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Connections

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Expository Preaching: A Pastor's Perspective



- Pr. Tan Kay Hoe

In your recent chapel message, you talked a lot about expository preaching. What is expository preaching about?

Expository preaching is a basic commitment to preach the meaning of the biblical text. It involves identifying a portion of scripture (i.e. a preaching unit) and explaining what it means; doing so in the light of its context and how it bears witness to Christ Jesus; demonstrating it, and then applying it to the hearts and lives of the people we are speaking to.¹

In our multimedia age, some have suggested that not only expository preaching, but the whole discipline of preaching is no longer an effective means of communicating God's truth. What do you think?

I don't think I can provide a simple answer to this, because I believe this is a fundamental question that warrants thorough treatment. If I may just mention three things quickly:

- Unless we are convinced of the validity and necessity of preaching, we probably shouldn't be preaching.
- I'm not convinced that "visual learner" and "limited attention span" are issues that are faced only by our current generation of preachers.
- At the end of the day, the issue is a theological one. 'God's Word has always been His chosen instrument to create, convict, convert, and conform His people' (cf. Gen 3:15; 12:1-3; Ex 20; 2 Kg 22-23; Ne 8-9; Ez 37:1-14; Is 55:10-11; Jn 1:1-4; Ac 19:20; 20:32; Ro 1:16; 10:17; Heb 4:12; 1 Pe 1:23, 25).² That's why we keep on preaching the Word.

For a more adequate response, I'd like to refer readers to an excellent essay by J. I. Packer on "Why Preach?" in *The Preacher and Preaching*.³

Isn't expository preaching too "academic" and "dry" for our local church settings?

Expository preaching is sometimes equated with verse-by-verse commentary on the text (grammar, structure, background, etc.) and if that is all there is to it, it can be academic and dry.

Thankfully, that is not the case!

Expository preaching is not about downloading information from text to hearers, but "exposing" hearers to the burden of the text, to help them interact and respond to what God is saying in his Word.

Of course not all expositors do this as well as others! But when you sit under the ministry of faithful expositors like John Stott, Bryan Chapell, David Cook, and others, you certainly won't go away feeling that there's anything inherently "dry" about expository preaching!

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What do you have to be angry about?

"I Knew This Was Going to Happen!"

1-2 Jonah was furious. He lost his temper. He yelled at God, "God! I knew it—when I was back home, I knew this was going to happen!"

God said, "What do you have to be angry about?" (Jonah 4)



- Rev. Dr. Tony Lim
Dean, English Department

Jonah is an angry prophet. We can feel his anger burning through the four chapters of his prophecy. What is he so angry about? And "does he do well to be angry?"

Jonah 1: "Jonah got up and went in the other direction to Tarshish, running away from God."

Jonah's prophecy begins with the command of God to him:

1-2 One day long ago, God's Word came to Jonah, Amittai's son: "Up on your feet and on your way to the big city of Nineveh! Preach to them. They're in a bad way and I can't ignore it any longer."

Instead of obeying, he ran away as far and as fast as he could. It did not matter where; it could have been anywhere and anyplace as long as he did not have to *preach* to the Ninevites.

The call to preach to the Ninevites is a call to talk about a good, righteous and merciful God. It is to preach without fear or favour. This means the Ninevites have to be rebuked about their sin and rebellion against God. Ultimately Jonah will have to preach to the Ninevites about their need to repent, to put away their wickedness and to return to God. Preaching always brings the possibility that those who listen may actually repent! This is the last thing that Jonah wanted the Ninevites to do.

Jonah would rather that God said to him, "go and proclaim the judgement of God against Nineveh – in three days time, fire and brimstone will rain on you and you will be destroyed." Above all, Jonah did not want God to show compassion to the Ninevites.

God's compassion is the primary theme in Jonah. God wanted to show Jonah and Israel that God's

compassion is boundless, not limited just to "us" Jews, the people of God, but also available for "them", the Gentiles and the enemies of Israel.

Fearing that God would show compassion to the Ninevites if he were to preach to them, Jonah:

"got up and went in the other direction to Tarshish, running away from God. He went down to the port of Joppa and found a ship headed for Tarshish. He paid the fare and went on board, joining those going to Tarshish—as far away from God as he could get."

But God would not let Jonah go that easily. God's desire to show compassion to the Ninevites is not so easily thwarted. God pursued Jonah at sea:

"But God sent a huge storm at sea, the waves towering." (Jonah 1.4-6)

Jonah got the sailors into trouble. Jonah revealed that God sent the life-threatening storm they were experiencing because he ran away from Him. The only way out, Jonah told the sailors, was to throw him overboard into the raging sea! Nevertheless the pagan sailors were concerned for Jonah and did everything they could not to throw him overboard as he suggested. We see that even pagan men had compassion and valued human lives! How much more God! In the end they had to throw Jonah overboard to save their own lives.

14 Then they prayed to God, "O God! Don't let us drown because of this man's life, and don't blame us for his death. You are God. Do what you think is best." 15 They took Jonah and threw him overboard. Immediately the sea was quieted down. 16 The sailors

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An Interview with Pr. Bernard Teh, Senior Pastor of FGA, Taiping, MBS alumnus, 1981



1. What years were you in MBS?

I studied for my Diploma in Theology at MBS from 1980 to 1981.

2. Tell us about your MBS experience.

MBS trained and grounded me in the Word of God. I learned to interpret the Bible, teach it accurately and preach it faithfully. In terms of practical and daily living, it was at MBS that I learned to trust God for all my needs. Unlike Bible students nowadays who seem to be better supported, in our day, most of us had little or no money! The good thing about being poor was that we were 'forced' to live by faith. We soon discovered that our God is a faithful God! Indeed, learning to walk and live by faith have always been the hallmark of every MBS student.

The other important lesson MBS taught me was how to live in community with Christians from different denominations. This is the strength of MBS as a non-denominational Bible Seminary. As the student president, I faced the additional pressure of helping my fellow students build relationships with each other and to sort out the inevitable conflicts arising out of full time residential living at close quarters. I also had to act as an intermediary between lecturers and the students.

The process of 'iron sharpening iron' took place not only at MBS but also in the churches where each of us had our practical ministry during the weekends. Personally, the emphasis on practical ministries in churches stretched and challenged me to serve God more effectively and humbly.

3. Tell us a little about yourself - your family and ministry since your MBS days.

I graduated from Singapore Bible College with a Bachelor of Theology after studying for two more years from 1983 to 1984. Upon completion, I returned to Taiping and in 1984 pioneered the Full Gospel Assembly (FGA) Taiping. I started with twenty members. Currently, FGA Taiping has four congregations, English, Bahasa, Tamil and Chinese, with a total congregation of 800 members. By God's grace we were able to purchase a four storey building in the heart of Taiping town for our church services. We were also able to purchase additional buildings for our work with orphans, the poor and our drug rehabilitation work. All these were purchased and fully paid for without the need to take out any loans!

The Dean, Tony Lim invited me to co-teach a course on Evangelism, Mentoring and Discipleship during the first semester of 2011. The Dean says that he will be looking forward to co-teaching with senior pastors like myself in the years to come. (Note from the Dean: the students rated Pr. Bernard's teaching on Evangelism as highly anointed and a life transforming experience!)

Family wise, I am married to Dorothy Wee and a father to two boys, Earnest (22) and Stephenas (19), and a girl, Sophia (20).

4. How did your MBS training help you in your ministry?

MBS helped me to pioneer, pastor and build up FGA Taiping. The key lessons that I took away from MBS were not so much in techniques and programmes. Instead MBS taught me the importance of knowing God intimately. My experience of God providing for all my needs caused me to love God passionately. This in turn created a deep desire to let God be known powerfully through Evangelism, Mission and Church Planting. MBS' non-denominational and conciliatory stance has also

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Reformed Theologian Turned Malaysian Church Historian!

When I was invited by MBS to lecture part time on Malaysian Church History, I was very apprehensive because I had not done anything in this area. I would have been more comfortable if the subject had been the Scottish Reformation, or Zwingli and the Swiss Reformation, or even the History of Reformed Theology. Didn't they know what I majored in for my MTh? I guess they thought that because I did something historical, it would cover every period in every place.

Since I did promise to help MBS when they appealed to the Presbyterian Church for more support many years ago, I wanted to fulfill a promise made and I said 'yes' after a few days of thinking it over.

But there was a big problem, I had just four months to write my lecture notes on Malaysian Church History starting from scratch, in the midst of my pastoral duties; and we had just planted a new church. There was much reading and research to be done and the timing was so tight. Anyway, by the first class, I had the notes ready to present.

It was quite an experience switching from preaching to lecturing for you have to write down on the board the right spelling of the names of all the people you mention and the correct dates. This I learned from my lecturer Mr Nick Needham of HTC who is very particular

over names and dates. He is the best Church History lecturer I have ever known.

I must say I enjoyed it from the very first lecture and it was getting more interesting as Malaysian Church History unfolded during the lectures. I never knew that Malaysian History and Malaysian Church History could be so interesting and I am glad I did it, for now it has become part of me and I did it all on my iPad. If you ask me, how were my lectures? I would not know, I think you will have to ask the students. But I would like to thank my students for their encouragement, and for listening to a rookie.

Would I do it again? Why not? If I am invited and with permission from my church of course. I would like to thank my Deacon Court for giving me space and time to prepare for the lectures.

Most of all, I would like to thank Dr. Tony, the Dean for his invitation to teach at MBS.

May God continue to shower His grace upon the Malaysian Church. ☩



- Rev. Low Teck Wah
DOULOS
Presbyterian Church

Ephesians



Group photo with students

taught me the importance of unity and the need to work with other pastors and churches besides my own. As a result, in Taiping I worked very hard to ensure that all the churches do not have any difficulty in working together.

5. You are a busy pastor. You are presently sitting on the boards of many para-church organizations. With all these demands on your time, tell us why you agreed to be involved in our MBS Alumni Association.

My service in the MBS alumni is one concrete way that I can

express my gratitude to God for sending me to MBS. Secondly, it is a debt of thanksgiving that I owe to MBS for equipping and empowering me to be a faithful pastor for the past 27 years. Great has been His faithfulness.

6. Share with us some of the things you hope to see in MBS in the years ahead.

I hope to see MBS continue scripturally, prayerfully, sacrificially and steadfastly training future leaders, pastors and evangelists for the harvest field. I desire to

see MBS working with leaders of churches of all denominations as well as CEO's in the marketplace for the extension of God's kingdom. Last but not least, I would like to see MBS working with our younger generation to help them to be effectively moulded and powerfully equipped to know the Word of God and to do the Will of the Lord.

ALL Glory belongs to God. Great things He has done and greater things He will do in the future through MBS! ☩

**Expository Preaching:
A Pastor's Perspective. FROM PAGE 01**

Is expository preaching the only "right" kind of preaching for the church?

If by "expository preaching" one means preaching only the Word of God, then "yes!" Because unless a preacher is preaching God's Word, we cannot claim to speak with any authority. But if one means doing expository preaching by systematically preaching through Scripture week by week, working through a book or a biblical genre one at a time, my response would be, "most of the time". In saying this,

I am merely passing on the advice given to me by seasoned ministers of the Word, that this is a good way to ensure that God's Word shapes the agenda of my preaching (and the church), not mine!

However, I also believe that we need to preach through key biblical themes and doctrines from the pulpit, as well as key concerns and issues in our society today. I think these sermons ought to be preached occasionally and intentionally, with systematic biblical exposition as the main component of our preaching program.

There are many gifted preachers who are not expositors and yet whose ministries are wonderfully blessed by God; to name but an obvious one, Charles Spurgeon, "the prince of preachers". Why the need to emphasise expository preaching?

No one who reads their Bible will be able to deny that God can and does use all kinds of means to accomplish his purposes. Robert Amess, Chairman of Spurgeon's College, is fond of saying that God can use good and poor preachers; the only possible exception is "boring" preachers!

Yet all who read their Bible will also understand that just because God chooses to work through some means, it doesn't necessarily follow that it is approved

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Lectures on Ephesians by Dr. O'Brien

Happenings Around And About MBS

MBS 33rd Anniversary Thanksgiving cum Campus Dedication Service
10 July 2011



Unveiling of plaque by MBS founding Principal Rev. Dr. Lukas Tjandra & Prof. Dr. Tan Chong Tin



Opening speech from Rev. Dr. Lukas Tjandra interpreted by Dr. Tan Kim Sai



"30 Years Service Award" presented to Dr. Tan Kim Sai



"30 Years Service Award" presented to brother Henry Teh



Group photo of Council & Faculty of MBS



Get-together buffet dinner

were impressed, no longer terrified by the sea, but in awe of God. They worshiped God, offered a sacrifice, and made vows.

¹⁷ Then God assigned a huge fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the fish's belly three days and nights.

Jonah 2: Three days and three nights

Jonah 2 ¹⁷ Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

¹ [a] from inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. ² He said:

"In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me.

Jonah 3: God is the God of the second chance

¹⁻² Next, God spoke to Jonah a second time: "Up on your feet and on your way to the big city of Nineveh! Preach to them. They're in a bad way and I can't ignore it any longer." ³ This time Jonah started off straight for Nineveh, obeying God's orders to the letter.

God showed his mercy and compassion to Jonah and re-commissioned him. God is the God of the second chance. In the New Testament, Peter was given a second chance and commissioned as an apostle even after denying Jesus three times. The apostle Paul too was re-commissioned as the apostle to Gentiles despite the fact that he had once persecuted Christians to death.

⁴ Jonah entered the city, went one day's walk and preached, "In forty days Nineveh will be smashed."

⁵ The people of Nineveh listened, and trusted God. They proclaimed a citywide fast and dressed in burlap to show their repentance. Everyone did it—rich and poor, famous and obscure, leaders and followers.

⁶⁻⁹ When the message reached the king of Nineveh, he got up off his throne, threw down his royal robes, dressed in burlap, and sat down in the dirt. Then he issued a public proclamation throughout Nineveh, authorized by him and his leaders: "Not one drop of water, not one bite of food for man, woman, or animal,

including your herds and flocks! Dress them all, both people and animals, in burlap, and send up a cry for help to God. Everyone must turn around, turn back from an evil life and the violent ways that stain their hands. Who knows? Maybe God will turn around and change his mind about us, quit being angry with us and let us live!"

Jonah 4: "I Knew This Was Going to Happen!"

¹⁻² Jonah was furious. He lost his temper. He yelled at God, "God! I knew it—when I was back home, I knew this was going to happen! That's why I ran off to Tarshish! I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready at the drop of a hat to turn your plans of punishment into a program of forgiveness!"

⁴ God said, "What do you have to be angry about?"

Closing Challenge

MBS aims to train leaders for the church in Malaysia and in Asia. Malaysia is a wonderful place for such training to take place as we are a multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-religious country. There should be no place for parochial sentiments and unbiblical ethnic arrogance among our faculty and students. But like Jonah we can still delude ourselves that God's compassion should only be shown to "us". The 'us' being interpreted as people like ourselves, good evangelical born again Christians as opposed to 'them', people who are not like us.

May we continue to know and experience God's amazing grace and compassion. And may we share, preach, and proclaim God's grace and compassion to all regardless of race, gender, and social status.

We will give God the final say:

¹⁰⁻¹¹ God said, "What's this? How is it that you can change your feelings from pleasure to anger overnight about a mere shade tree that you did nothing to get? You neither planted nor watered it. It grew up one night and died the next night. So, why can't I likewise change what I feel about Nineveh from anger to pleasure, this big city of more than 120,000 childlike people who don't yet know right from wrong, to say nothing of all the innocent animals?" ☩

by God (e.g. think about those who crucified the Lord!). The ends does not justify the means!

For me, the issue is not what God can use but what we are charged to do: *not* to preach what *works*, but to preach *the Word*! I believe this generally translates to expounding the Word systematically.

Does commitment to expository preaching mean having to forgo church growth?

In my chapel message, I shared from the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-20) that we are to expect one word, many responses. We tend to equate success with immediate numerical rewards, but the parable teaches us that the coming kingdom implies redemption *and* judgment. Not all forms of "growth" are worth celebrating.

The commitment to expository preaching is a commitment to preach the word, and submit to God's sovereign purposes on when and how it grows. Personally, it means being prepared to be patient, to dig deeper, and never be satisfied with growth without depth.

Having said that, I fail to understand why anyone would seriously think that a church can't grow through faithful expository preaching. Think of John Stott (All Souls, London), Dick Lucas (St Helen's, London), Philip Jensen (St Matthias & St Andrew's, Sydney), Tim Keller (Redeemer, NY), Mark Dever (IXMarks) – these are but a few of many growing churches that are committed to expository preaching.

What do you think is the main objection to expository preaching?

John Stott singles out one basic hindrance to preaching: "*loss of confidence in the gospel*".⁴ I think he's absolutely spot-on!

What resources have you found helpful on your ongoing development as an expositor of the Word?

My training at SMBC (Sydney Missionary and Bible College) has been formative.

Since then, regularly feeding on good expository preaching has been very helpful. We have access to so many sermon resources these days. The ones I regularly listen to include SMBC Principal's hour, Living Christ Today, Redeemer New York, and Phillip Jensen.com.⁵

Finally, I find the discipline of preparing a kid's version of sermons I preach a very rewarding exercise. At our church, we have a kid's talk before the sermon every Sunday, where we distill the main message of the sermon into a 5-8 mins kids' talk with preschoolers and primary kids in view. Having to prepare a kids' talk always helps me in my sermon preparation. ☩

Pastor Kay Hoe pastors the Puchong Presbyterian Church and is a founding member and chairman of the Kuala Lumpur Christian Conference - an interdenominational organisation that seeks to promote expository preaching through Bible conferences, preaching seminars and camps.

¹ Adapted from a definition offered by Bryan Chapell in Michael Duduit, 'What is expository preaching? An interview with Bryan Chapell', <http://www.preaching.com/resource/articles/11565737>, cited on Aug 15, 2011.

² Mark Dever & Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2005; pp33-34.

³ James I. Packer, 'Why Preach?', in *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art*. Samuel T. Logan Jr. (ed). Phillipsburg: P&R, 1986.

⁴ John R.W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982; p.82.

⁵ SMBC Principal's Hour (<http://www.smbc.com.au/resource/phour/episodes.php>), Living Christ Today (<http://www.livingchristtoday.com/dailymessages/today>), Redeemer NY (<http://sermons2.redeemer.com/>), Phillip Jensen.com (<http://phillipjensen.com/>).