

SHARING LIFE AT FIRST ON JUNE 4, 2017 BY PASTOR BOB BENDER
“PROCLAMATION ELEVATION” FROM NEHEMIAH 8:1-12
LAUNCHING INTO LEADERSHIP NEHEMIAH LIFE MESSAGE SERIES

You are starting a new spiritual society. What is the first thing you do after your successful building program to insure a good launch? A pot luck supper? A congregational survey? A vision team meeting? How does Nehemiah, the leader, launch into this next significant chapter in his country's life? What should be this new society's foundation? Let's discover Nehemiah's approach as we read the first thing they did as a new community in Jerusalem with secured walls around it. Please stand for the reading of God's Word with a rationale as to why we do so in our text <read>. If last week's passage was the hardest to preach on in Nehemiah, then this week's is the easiest!

The first thing they did was to gather under the reading and preaching of the Word of God. Having built the city's walls, Nehemiah now focuses on building the congregation's wills. A new character is introduced to us, but not to the original readers, as Ezra the priest had been in Jerusalem for 13 years prior to Nehemiah's arrival. During these years, he had been praying for God to move among His people (Ezra 10). On this day, his prayers were answered mightily.

So, today I find myself preaching on preaching. I normally try to practice what I preach but today I get to preach what I practice! I speak to you on proclamation elevation with our big idea being: Proclamation elevation leads to personal transformation. When preaching is made a priority, life change occurs. Is there an area of your life that needs changing—your thoughts, attitude, relationships, desires, actions, even addictions? Then today is your day!

/THE PRIMACY OF PROCLAMATION ELEVATION FOR GOD'S PURPOSE

Preaching has always been God's primary means of evangelism, encouragement, and edification. God's purpose in preaching is not mere information, but transformation, as seen in the end of our story in Nehemiah 8. There is the life-changing power of the preaching of the Word of God. But what kind of preaching? This chart reflects the 7 levels of communication to give you some insight into how we do preaching around here (see below):

Level 1: Speaking—any public or private verbal communication.

Level 2: Preaching—God's truth communicated through man's personality (adapted from Phillips Brooks).

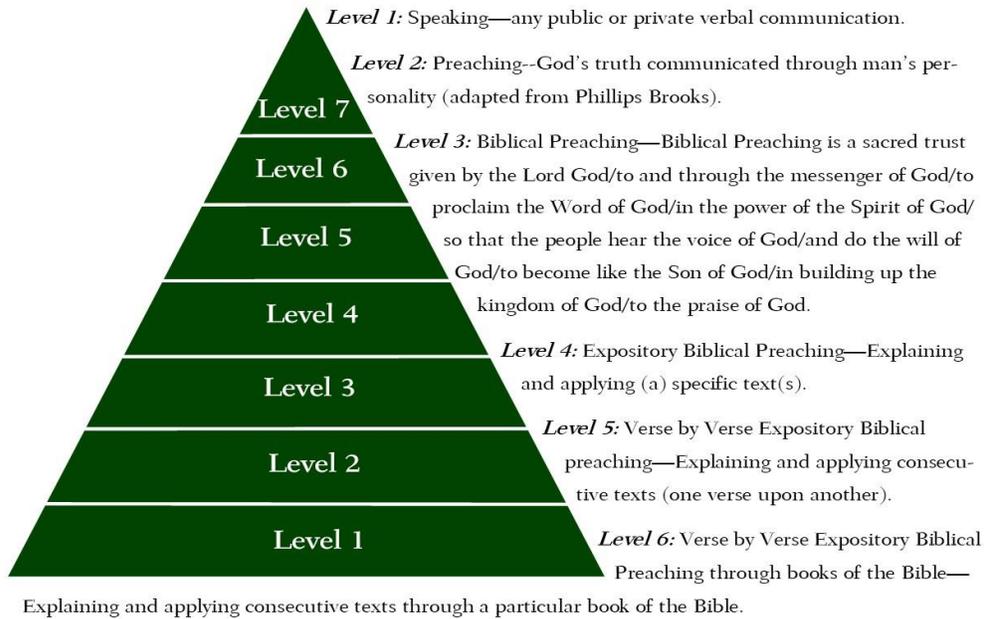
Level 3: Biblical Preaching—Biblical Preaching is a sacred trust given by the Lord God/to and through the messenger of God/to proclaim the Word of God/in the power of the Spirit of God/so that the people hear the voice of God/and do the will of God/to become like the Son of God/in building up the kingdom of God/to the praise of God.

Level 4: Expository Biblical Preaching—Explaining and applying (a) specific text(s).

Level 5: Verse by Verse Expository Biblical Preaching—Explaining and applying consecutive texts (one verse upon another).

Level 6: Verse by Verse Expository Biblical Preaching through books of the Bible—Explaining and applying consecutive texts through a particular book of the Bible.

Level 7: Incarnational Verse by Verse Expository Preaching through books of the Bible (Life Message). The word incarnational means “in the flesh,” or “fleshed out.” Here, the preacher internalizes God's message to himself first; then hopefully in his hearers' lives. The effective preacher has the Word of God in him (Jer. 15:16). A life message is a Biblical message shared through the preacher, not “beside him” (sermon). See Ezra 7:10 and Ezekiel 3:1-3.



Level 7: Incarnational verse by verse expository preaching through books of the Bible (Life Message). The word incarnational means “in the flesh” or “fleshed out.” Here the preacher internalizes God’s message to himself first; then hopefully in his hearers’ lives. A life message is a Biblical message shared through the preacher not “beside him” (sermon).

I have a calligraphy hanging in my office by Vance Havner: “God is on the lookout today for a man who will be quiet enough to get a message to him, brave enough to preach it, and honest enough to live it.” Anyone can cobble together a sermon using quotes, anecdotes, and cute outlines. Oswald J. Smith writes, “You can go to seminary and learn how to preach sermons but you will have to go to God to get messages.”¹ There is the grave danger of dabbling in unfelt truths. A message prepared on paper can only reach paper. A message prepared in the mind can only reach a mind. A message prepared in the heart can only reach a heart. But a message prepared in a life can change another person’s life.

It is here at the summit—level 7—rare air indeed where we camp. This is one way we fulfill Jesus’ command to “make disciples.” I am not casting aspersions on any other method; I am convinced, however, that this is the most effective one—expressing our church’s particular DNA.

But is it Biblical? The Bible says, “Jesus came preaching” (Mk. 1:14). Was He merely just a story teller as some conclude? Notice how He preaches in Luke 24:27, “Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets He **explained** (expounded—the verb form of exposition) to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.” Ezra, the father of expository preaching, set the pattern in verse 8 where he “translated to give the sense (of the passage at hand).” The word “translating” is a combination of two Hebrew phrases meaning “clearly explaining”—the phrase from which we get our word “exposition” (explaining).

There is no better time to re-engage the primacy of expository preaching than in 2017. Does anyone know the significance of this year in Christian history? 2017 is the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation under Martin Luther whose mantra was Sola Scriptura—Scripture Alone. When asked to recant his Biblical views, he said at the cost of his life; “I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus, I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one’s conscience is neither safe nor sound. Here I stand. God help me. Amen.” Luther’s high esteem for God’s Word explains why he preached systematically through the Scriptures. May his tribe increase today. As we embrace the primacy of proclamation elevation, we experience God’s purpose of transformation.

//THE PRACTICE OF PROCLAMATION ELEVATION FOR GOD'S PREACHERS

Notice the expository preaching principles found in Nehemiah 8 that apply to the preacher in the pulpit. Expository preaching is of great value to the preacher as he knows what he is going to preach on Monday morning. Preaching through books of the Bible also keeps him from slapping his people around. A preacher was asked what he was preaching on the next Sunday. He responded, "I don't know. It depends on what's happening in my church." Preaching ought to be practical, but nobody likes to be shot at by their preacher in a pillbox called the bully pulpit! Notice the additional principles to be practiced by the preacher in our text. Pray for me that I may meet these standards.

- **He is God's man—"Ezra the priest" (v. 2a).** Who knows what the priest's dress code was? It included a turban that said, "Holy to the Lord" and a breastplate that had the 12 stones representing the tribes of Israel on it. May my mind focus on God and His Word and my heart be drawn to you—God's precious people.
- **He brings God's message—"brought the law" (v. 2b).** God asks the preacher the same question he asked Moses—"What's that in your hand?" In my hand I do not bring psychology, philosophy, politics, or my personal opinion. I don't bring man's word—2 Opinions 2:2; I bring God's Word (2 Tim. 4:2).
- **He publicly reads it—"He read from it" (v. 3).** "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy" (Rev. 1:3). The public reading of the word of God is not preliminary to the preacher's words; it is foundational and central to them. I don't read God's Word to get it out of the way so I can have something to say. If all a preacher did was to get up and read or quote Scripture, I would leave blessed.
- **He stands—"Ezra the scribe stood" (v. 4).** The difference between preaching and teaching is the difference between standing and sitting. Jesus sat down to teach and stood up to preach. Teaching is primarily for instruction for the mind; preaching is motivation for the will. I do not sit as if to give you a little fireside chat of advice to dialog with you about it: I stand to bring you the Word of God. You don't dialogue with the Word of God; you proclaim it and obey it. It is interesting that he used a wooden podium for that purpose—just like our pulpit. Our architecture speaks to the primacy of preaching as there is not a table up here in this place of prominence, but a pulpit. Preaching trumps everything.
- **He opens the Word of God—"He opened the book" (v. 5).** Tragically, people can go to a church—even an evangelical one—and never crack open their Bibles. What's with that? Even worse, sometimes the preachers don't even open it. Bring your Bible to FBC because you will need it around here.
- **He is above the people—"for he was standing above all the people" (v. 5).** Here we see the visual aspect of proclamation elevation as a platform was built for that purpose. This was not only so that Ezra could be seen by this throng of people, but to communicate that we all—including this preacher—are under the authority of the Word of God. We sit under its authority; not over it nor even beside it. Some people who are educated beyond their intelligence and think they are smarter than God put themselves in a very precarious position—over the Word of God. Don't be standing near them in the judgment! There are few things God hates more than being misrepresented by His so-called spokespersons. Do you know the difference between a stage and a platform? This is not a stage; it's a platform. A stage is for performance; a platform is for proclamation. Our churches' platform (akin to a political parties') is the Bible!
- **He honors the God of the Word—"Ezra blessed the Lord the great God" (v. 6).** See John 5:39 and 12:32. If our love for the Word of God does not lead us to a greater love for the God of the Word, then we are missing it.

- **He preaches the Word**—“**translating to give the sense so they understood the reading**” (v. 8). I remember as a seminary student in the mid 1970’s before expository preaching became vogue trying to convince my preaching class and professor of its higher value but to no avail as they looked at me like I was the village idiot who just fell off the turnip truck. Now you are out of vogue if you don’t for good reasons. It is not the only way to proclaim the Word of God, but it is the best way because it is Biblical, powerful, and practical. As God’s preachers practice proclamation elevation, it will lead to transformation—first in the preacher’s life; then life on life. What is the greatest thing I can bring you? The life of God through me to you.

///THE PRACTICALITY OF PROCLAMATION ELEVATION FOR GOD’S PEOPLE

Notice the expository preaching principles found in Nehemiah 8 that apply not only to me—the preacher in the pulpit, but to you—the people in the pews. Incarnational expository preaching gives people the true meat of the Word of God as well as the broader context of the Word. I as the preacher have responsibilities; you have an opportunity . . . to do what from this passage?

- **You are all here in unity**—“**and all the people gathered as one man**” (v. 1). “Unite my heart to fear your name” (Ps. 86:11). See Acts 10:33.
- **You are hungry for the Word**— “**they asked Ezra to bring the book/and were attentive**” (vv. 1, 3). Could I encourage you to enter this auditorium every Sunday with this question on your mind: Preacher, do you have a word from God for me today?
- **You are capable of understanding**—“**all who could listen with understanding**” (v. 2). These included the older children. Never underestimate the capacity of a child to understand God’s Word.
- **You reverence God’s Word**—“**all the people stood up**” (v. 5). Do you have respect for God’s Word? Hey, this is God speaking!
- **You respond emotionally**—“**and all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen!’**” (v. 6) In verse 9, they also weep and then in verse 12 they celebrate. Sometimes we respond to the preaching of the Word of God with “Amen.” Other times we respond to the preaching of the Word of God with “Oh me!” See Revelation 10:9-10. The Word of God comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable!
- **You respond physically**—“**they bowed low and worshipped the Lord**” (v. 6). There are appropriate physical responses to God’s movements—kneeling, standing, raised hands, etc.
- **You engage the Word in small groups**—“**(they) explained the law to the people**” (v. 7). Public proclamation was insufficient; they needed further instruction—just like we provide in our life groups.
- **You respond obediently**—“**they went away to celebrate/made booths for themselves**” (vv. 12, 16). The people recognized they had been living in disobedience in not celebrating the Feast of Booths (a seven-day camping trip in tabernacles to remind them of God’s deliverance from Egypt). It would be like us not celebrating the Lord’s Supper, reminding ourselves of our deliverance from sin through Jesus’ blood. When we go away, we need to have an action plan in mind. Biblical preaching is not meant to elicit an opinion; it is meant to create a determination that leads to a transformation! The question to always ask after the life message is: what am I supposed to do with this? Today, I desire you to appreciate the essential value of expository Biblical preaching as it relates to your spiritual formation doing all you can to avail yourself to it. If you are not there, just ask God to give you a hunger for the Word. Every life message should meet your need to know something, feel something, and do something.

I couldn’t tell you what physical food or menus Beverly made for dinner last week, but as you can readily see, I am well fed. Maybe you cannot remember what I have been feeding you spiritually but if you apply the principles found in Nehemiah 8, you will be well-fed and that’s what matters. As you embrace the practicality of proclamation elevation, it will lead to transformation in your life intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally—something for everyone.

“For it (God’s law) is no empty word for you, but your very life” (Dt. 32:47). “All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God” (Dt. 8:2).

¹ *Leadership*, Summer 1987, p. 19.

Central Idea of Text (CIT): The people of Jerusalem gather as one to hear Ezra—the father of modern expository preaching—read, preach, and explain the Word of God.

Big Idea of Message (BIM): The elevation of proclamation—especially expository Biblical preaching—leads to the transformation of God’s people.

Major Objective (MO): Commitment

Specific Objective (SO): I desire my hearers to commit to the essential value of expository Biblical preaching as it relates to their spiritual formation/transformation.

Primarily Addressed Need (PAN): Why does Pastor Bob preach verse by verse through books of the Bible? What’s the big deal about expository preaching?