

Homiletical Strategies from the Master Preacher of Hebrews

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Abstract

This presentation examines the homiletical and rhetorical strategies modeled by the author of Hebrews, whom Dr. David A. deSilva characterizes as a master preacher. It outlines five core strategies for contemporary preaching: centering the message on Jesus to provide divine perspective, shaping the congregation's circumstances through scripture, holding believers accountable to progress toward spiritual maturity, engaging in rigorous theological depth, and channeling the congregation's innate passion toward godly excellence. Ultimately, the session demonstrates how these ancient homiletical tools can revitalize modern preaching and inspire deep, enduring Christian discipleship.

Outline

I. Introduction to Preaching through Hebrews

A. Dual Focus of the Presentations

1. Homiletical strategies modeled by the author of Hebrews as a master preacher
2. The core message of Hebrews as perennially essential for faithful response

B. Learning from the Preacher's Example

II. Strategy 1: Always Give Them Jesus (Hebrews Chapters 1-2)

A. The Goal and Art of Rhetoric

1. Moving the audience from their current state to the speaker's desired endpoint
2. Bridging the distance through strategic starting points

B. Alternative Starting Points the Preacher Avoided

1. Addressing the audience's past and current suffering
2. Upbraiding the congregation for practical problems like church absence
3. Relying on historical biblical stories like the wilderness generation first

C. The Chosen Starting Point: A Forceful Declaration of Jesus Christ

1. Christ as God's definitive word of deliverance, superior to the prophets
2. Christ's cosmic role as partner in creation, sustainer of the cosmos, and divine imprint
3. Christ's incarnation, sacrificial work, and exaltation at God's right hand

D. Rhetorical Accomplishments

1. Directing attention away from adversity back to God's activity
2. Reframing the audience's view of loss and powerlessness

3. Pointing to honor and glory as the final end of their narrative

E. Homiletical Application for Contemporary Preaching: Helping congregations see Jesus to gain perspective on current challenges

III. Strategy 2: Shape the Moment with Scripture (Hebrews Chapters 3-4)

A. Reframing the Congregation's Present Condition

1. Defining challenges and opportunities via scriptural precedents
2. Overlaying mundane concerns with an eternal framework

B. The Scriptural Canvas: Numbers 14 and Psalm 95

1. Historical narrative of the wilderness generation's rebellion in Numbers 14
2. Homiletical entry point: Psalm 95 ("Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts")

C. Defining the True Threat: Spiritual Sclerosis

1. The primary threat is not external pressure or lack of improvement
2. The real threat is hardened hearts of distrust turning away from the living God

D. The Mental Frame of Standing at a "Threshold"

1. Highlighting the stark choice: move forward in trust or retreat to "Egypt" (worldly security)
2. Reinforcing perseverance as the only rational choice given past investment

E. Homiletical Application for Contemporary Preaching: Discerning the view from heaven and using sacred history to guide the congregation

IV. Strategy 3: Hold the Congregation Accountable (Hebrews Chapter 5:11 - 6:20)

A. The Purpose of the Mid-Sermon Wake-Up Call

1. Pausing the argument to call the congregation to account
2. Demanding attentiveness, commitment, and spiritual maturity

B. Challenging Congregants to Leadership and Vows

1. Expecting mature believers to act as teachers and leaders rather than passive followers
2. Living up to baptismal and confirmation promises to nurture others in faith

C. Christian Discipleship as a Continuous Metamorphosis

1. Conversion and church membership as the "larval stage" of ongoing transformation
2. Expressing costly gratitude for costly grace

D. Homiletical Application for Contemporary Preaching: Cultivating a spiritual climate of high expectation and deep gratitude

V. Strategy 4: Make It Meaty (Hebrews Chapters 7-10)

A. Engaging in Rigorous Theological Explanation

1. Dedicating four chapters to explaining the effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice
2. Addressing difficult theological questions (e.g., human sacrifice, cross as altar)

B. The Pastor as Primary Theologian

1. Safeguarding the ministry of the Word from "busy pastor syndrome"
2. Helping parishioners connect the sacred tradition with their fragmented lives

C. Homiletical Application for Contemporary Preaching: Embracing the intellectual and spiritual labor of mining scripture for theological assurance

VI. Strategy 5: Release the Congregation's Passion for Excellence (Hebrews Chapters 11-13)

A. Channeling the Passion for Achievement and Honor

1. Redirecting ambitions from secular success toward a Godward direction
2. Shifting focus to the "applause of heaven" rather than worldly approval

B. Contrast of Lifestyles: "Rich and Famous" vs. "Rich Toward God"

1. Worldly success often requires accommodation to compromised values
2. Divine success modeled by the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 11 and perfected by Jesus in Hebrews 12

C. Forming a Godly Image of Heroism

1. Surrounding believers with examples of faith to inspire holy ambition
2. Drawing from contemporary stories of faith, survival, and martyrdom (e.g., behind the Iron Curtain, Southeast Asia, Northern India)

D. Life Reframed through Metaphors of Perseverance

1. Life as a great athletic contest or wrestling match before heavenly spectators
2. Life as a training exercise where God disciplines and shapes character

E. Homiletical Application for Contemporary Preaching: Conveying the excitement of the Christian race and whipping up congregations' thirst for greatness