PREACHING & TEACHING

How to Write a Sermon

A five-day method for getting from a passage to a preached sermon, written as a working week rather than a theory of homiletics. Monday reads, Tuesday decides, Wednesday drafts, Thursday cuts, Saturday says it out loud. Built for preachers who keep arriving at Friday with nothing.

a working week · 5 segments

Five days, five jobs. The point is that most sermon problems are scheduling problems wearing a theological costume.

BEFORE YOU RECORD

- The commonest sermon failure is not theological, it is that the preacher started on Friday. This method exists to move the thinking earlier, where it is cheap.
- Saturday out loud is not optional. A sermon read silently is a different document from a sermon spoken, and you will find three sentences you cannot actually say.
- If you are preaching weekly, Monday belongs to next week, not this one. Preachers who use Monday to recover from Sunday are always seven days behind themselves.

01. Monday: read until it is strange

40 min

[no commentaries yet - you are looking for what surprises you]

Read the passage five times without writing anything. Once out loud. Once in a translation you do not normally use. The job is not to understand it yet, it is to notice what is odd.

Then write down the questions, not the answers. Anything you cannot explain. Anything that seems out of character. Anything a sceptical friend would jab at.

Commentaries on Monday will hand you someone else's sermon before you have found your own. Open them Tuesday.

02. Tuesday: the one sentence

90 min

[the day that decides whether Sunday works]

Now read commentaries, then close them and write one sentence that is a claim, not a topic. "God is faithful" is a topic. "God kept a promise Abraham had already stopped expecting" is a claim.

[your one sentence - if it takes more than an hour, the passage is not the problem, the week's reading was]

Then name the tension in a second sentence: what makes this hard to believe or hard to do. Two sentences and Tuesday is finished.

03. Wednesday: draft badly, on purpose

2 hours

[speed over quality - you cannot edit a blank page]

Write the whole thing start to finish without stopping to improve anything. Leave gaps marked for the illustration and the application. The draft will be too long and partly wrong, and that is the correct output for Wednesday.

Use the nine movements on the sermon outline page if you want the frame handed to you.

04. Thursday: cut a third

90 min

[the hardest day and the one that most improves the sermon]

Take out everything that does not serve the one sentence. Your second-best illustration. The paragraph you are proud of. The digression into Greek. A third of Wednesday's draft should not survive Thursday.

Then fix the application. Most drafts end with an instruction nobody can act on, and Thursday is when you make it small and specific enough to be done by Friday week.

05. Saturday: out loud, standing up

45 min

[in the room if you can get into it]

Say it aloud, standing, timed. You will find sentences that work on paper and collapse in the mouth, and you will find the real length, which is usually four minutes longer than you thought.

Memorise two things only: the first ninety seconds and the last thirty. Everything between can be read. The open and the close cannot.

USAGE

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