Christians are lose their internal spiritual grip on the doctrine of free justification and may be 'returning to the bondage' (Gal.5:1) to false savior-gods (Gal.4:8).

3. A Cultural-transformationist tends to look at the text as it relates to corporate and cultural issues, such as social justice and economic fairness and Christian community building. The 'Great Reversal' of the cross means that the gospel proclaims a complete reversal of the values of the world--power, recognition, status, wealth. For example, the gospel is especially welcomed by the poor and for the poor (Luke 4:18- *He has anointed me...to preach the gospel to the poor.*" Cf. also Luke 7:22.) Preaching the gospel and healing people's bodies are closely associated (Luke 9:6). Jesus points to the coming kingdom of God that will renew all of creation. The gospel creates a people with a whole alternate way of being human. Racial and class superiority, accrual of money and power at the expense of others, yearning for popularity and recognition--all these things are marks of living in the world, and are the opposite of the mindset of the kingdom (Luke 6:20-26). The cultural-transformationist looks at all things with this perspective.

B. Mini-examples

Matthew 8:1-4 (Luke 5:12-14; Mark 1:40-44) This is the story of the healing of the leper which comes at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the synoptic gospels.

- The doctrinalist reads the passage and sees it teaching us about Jesus and the ceremonial law. Jesus both breaks the law (by touching the leper and then by not going himself to become ritually clean) and yet honors it (by telling the man to go to the priest.) Jesus is the fulfillment of the ceremonial law. In him we are 'cleansed' and justified. Now that he has come the OT ceremonial law does not bind us.
- The pietist, however will notice the love of Jesus in touching the leper. Jesus is the caring one who does not simply heal the body but wants to heal emotionally, to touch a man who has not experienced human contact. Also, Jesus exemplifies the tension in our lives in the world. We are not to withdraw from the world to avoid pollution--we much reach out and be engaged with the world. Yet, we must not let them be agents for our pollution--we must be agents for their cleansing. A hard task!
- Meanwhile, the culturalist focuses on the fact that the leprosy was a social status, not just a disease. Lepers were marginalized economically, politically, and socially. Jesus is incorporating a marginalized person back into the community. That is why he tells him to go to a priest and prove his cleansing.

Genesis 18:16-33. This is the account of Abraham praying for Sodom and Lot's family.

- The doctrinalist points out that Abraham is looking for a new kind of righteousness. It was clear that the sin of the few could transfer and bring the many into condemnation. (This is why whole families were destroyed for the sin of one or two members.) But Abraham is asking: could it not work the other way? Would it be possible that the righteousness of the few could be transferred to the many for acquittal? God's answer is positive! So Abraham points us toward our acquittal in Christ, when his righteousness covers us despite our sin and leads to our pardon.
- The pietist notices, however, Abraham's prayer. The prayer of Abraham is bold yet humble, specific, passionate, persistent. Here we have a wonderful model for our prayer lives. We should follow it.
- The culturalist, however, sees that Abraham is not simply praying for Lot's family but here is praying that God have mercy on a very wicked, pagan city. He is praying that God would spare Sodom itself! So here we have a model for believers seeking God for the peace of even unbelieving cities.

Which of these is 'right'? a) In the specific text, the author usually has one or two of these basic perspectives in view. So the preacher who tries to be true to the text does not usually need to 'get them all in.' b) But across the face of the whole Bible it seems clear that all three are 'right'. They are all in the Bible.

Most importantly, we need to use all three perspectives when thinking about any particular passage. Why? We all have our prejudices and will tend to 'screen out' our less favorite one(s) and often 'read in' our favorite one(s) even when they are not truly in the text. Reformed people are especially sensitive to 'therapeutic' and 'liberationist' ideologies and so they tend to screen out the legitimate corresponding Biblical themes. But we in the Reformed camp have our own imbalance. We still love the logical beauty of the Reformed 'system'--which in its traditional form almost surely owes something to the rationalistic age in which it developed. So we tend to be 'doctrinalists' only. Since by temperament we all have our 'bent', we should force ourselves to look at a text through all three application 'perspectives'. When we do so, we will often see many rich possible uses of a text that otherwise we would miss.

C. The Three Perspectives and the question of 'What is the Gospel?'

1. The controversy and the dangers. There is a rather significant and growing controversy going on about 'what is the gospel?' in evangelical circles today. Many people are saying that the traditional evangelical gospel is too 'individualistic' because it left out the 'kingdom of God'. More and more are saying, "the gospel is the good news of the reign of God, not the good news that you can have personal forgiveness and peace with God." (Much of this sort of language is inspired by the writings of Leslie Newbigin, N.T.Wright, and the 'Gospel and Our Culture Network'.)

This kind of talk is both helpful and misleading.

- It is quite true that traditional evangelicalism has been individualistic, largely because of a lack of orientation to the Redemptive-Historical perspective. It is quite true that 'the kingdom' is essential to the gospel. For example, the very concept of *simul justus et peccator*--simultaneously legally 'just' and yet actually 'sinful', the very heart of Luther's gospel--is based on the 'already but not yet' of the kingdom of God. Justification by faith is possible because of the presence now of the future verdict upon God's people on judgment day. When we are 'born again', we are born *into the kingdom* (John 3:1ff). So if you leave the kingdom of God out of the gospel preaching, you are being misleading.
- However, it may also be quite misleading for a preacher to simply say, "the good news is that the reign of God is here!" That can become a new moralism (a socially activist moralism) that tells people "God's program of creation renewal is going on, and you can join it." But how does a person join it? By just 'getting with the program' in some general way? By getting baptized and beginning to live according to kingdom values? This may end up being a new kind of self-effort. I doubt that preaching simply "the good news is the reign of God" is going to lead people to respond, "My chains fell off; my heart was free. I rose, went forth, and followed thee." Cultural-transformationalist 'overkill' could get us into the same stew the mainline churches are in. They have a wonderful social vision but they don't have churches full of deeply joyful, transformed and converted individuals who can work toward it. If we too much think of the corporate manifestations of sin (materialism, racism, militarism) individuals do not get convicted of personal sin and then transformed by a discovery of grace. Instead they tend to get angry at the people in the wrong political party.
- Nevertheless, if over-individualistic Reformed evangelicals don't preach and apply the gospel also in its 'culturalist' perspective, we will not be effective in a pluralistic, post-modern world. Our deeds of love and service, our concern for the poor--are important ways the gospel is embodied in us and will be perceived clearly by others.

2. Three Perspectives on the Gospel. I think it is important to see that the gospel itself (just like the Tri-une God) should be understood through three perspectives as well. Each perspective is true in that it eventually comprises the whole, but each approach begins with a particular 'door' or aspect. We spoke about this earlier in the course. This is a good place for a recapitulation.

The 'normative' aspect I'll call "the **gospel of Christ**" - stresses objective, historic work of Christ that Jesus really came in time-space and history to accomplish all for us. It will talk much more about the real, historicity of Jesus life, death and resurrection. John Stott. This view thinks that the problem addressed by Paul in Galatians was a doctrinal heresy.

The 'existential' aspect I'll call "the **gospel of sonship**"- stresses our new identity in Christ as adopted children, liberated from the law. It will talk much of the power of the spirit to renew broken hearts and psyches. Jack Miller. This view thinks that the problem addressed by Paul in Galatians was a pastoral one of Christians falling back into legalism.

The 'situational' aspect I'll call "the **gospel of the kingdom**" - stresses the reversal of values in the new creation. It will talk about healed community, cultural transformation, ministry of deed and justice. Harvie Conn. This view thinks that the problem addressed by Paul in Galatians was the lack of 'table fellowship' between Jew and Gentile.

We need all three perspectives, though each perspective is not simply a 'part' of the gospel. For example, the 'kingdom' perspective contains the other two. If God is king, then salvation *must* be by grace, for if we are saved by works, something else will be our Lord and Savior. Or, if we have a new identity in Christ by sheer grace, then we must not look down at anyone else, and self-justification is the basis of racism and injustice. If you go deep enough into any one perspective, you will find the other two.

3. What is 'the Problem'? There is a great danger of getting locked into only one perspective because we get obsessed with some too-sweeping analysis of what *the* main problem "in our world today". (1) If you think that subjectivism in society is the problem you will do the gospel of X and fear that sonship-gospel and the kingdom-gospel sound too much like the 'liberal' ideas. (2) If you think that Pharisaical objectivism is the problem, you will do the sonship-gospel with more emphasis on personal individual emotional freedom. (3) If you think the main problem we face is old Enlightenment individualism, you will do the gospel of the kingdom with more emphasis on working together sacrificially to transform power of the gospel. But aren't we facing all these problems?

Remember also that different groups and classes of people are in different conditions. With traditional cultures, the traditional evangelical gospel good, as it builds on a desire for historical evidence and a sense of 'truth'. Traditional cultures (with their share of 'failed Pharisees) often respond well to the sonship-gospel, as may 'post-modern' people who have a desire for freedom. Many groups with a high 'people-consciousness' such as minorities will respond better to the kingdom-gospel, as will many post-modern people who think more so in terms of 'sociology' than psychology (identity politics).

So we should be careful. Most of us are 'in reaction' to some approach to the gospel we think unbalanced. We must not over-react by getting 'stuck' in one perspective.

4. Major example: Application for the Story of Esther

"WHAT YOU MUST DO"

a. God calls us to serve him in intensely secular settings. (Cultural Transformationist)

This message is similar (but stronger!) as that of the accounts of Joseph and Daniel. We learn here how a believer can be effectively used by God in the heart of secular and pluralistic culture, even in the centers of its power. In all three accounts, we learn of Jewish figures who rise to power in an unbelieving society through their skills and talents--and then use their places to save their people.

This is a threatening message to many Christians today. There has always been a strong tendency among orthodox believers toward separation from the polluted, unclean, and morally/spiritually 'messy' arenas of politics, business, government, and so on. But Esther is a concubine, a member of a harem!

"Let Esther's harem represent every unclean political or commercial institution or structure where evil reigns and must be confronted. Believers are needed there....Our cities are full of dens of iniquity. Our culture is described as essentially post-Christian, secular, and often antithetical to biblical values and hostile to biblical virtues....[But] Esther gives us permission to reflect on our call to serve God within the matrix of a modern secular...system....How could God call Esther to be the interracial replacement spouse of a polygamous, pagan Persian king?....This book is off the screen for many evangelicals....We urban people need Esther now more than ever. Never allow it to be trivialized or spiritualized away, as it has been so often...." (Ray Bakke, *A Theology as Big and the City* (IVP, 1997).

b. God calls us not only to change individuals, but change society and culture.

(Cultural Transformationist) In each case we've looked at in this course--Joseph, Daniel, and Esther--God called someone to work for just laws and policies in a secular society. It is common for modern Christians to insist that the only way to change society is to convert and disciple individuals. If that is all there is to be done, then the 'higher' calling would be to go into Christian ministry. But the Bible shows us people who God also calls to work for social and "systemic" justice and peace in society. Esther used her position to have an unjust law repealed.

Ray Bakke (*A Theology as Big as the City*, p.106) reminds us that we must read Esther 'synoptically' with Ezra and Nehemiah. These three Jewish 'heroes' had three very different callings. Ezra was a clergyman, who taught the Bible to the restored community in Jerusalem. Nehemiah was a lay person who used his skills to literally rebuild the wall and infra-structure of Jerusalem to insure safe streets and a decent economy. Esther, meanwhile, used her position to work for just laws in the secular realm. Only all three people, working together, were able to rebuild Jerusalem into a viable city. One did evangelism/discipleship (working on the spiritual welfare), one did community development (working on the social and economic welfare), and one did social justice (creating laws that were just and allowed the community to grow). This was not only a lay-clergy leadership team, but a male-female leadership team.

This means that we will never see God's kingdom move forward with only evangelism and discipleship. We must also do 'wholistic' ministry that works on behalf of the poor and at-risk neighborhoods, and we must also have Christians in 'secular' jobs working with excellence, integrity, and distinctiveness. We need Ezra ministry, Nehemiah ministry, and Esther ministry--all together--if we are going to 'win' our society for Christ.

c. God is the only real King. (Doctrinalist)

We have noted that God's name is never directly mentioned why? The teaching is: God is sovereignly in control, even when he appears to be completely absent. The dramatic tension in the book revolves around a threat to the very existence of the Jews. If we put the book in its total Biblical context, we know that this is really a threat to the whole plan of God to redeem the world by grace. Genesis 12:1-3 tells us that God planned to bring salvation into the world through a family and a people, descended from Abraham. Abraham's people were to be guardians of both the true faith and the "Messianic seed" which would one day produce a savior who would redeem the world. A threat to the Jewish nation was, therefore, an attack by the world on God's redemptive plan. However, largely through a set of "coincidences", the Jews are saved. God's plan to save the world through grace is intact.

"What the writer of Esther has done is to give us a story in which the main actor is not so much as mentioned--the presence of God is implied and understood throughout the story, so that these mounting coincidences are but the by-product of his rule over history and his providential care for his people. It is an extraordinary piece of literary genius that this author wrote a book that is about the actions and rule of God from beginning to end, and yet that God is not named on a single page of the story." (Dillard, p.196).

What a vivid way to teach us that God is always present, even when he seems most absent and his purposes most 'opaque'! The message of the book is that God's plan of grace/salvation cannot fail, and though he may appear to be completely absent, he is really behind everything, working out his plan.

Because of this theme, the writer contrasts two conflicting world-views--that of Haman and that of Mordecai. Haman believes in chance-fate. He casts lots to determine the best time to annihilate the Jews (3:7-11). He thinks he can control history by the exercise of his power. The other world-view is that of Mordecai. He believes that there is a divine presence overruling history (4:14) who can use us if we make ourselves available to him, but whose plan is not dependent on nor thwarted by human power. "The book sets the two world-views in contrast and shows by the outcome which is to be preferred." (Baldwin, p.38)

Nevertheless, we are taught that God's sovereignty is not determinism. When the story is over, it will be possible to look back and see that so much of what happened was due to a divine power behind even the most mundane 'accidents'. Yet the narrator does not depict a kind of fatalistic determinism. Our choices are not determined apart from the responsible exercise of our will. Esther will have to risk her life and act courageously if the salvation of her people will be realized. We are not just passive pawns in God's plan.

d. Human strength is weakness and weakness can be strength. (Pietist)

Recent commentators have noticed the weakness of men and the power of women in the book. In contrast to the huge show of power in his great feast, the drunken Xerxes tries to humiliate his wife who in turn humiliates him. In response, he decrees that all men should control their wives when he can't control his own. The decree, evidently made when he was still drunk, only makes him look foolish. Later he appears to regret it on several fronts.

Not only is he 'bested' by his first queen, the rest of the book shows him being 'bested' by his next queen. While the king is revealed to be ill-informed, forgetful, impulsive, unjust, and unwise, his queen Esther is seen to be brave, take-charge, focused, wise, and just. Not only Vashti and Esther, but Haman's wife Zareh appear as 'strong and shrewd' while all the men (except Mordecai) appear vain and foolish.

Esther, of course, is the person who most of all stands the world's expectations on their head. First, she was an orphan, without father or mother (2:7). Orphans are one of the oppressed, powerless groups (cf. James 1:27). Second, she was a woman, and not a powerful or wealthy woman, but a concubine, the member of a harem. In the process of the narrative, however, she ascends from being an orphan and Mordecai's protegee to being a queen of great power, who makes plans and takes decisive leadership and who in the end is her uncle's guardian. Originally, her physical beauty won the king's heart, but 2:15 indicates that her character and behavior had won the attraction of the rest of the court as well. Esther comes from the outside margins of society and is used by God to do redemption. So again we see a very prominent

theme in the Bible. God does not work through the channels that the world considers strong and powerful. Instead, he works through groups (women, racial minorities) who seem powerless. The first shall be last and the last shall be first.

In a related theme, we learn that 'the one who would lose himself will find himself'. We learn that evil sets up strains in the fabric of life and backfires on the perpetrator, while faithfulness to God is also wise. Haman, who intends to destroy Mordecai and his kin, ultimately destroys only himself and his kin. This theme is especially achieved through the literary device of irony. The gallows that Haman builds for Mordecai becomes his own place of execution. Haman seeks to plunder the wealth of the Jews, but it is his wealth that fall into their hands. The reversal of role and of fortune that occurs so often in the Bible eventually finds its fullest expression in Jesus, who was exalted because he stooped so low. At the same time Satan is brought low because he sought exaltation. **Sum--**Do what you can to penetrate the culture. Don't live in a ghetto!--and when there, sever the Lord. Serve your people. Serve the interest of justice! Don't be afraid to lose your power, even your life, for God is the real king! Don't be seduced by human power, beauty, and acclaim!

"WHY YOU CAN'T DO IT"

Now how can you do all? You can't! If we end the sermon right here, we'll all be in despair. You don't have the courage to do this. You may get excited today about doing this, but your courage will evaporate quickly. And you may decide you are going to make all the risks that Esther made, but when it comes down to it, you aren't going to risk your influence and money and status to help people in needs. You just won't have the ability to do so.

"BUT THERE IS ONE WHO DID DO THIS"

You have to often go into the palace--but not be tempted by the palace! You've got to be willing to leave the palace in order to serve your Lord! (Ah, but why can't we? We are enthralled to acclaim and glory of the palace! How free ourselves? Esther's great temptation, once she comes into a place of luxury, comfort, and privilege, is to hold on to that position to the detriment of her people. When by God's grace we come into such a standing, we may be seduced by it. Mordecai had to challenge Esther and force her to see her choices. Salvation comes through Esther only when she is willing to give up her place in the palace and take her life into her own hands and risk it all in order to intercede before the throne of power. Again we see that redemption comes not by gaining but by losing, not by filling oneself, but by emptying oneself.

We also see, over and over, that we need a deliverer who identifies with us and that stands as our representative--as in the career of Joseph in Egypt, David before Goliath. So in this story we are led to see Jesus, who did not need a challenge to leave his place of power, who saved us not at the risk of his glory but at the cost of his glory, who did not say, "if I perish, I perish" but "when I perish, I perish", who had to die in order to stand before the throne as our intercessor (Heb.7:24-25). But the "rest" that Jesus brings is not one that gives us rest from enemies by killing them, but by winning them. After the cross, we pray for our enemies. Jesus has brought the barrier down between Jew and Gentile, Saul and Amalek. *We learn-- Salvation "rest" comes by the sacrifice and intercession of another.* We have one who was in the greatest palace of all, but who did not just serve his God as the risk of losing the palace, but at the cost