

Recapturing the Voice of God:
Preaching God's Word, God's Way¹

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Riding on the City of New Orleans,
Illinois Central Monday morning rail
Fifteen cars and fifteen restless riders,
Three conductors and twenty-five sacks of mail.
All along the southbound odyssey
The train pulls out at Kankakee
Rolls along past houses, farms and fields.
Passin' trains that have no names,
Freight yards full of old black men
And the graveyards of the rusted automobiles.²

Steve Goodman's "City of New Orleans" was a pop hit for both Arlo Guthrie, and Willie Nelson. The song is a notable illustration of musicality providing a rhetorical dimension to lyrics, allowing the genre of folk song to drive, and therefore, *shape* the narrative. Goodman's intended *message* of the demise of the railroad is shaped by the *medium* of the folk song. In this way the songs move the listener; the listener is able to feel the rhythm of railroad as percussions mimic the train rolling over railroad tracks. The resonating whale of the rail whistle is mimicked

¹ This paper is adapted from the author's forthcoming monograph, *Recapturing the Voice of God, Sermons Shaped like Scripture*. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015); and from papers presented at the annual meetings of the 2013 Evangelical Homiletics Society and the 2014 Evangelical Theological Society respectively.

² Steve Goodman, "City of New Orleans, 1971," Steve Goodman, 1971, accessed August 10, 2013, <http://www.lyrics007.com/Arlo%20Guthrie%20Lyrics/City%20Of%20New%20Orleans%20Lyrics.html>.

repeatedly through the use of the harmonica. Instrumentation that was intended to layer the song with meaning actually influences the stories meaning. In this way, the meaning of the song is carried by the instrumentation as much as the lyrics.

It is hardly the exclusive domain of rhetorical research that intuits that the medium of the instrumentation is a medium that provides meaning to the words of the song. However, this has been a significant motif of research in rhetorical studies. Irvine and Kirkpatrick's landmark article published in the *Journal of Quarterly Speech*, "The musical form in rhetorical exchange" argues that the music itself is rhetorical. This is a departure from how rhetoric is commonly understood in homiletic conversations; rhetoric is understood to be the domain of the words of a speech act or sermon. However, in communication studies, rhetoric in the popular culture is understood as the culture's way of understanding itself; thus Barry Brummett's definition of rhetoric as "managed meaning."³ So, in other words, the way we express something is a way of managing the meaning of it. In our previous illustration of "City of New Orleans" the message was managed by, and thus shaped, by the instrumentation.

The application of this rhetorical theory to preaching is somewhat obvious. Only the most naïve preacher would attempt to bifurcate the delivery of the sermon and the content of the sermon. This because the way we say something is its own message. Delivery is content. So, we know this intuitively. It's not just what you preach, it's how you preach it. Yet, here is the irony: many of us who are convinced as to the influence delivery and sermon structure has upon the meaning of the sermon, insist on ignoring the rhetorical function of the genre of a biblical text when we preach. In other words, what we expect of ourselves, in the explanation of a text, we do not anticipate in the text itself. We allow an exegesis of our audience to shape how we say things. Yet, we fail to allow the exegesis of the biblical text to be influenced by how God said something. Yet preaching is not just saying what God says. Preaching is saying God's words God's way. Preaching is the translation of the voice of God and the words of God.

³ Barry Brummett. *Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture*. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press), 1991.

Consider the irony: We carefully craft rhetorical dimensions of the sermon: vocal production, hand motions, posture all in sermons that ignore the rhetorical dimensions of the text of which the sermon is to represent. This effect could only be caused from a belief that the meaning of the text is fully loaded in the words alone, independent of the structure of those words resulting from the genre in which the Holy Spirit inerrantly placed them. Which brings all of this to a fine point: The inspiration of Scripture includes the fact that the Holy Spirit inscripturated words into God chosen genres. This implies that Paul did not write in the epistletory genre simply because he lived in first century Palestine, but because God chose that medium to communicate this particular message. With this view of inspiration running like a software program in the back of my mind, preaching becomes something very different than extraction of theological propositions from a text; preaching becomes the re-presentation of the words of God with careful attention to the voice of God. If there is meaning at the structural level of a text, then the preacher must pay attention to the structures that are provided to us by the genre. And then re-present them. This is preaching God's word in God's voice. This is re-presenting the word of God by recapturing the voice of God.

So, rhetorical theorists have long noted the relationship of the music proper to the lyrics of the song.⁴ Yet, for those of us whose message is Scripture and whose medium is also Scripture, this relationship has often been ignored. Instrumentation is to a song what structure is to a sermon. Scripture is the medium of its own message.

Toward the end of the understanding the relationship of genre and the text of Scripture, this article will address three broad observations about the nature of genre: namely that they are limited, situational, and are moving; all in an attempt to demonstrate how and why the genre of a text should influence the sermon.

⁴ For example, see the important article by Irvine and Kirkpatrick "The Musical Form in the Rhetorical Exchange: Theoretical Considerations". *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 62.2 (1976): 157-166. See also, "The Synchronization of Spirituality in Elvis Presley's 1976 Live Performance of 'How Great Thou Art'"; the author's paper presented to North American Pop Culture Association, Toronto 2002.

A preliminary question to this discussion might be, why are evangelicals not naturally given to allowing the structure of the sermon to be our friend in carrying the delivery of the message? Before addressing features of genre, a brief introduction will serve to answer that question dealing briefly with the history of preaching.

Sermon Structure

Yes, reduce your text to a simple proposition, and lay that down as the warp; and make the use of the text itself as the woof; illustrating the main idea by the various terms in which it is contained. Screw the words into the minds of your hearers. A screw is the strongest of all mechanical powers . . . when it has been turned a few times scarcely any power can pull it out.⁵

It is in the metaphor of the “Warp and Woof” that British divine Charles Simeon (1739-1836) helps us understand the structure of the modern sermon.⁶ The word picture is textile in origin. A weaver lays down the thread in front of her vertically (warp). Then thread is woven through it horizontally (woof); ergo the warp and woof is the “whole thing”.

To Simeon a sermon was laying down the warp of a proposition. The woof of the text was woven through the proposition demonstrating how it illustrated the proposition. Those of us who are committed to letting the text speak may want to say, more precisely, that we extract propositions from the text and then demonstrate how the text supports that proposition. Regardless, those in the tradition of evangelical preaching owe a great deal to Simeon. It was Simeon who, influenced by Huguenot Jean Claude, developed a method that allowed the divisions of a text to be extracted from the text. Similar to the Puritan plain style of Perkins, Simeon has a high view of Scripture. Unlike the Puritan plain style, Simeon has more divisions in the sermon and is not holding to the

⁵ Hopkins, Hugh Evans. *Charles Simeon of Cambridge*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1977). Cited in Denny Autry, “Factors Influencing the Sermonic Structure of Jean Claude and his Influence on Homiletics” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary), 2013.

⁶ David Larsen’s “Taxonomy of Sermon Structure” demonstrates Simeon’s influence, reflective of Jean Claude, on the modern sermon structure. *The Company of the Preachers*. (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1998), 857.

Text, Doctrine, Uses tri-chotomy of Perkins, et.al.⁷ However, it is in Simeon and Perkins that we have a dual fountainhead for much evangelical preaching. A proposition is identified and then worked through a particular text.

In recent times, propositional preaching has been challenged by the New Homiletic; a homiletic that rejects propositional preaching for narrative preaching. However, those committed to the sufficiency of Scripture have balked at a homiletic which seems to freely build upon the sandy foundation of the New Hermeneutic.⁸ However, there is a more practical criticism the New Homiletic in the spirit of this article: if propositional preaching misrepresented a text by melding every text into a proposition, then the New Homiletic erred by taking every text and turning into a story. Surely the critical knife cuts both ways. Both forms of preaching could be executed without attention to the genre of the text. In effect these sermonic templates transcend the text.

Perhaps this is one reason for a renewed interest in genre-sensitive preaching. Evangelicals have found themselves appreciating a desire to loosen perceived strictures of pure propositional preaching but leery of rejecting any form of propositional preaching. At the same time there is a rising interest in Christ-centered, Redemptive Historical preaching.

The train itself is a helpful metaphor. A train has many cars, all going in the same direction. The train cars are shaped in a way that

⁷ Compare William Perkins', *The Art of Prophesying* to Charles Simeon's redaction of Jean Claude's, *Essays on the Composition of a Sermon*, which Simeon included as the last volume of his multi volume homiletic commentary *Horae Homileticae*. Or, more to the point, compare the recently released sermon of Jonathan Edwards (*Sermons by Jonathan Edwards on the Matthean Parables, Volume I: True and False Christians - On the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins*. (New Haven: Yale, 2012) to the sermons in Simeon's *Horae Homileticae*. While Simeon advocated for more homiletic structure with points coming from the text, Edwards retained Perkin's homiletic template of Text, Doctrine, and Uses.

⁸ For further study, see:

Allen, David. "A Tale of Two Roads." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43 (2000): 489-515.

Reid, Robert Stephen. "Postmodernism and the Function of the New Homiletic in Post-Christian congregations." *Homiletics* 20 (Winter 1995): 1-13.

accommodates their respective cargo and the situation in which they will be needed; thus the tanker is round to hold its fluid cargo; the engine more aero dynamic, etc. To understand the shape of the vehicle is to understand something of its content, which leads to a discussion of these individual cars. Toward a discussion of these genres, three features of genre will be explored: first, the genres are themselves limited; second the genres are situational; and finally, they are moving. Once these three features of genre are established, an attempt will be made to demonstrate how these features serve the message that they are intended to communicate.

Features of biblical Genre

Genres are Limited

The study of genres can be daunting. The preacher, or seminary student, who first understands that Scripture is composed of multiple genres, may be intimidated by the many genres and sub-genres.⁹ If the structure of a sermon is to be influenced by the structure of a text, then how would one begin to appreciate all the different genres of Scripture? There are some helpful monographs intended to help preachers understand the influence of the major genres on the sermon.¹⁰ And there are other works that teach homiletics as it is applied to each genre.¹¹ However many introductory homiletic texts give little specific instruction on the impact

⁹ See Thomas Long's metaphor of the "guessing game" in *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*. (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1989) 14-21.

¹⁰ Thomas Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*. (Seoul, Korea: Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1995).

Also, see these examples:

Jeffrey Authors, *Preaching with Variety: How to Re-create the Dynamics of Biblical Genres*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2007).

Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *The Beginning and End of Wisdom*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publications, 2011).

Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

Craig L. Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2004).

¹¹ A most notable example of this is: Sid Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988).

of individual genres on the sermon structure.¹² And this for the apparent good reason that the study of genre seems to be, at least academically, the purview of literary scholarship and biblical studies, not homiletics. To complicate things further, discussions about a genre do not take place among experts in genre per se, but rather they take place among scholars that are experts in one specific genre.¹³

However, here is some really good news: *there are not an infinite number of genres*. There are arguably at least nine discernable genres of Scripture: OT Narrative, Law, Psalms, Wisdom Literature, Law, Gospels/NT Narrative, Parables, Epistles, and Apocalyptic.¹⁴ However, there is further good news: all of these genres are expressions of three basic structural forms. Meaning, the nine genres listed above fit under three macro structures: Narrative, Poetry, and Epistles. Everything in Scripture is story, poetry, or letter:

Narrative: *OT Narrative, Law, Some Prophecy, Gospels, Parables, Some apocalyptic*

Poetry: *Psalms, Wisdom, Most Prophecy, Some Apocalyptic*

Letter: *Epistles, Some Apocalyptic*

¹² For example, at Southwestern Seminary, our professor's use *Power in the Pulpit*, by Vines and Shadix, Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*, and will supplement with chapters from other texts such as from Bryan Chappel's *Christ Centered Preaching*. These texts do deal with genre, but only slightly. There are notable exceptions to this rule among primers in preaching, notably is Cater, Duvall, Hayes, *Preaching God's Word*. One is also helped tremendously by the work of the Proclamation Trust and their series by David Jackman simply entitled *Preaching and Teaching Old Testament and Preaching and Teaching New Testament*. Jackman walks through each genre explaining how the genre influences the meaning of the text and therefore should influence sermon preparation.

¹³ Among notable exceptions would be works such as Leland Ryken's *A Literary Introduction to the Bible*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997). Of course the purpose of this book is to understand the genres more so than to help on preach the genres.

¹⁴ Thomas Long (*Literary Forms*) deals with five; Jeffrey Authors (*Preaching with Variety*) deals with six. The list here provides some sub-genres, of which there are sub-sub genres!

There is a lot to understand about genre. However, in terms of structure, one must at least understand narratives and their scene structure, poetry and its strophe structure, and epistles with their paragraph structure. Therefore, if the sermon reflects the text, at least three different *sermon forms* are needed: one that recognizes the moves of stories, one that reflects the verve of poetry, and one that can communicate with the directness of letters.

Imagine the relief of an MDiv student in his introductory preaching class who is told that 1.) the structure of the sermon should reflect the genre from which it is preached, 2.) that there are at least nine genres (some with multiple sub genres) in Scripture, but 3.) (*sola Deo gloria*) preaching those genres may be facilitated by understanding three basic macro level structures.

This is potentially reductionist. Admittedly preaching the poetry of the prophecy of Ezekiel is different than preaching the poetry of Ecclesiastes! However, understanding the structure of Hebrew poetry enables the student the macro template by which to preach both Psalms and the Prophets. And, at the same time, when using a macro-template they will then begin to realize the nuanced differences between the two.

One may fairly ask the question as to why God used *these specific* literary genres and why He used them in this measure. Of course, this is in the mind of God, but asking the question helpfully leads to the second important feature of the genres, namely that genre's themselves are situational.

Genres are situational

Humanly speaking, genres emerged from the needs of specific situations. The situation of angst and complaint calls for a Psalm. The situation of a struggling church calls for an epistle. The situation of the grand movement of God calls for a narrative. Understanding the situation to which, or from which, a text is written is itself instructive. Namely, it tells us what prompted the use of this particular genre. When Paul understood how far the Galatians were from Christ, he did not sing a song or give them a law. Rather, he gave them a stinging rebuke in the *form* of a letter.¹⁵ The situation drove the genre. We know this. The

¹⁵ Gal. 1:6-10

situation of the writing of the text is helpful to understanding its meaning.

However, the knowledge of the situation can also be a distraction away from its meaning. This is because the knowledge of the situation can produce the latent temptation to preach the situation and not the text. This temptation to preach the situation and not the text is especially acute in the Psalms.

Take for example Psalm 51, David's Psalm of contrition. The Psalmist is lamenting for his sin. His contrition is deep ("for I know my transgressions" v.3) and wide ("and my sin is ever before me" v.3). The poem is the perfect medium for David's loathing. The poem allows the heartache and pain to seep through his porous soul in waves of theologically nuanced suffering. The medium is perfectly *situated* for the message. And here in lies the temptation. The temptation in such a Psalm is to reach back to the story and preach the story and not the Psalm. The narrative of II Samuel 11-12 is a fascinating, provocative, and heartbreaking narrative. The natural temptation therefore is to take as one's text Psa. 51, but use most of the time preaching the narrative of the sin and ignore the Psalm. In other words instead of preaching the meaning of the text to the immediate audience, we preach the situation of the text. Instead of preaching the text and its implications for today, the bulk of the sermon is what is behind the text.¹⁶

While this temptation is especially acute in the Psalms, the temptation can be an equally as great while preaching the words of Paul to the people of Galatia, the Sermon on the Mount from Jesus to the People, or the Revelation to John from Jesus to the seven churches. All of these texts are situational, and the situations are fascinating (at least to the inner nerd within every Bible student). The situation is in fact helpful. However, it is helpful as an interpretive guide to the text at hand. The preacher wants to avoid preaching the text that is behind the text (the situation) instead of preaching the text itself.

This is our theology of Scripture. We are not preaching the situations, we are preaching texts. Preaching the situation that is behind the text to the exclusion of the text at hand misrepresents the nature of

¹⁶ See: Abraham Kuruville. *Privilege the Text! A theological hermeneutic for preaching.* (Chicago: Moody, 2013), 33-67.

Scripture. Scripture is given to us “transhistorically”¹⁷ to transcend time and speak to our situation. While we consider the historical context, a sermon that deals too much with the historical situation moves the preacher further away from the most important situation, namely the situation in which people find themselves: with the need to be aware, of how much they need to be aware, of sin. And this is the most important aspect of the situational nature of the genre: they are situational in an *anticipatory* way. The genres exist not just to facilitate the ancient situation, but as facility for our situations. The point is not that the genres capture the limited numbers of ways God chose to communicate, rather that the genres speak to the unlimited number of situations of all believers of all time. This is the point. They are situational, but again, in a transhistorical way.¹⁸ And, in order to allow the text to meet the current situation, we must preach it in a way that addresses immediate needs.

Tending to a study of individual genres should make us more sensitive to present needs, not desensitized against present needs while being sensitive to the ancient situation. Understanding the ancient situation is an aid to understanding the text, a text which is given to meet the present situation.

This then leads to a question. Why exactly are the genre's able to meet the current situation? This is the question of relevance. Put more precisely, what makes an ancient text presently situational? It is important to note that this deference to ancient literature as *absolutely* trustworthy has little modern equivalent. In a day when baccalaureate science textbooks become out of date by the time they are printed and reach the market, it is a significant challenge for the evangelical to present an ancient text as the answer for contemporary problems. However, the reason that they are able to meet current needs is because they themselves have never been static, but have always been moving.

The text speaks to the present situation because the text itself is present. It is moving and it is moving in a very specific direction.

The Genres are Moving

¹⁷ Kuruvilla, 44

¹⁸ Ibid.

The reason the text from any genre can speak to a contemporary need is because the genres are themselves moving. More precisely: they are situational because they are not static. Further, the moving nature of the genres should help one understand them as moving toward a very specific end goal.

The genres are literary devices. That is the way they function. However, if only viewed as literary devices, they may be seen as either flat or static. Both of these aberrant understandings of the text manifest themselves in the pulpit. Let's briefly look at both flat and static homiletic approaches to the text.

Flat. The flat approach assumes that a biblical text, is a text, is a text. The preacher is predisposed to a universal homiletic template, which is then transposed over any text regardless of the genre. In this way, the genre in which the text was placed has no consequence on the sermon. In this scenario the preacher chooses the homiletic template first. The sermon is a demonstration of how neatly a text can fit into this pre-chosen form.

The problem is that when genres are viewed arbitrarily, communication is itself flat. No life, no texture, no nuance, no color in the text. This is tragic for the reason that it does not re-present the text. What often happens as a result is that the text is presented as flat and "creativity" (i.e. supplementary material, visuals) is then needed to make the text compelling. Creativity is essential, and multi-sensory communication can be compelling. However, the text is creative. Therefore the breadth of the creativity should come from the depth of understanding the text. In other words, we are not bringing creative elements to the text as much as we are showing the creativity that is already embedded within the text. We are letting the text breathe. We are not suffocating it with our own thoughts. Exegetical work is mining the life that is already embedded in the text.

The deeper problem, as established above, is that the form of a text can influence the meaning. To ignore the shape is to risk missing a part of the meaning. So while suggesting that the communication will be flat may seem like a rant against creativity, one is pressed further to see that not paying attention to the genre is a matter of interpretation first, and communication second. There is meaning in the structure of a text.

Static. Like the flat approach, the static approach perceives that the genres are non-moving literary devices. In this way the genres, and the pericopes within the genres, function like a rhetorical artifact that can be studied independent of their setting in the within the canon. It's as if the pericope is found on a piece of paper on the ground. Each sermon from such a pericope is a one volume short story influenced by nothing outside of the homiletic binding of the introduction and conclusion of the sermon. But surely this text is going somewhere?

The multiplicity of genres in Scripture not only gives witness to the many situations to which it was written, but to the many situations to which Scripture is able to speak. In other words, the many genres speak not only to its variety, but to its direction. When the Scriptures were penned, they were penned to be applied in the present situation. They are limited genres speaking to unlimited situations.

Perhaps the best way to understand this is to look at the book of Revelation. Revelation is the most inter-textual of all the books, and necessarily so. As the climatic book in the cannon it comprises so many of the genres. Here we see so many genres alive in one book. The reason is simple, this book describes the final destination. It is not surprising that we find all the vehicles of transportation present. Consider the many genres in Revelation.

Revelation is narrative. Revelation begins with a vision of Christ, His word to the churches, and a sense of direction as to where these things are all headed. Many commentators see an outline to the book in 1:19, "the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this." This outline is the movement of a story, especially the narrative flow of the last section, or bulk of the book, where things move from a scene of worship in heaven (4, 5) moving toward a great battle (16:10-19:21) to the new heaven and the new earth and the descent of the new city (21, 22) leaving John in breathless wonder to cry "Come, Lord Jesus." The book is one dramatic narrative.

However this narrative contains the genre prophecy. For example the bulk of chapter 18 reads, at least structurally, like the prophecies found in the Major Prophets. And the prophets of course use the genre of poetry. So in Revelation 18 one finds the strophe structure

of Hebrew parallelism that is found throughout Scripture.¹⁹ Added to this, the genre proper of the Revelation which is apocalyptic.

All of this Revelation is wrapped in a situation. The situation is that John is writing an epistle to the seven churches; a specific author and a specific audience. So in the epistle of the Revelation of John is narrative, prophecy, poetry, and apocalyptic. These individual genres are alive and they are indeed going somewhere. They are moving to a very definitive ending. The quick pace of the book of Revelation, and its use of the genres to accomplish that pace, is, in many ways, metaphorical for the whole of Scriptures: many genres used for one purpose, to move us to one end.

So, contra the flat or static approaches, the genres are themselves intentionally vibrant, and they are dynamic. In other words God desired for a limited number of genres (story, poem, and letter) to speak to unlimited number of situations. Therefore they are intentional in their placement and they are intentional in their movement toward a destination. A destination which, once understood, helps us know what to do with them when we preach them. An understanding of the genre helps us understand the relationship of the Gospel message to the text of Scripture.

Gospel in Genre

There is an involved recent history in the development of a Christocentric, or Redemptive Historical (RH) preaching. The motivation for this type of preaching may be to communicate to the listener the holistic nature of the text while leading the individual to grow in their worship of, and love for, Christ. However, like all movements there are some inherent dangers in the respective approaches.²⁰

¹⁹ See: Leland Ryken. *Words of Delight*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2007), 477.

²⁰ For a critique of Christ-Centered approaches to preaching, see Kuruvilla, *Privilege*, 211-268; see also Ken Langley "When Christ Replaces God at the Center of Preaching". Paper presented to the Evangelical Homiletics Society. 2008.

One unintended consequence of using a RH approach appears in the use of the Meta Narrative of Scripture in every sermon. For example Graeme Goldsworthy has helpfully submitted a schematic, using Matt 1 as a template, by which the preacher may get to Christ in each text of the Old Testament. The idea is to find the nearest attending covenant, and take that covenant to the new covenant in Christ.²¹

For a preacher wanting to know how to preach Christ from say I and II Samuel, this is a very helpful strategy. However, for a pastor preaching *through* I and II Samuel, the sermons run the risk of being redundant. It's true that a backward look to the Abrahamic Covenant can help you understand why God did not want Israel to have a King. And certainly a forward look to the Davidic Covenant will help one understand the tragic reach of David's sin with Bathsheba. However, for so much of the text in between, pointing to the meta-narrative could be wearisome Sunday after Sunday. This is especially true if views from the Gospel crowd's nest are repetitive to the neglect of what is going on immediately in the text.

The text does have value for life and godliness alongside the Gospel presentation (not exclusive of it or with it alone). In other words, the goal of Gospel clarity, textual explanation, and current application are not exclusive of each other. And this brings us to the genre of the text.

If one preaches the genre of the Scripture at hand and uses the structure of the text to determine the structure of the sermon, the preacher must deal with the situation of the text. In dealing with the situation of the text, they must deal with the *real* situation, the situation to which the text was written, the modern situation. When the modern situation is addressed it must be addressed in a Gospel-centered way, for there is no greater need in the current situation than that the listener align himself with the Gospel imbedded in the genre of the text. In other words the reach from the ancient situation to the current situation is the Gospel. Attention to the genre pulls one back into the ancient world and once there, the fear of being tethered to the moorings of the ancient forces him to head to the shore of the modern. The Gospel is the means by which to get there.

²¹ Goldsworthy, Graeme. *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

Anecdotally, we know this to be true. I have found myself to be preaching and sensing from the congregation a resistance to the text. The ancient situation intersects with the current situation in a way that is provocative and even threatening. It is clear that the listeners have no intention of aligning themselves with the meaning of the text. And, as sometimes happen, I am preaching and have the sense that there is someone in the audience far from the Gospel. At that moment I decide to go off script, abandon the homiletic rules, and make the Gospel as clear as possible. Yet, think about this. Should not the homiletic rules facilitate a clear Gospel presentation and not limit it?

What we need is sensitivity to a God who in his sovereign love gave us genres that demonstrate his desire for His truth to meet every situation of our lives. When we understand that this love is behind the genre we are preaching, and all genres, we cannot preach without clearing a spot and making the Gospel explicit, plain, and clear. In this way, whether there is a type of Christ in the text, or a referent that points us explicitly to a covenant that takes us to Christ becomes less important in that moment. What becomes most important is that the situation at hand is addressed a compassion reflective of the One who Authored the text.

To say it another way, we make the Gospel plain from every genre. An explicit Gospel is demanded from the reality that a finite number of the genres speak to a God who wants to make the message plain in a multitude of ways. The situational nature of the genre screams that God is speaking into our situation. And the movement of the genres begs the question as to where are they moving. Thus, and honest look at the genre demands a faithful representation of the genres. A faithful representation of the genre means that it is represented in spirit and in truth. This leads us to the Gospel.

To reverse the trajectory: The content of the message is shaped by the genre in which it is situated, the number of situations, and the number of genres, speak to the love of God. A love that initiated the Gospel within Himself before time began.

Conclusion

The text is not static, it is moving like a train. And like a train it is composed of individual vehicles whose shape is determined by the cargo

that they carry. In the same way the shape of the genres of Scripture are not things that need to be bent toward Christ, rather they exist like they do *because* of the Gospel message. This argument from the nature of Scripture gives warrant to the desire to clear a spot and preach Christ from any Scripture. The commonality is the destination. They are each moving individual, car-specific, cargo to the final destination: the culmination of God's plan in redemptive history.

The genres are limited, there are a finite number of them. The genres are situational and speak to every contemporary situation. The genres are also moving. They are carriers of a message that is complete, but a story that is not yet complete. These three realities could be summarized as such: the limited genres speak to unlimited situations that are all reaching their climax through the message of the Gospel. The genres are the individual cars that carry the entire message. Thus, the existence of different genres speaks to the compassionate nature of the Gospel.

If this is true then one can make the Gospel explicit from any genre. It is warranted in any situation, because the nature of Scripture demands it. In other words, the composition of Scripture begs for the explanation of the Gospel from it.

If this is the case, then the genres are carrying us as well. We are studying the genre, but the genres are studying us. Preaching is explaining to people how God is reading them. It is to our situation which *they* speak; therefore it is to the present situation that we must speak. And that situation demands the Gospel.