

The Lord's Remembrancers
Jeffrey Arthurs
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Abstract: A purpose of preaching which is emphasized in the Bible may be missing or minimized in standard evangelical homiletics texts: reminding. This paper develops a biblical theology of memory, then explores how that theology is practiced in the preaching of Moses in Deuteronomy, the prophets, and the epistles. I conclude that the reminding-function is legitimate and needed when preaching to believers. The paper concludes with some suggestions on how reminding can be done without monotony.

I love to tell the story; for those who know it best
 Seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest.
 Katherine Hankey

Some sermons teach, some persuade, and some apply the truth to everyday life—or more precisely, *every* sermon does all three of those functions to one degree or another. Those three functions of preaching are well-trodden terrain in standard textbooks of evangelical homiletics. While I agree with those purposes, I believe that the textbooks neglect another purpose—reminding. By “merely” reminding the baptized of what they know and believe, slumbering knowledge may be awakened, somnambulant conviction may be roused, and sluggish volition may be inspired. Jonathan Edwards put it this way: “God hath appointed a particular and lively application of His Word to men in the preaching of it . . . to stir up the minds of the saints, and quicken their affections, by often bringing the great things of religion to their remembrance, and setting them before them in their proper colours, though they know them, and have been fully instructed in them already.”¹ It may have been Bishop Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626), chaplain to the courts of Elizabeth and James I, who described preachers as “the Lord’s remembrancers,” a metaphor borrowed from the judicial system of the day. The office of The King’s (or Queen’s) Remembrancer is the oldest judicial position in continual existence in Great Britain, having been created in 1154 by Henry II. Today it is a ceremonial role, but for centuries the officer’s role was to put the Lord Treasurer and the Barons of Court in remembrance of pending business, taxes paid and unpaid, and other things that “pertained to the benefit of the Crown.”²

This paper considers the role of preachers as “remembrancers.” We are the *Lord’s* remembrances, reminding his subjects of the covenant he has made and its stipulations. In particular this paper examines the reminding-function of preaching by developing a biblical theology of memory, noting especially the place preaching plays in stirring memory. My research question is: what might a biblical theology of memory contribute to homiletics? And my thesis is that when preaching to believers (people in the covenant), preachers should see the stirring of memory as one of their primary tasks.

The first step in biblical theology is lexical.

Lexical Considerations

The two most important terms for this exploration are the Hebrew word *zakar* and its cognates, and the Greek word *mnemoneuo* and its cognates. The following table summarizes lexical data:

Term	Form	Meaning	Example
Zakar	Qal (169x)	Remember, call to mind, pay attention to (often accompanied by appropriate actions)	Psalm 137:1, “By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when <i>we remembered</i> Zion.”
	Hiphil (41x)	To cause to remember, to invoke, to mention	1 Sam. 4:18, “As soon as <i>he mentioned</i> the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat.”
	Niphil (19x)	To be remembered	Zech. 13:2, “On that day . . . I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that <i>they will be remembered</i> no more.”
Zeker	Noun	The act of remembering, a commemoration or memorial	Esther 9:28, [commenting on Purim] “These days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation . . . nor should <i>the commemoration</i> of these days cease among their descendants.”
Zikkaron	Noun(24x)	Memorial, token, record	Esther 6:1, “On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring <i>the book of memorable deeds</i> , the chronicles, and they were read before the king.”
Mnemoneuo	Verb (approx. 20x)	Remember, be mindful of (often accompanied by appropriate actions)	Gal. 2:10, “They asked us to <i>remember</i> the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.”
Mnaomai. “remember.”	Verb (approx. 20x)	Same	Luke 23:42, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.”
Cognates	Nouns and verbs (approx. 29x)	Same	Luke 22:19, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

The Hebrew term *zakar*, like our English term “remember,” has a range of meaning, but the range is not extensive. Sometimes it denotes a simple mental act as when Israel “remembered” the food they ate in Egypt (Nu. 11:5), but most often “in the Bible, memory is rarely simply psychological recall. If one remembers in the biblical sense, the past is brought into the present with compelling power. Action in the present is conditioned by what is remembered.”³ For example, Israel was to “remember” the days of their slavery in Egypt and free their own slaves

every six years (Dt. 15:15). Israel was also to “remember” the Sabbath by keeping it holy (Ex. 20:8). Joseph asked the cupbearer to “remember” him before Pharaoh (Gen. 41:14), that is, mention him favorably to Pharaoh. And Hannah vowed that if the Lord would “remember” her, she would dedicate her son to the Lord (1 Sam. 1:11). While the majority usage of the English word “remember” is limited to “psychological recall,” an older definition captures the biblical connotations: “to bear a person in mind as deserving a gift,” as when we say that “the company always remembers its employees at Christmas,” and the child at the party says to the host who is passing out treats, “Remember me!”

Linguistic scholar Stephen Renn states, “When *zakar* is associated with God, divine ‘remembering’ signifies Yahweh’s intention to implement the next state of his redemptive plan, whether it be his purpose to bless or (less frequently) bring down judgment.”⁴ The synonymous parallelism of Hebrew poetry confirms that *zakar* means more than mental recall. In the lines following *zakar*, the idea of God remembering his people is elevated to “blessing” (Ps. 115:12-13), “rescue” (Ps. 136:23-24), and “helping” (Ps. 106:4).

Israel was to remember the laws and statutes (Num. 15:3 ff., Neh 1:8, Mal. 4:4), God’s redemptive deeds (Dt. 6:17), and YHWH himself (Dt. 8:8, Neh. 4:14, Eccl. 12:1, Jer. 51:50). “Part of the identity of the people of God comes from remembering God’s great acts and faithfulness and the origins of His people. Remembrance leads to gratitude and praise for the present and hope and security for the future.”⁵ But while gratitude often accompanies this term, the greatest number of uses of *zakar* occurs in the psalms of lament: the psalmist strengthens himself when he remembers the glad shouts and songs of praise (42:5), but he also groans when he remembers God (77:3) and the days of old (143:5).

The opposite of remembering is, of course, “forgetting” (*shakah*—used about 100x in the OT), and this term also implies more than simple mental act. To forget God means to worship other gods (Dt. 8:19) and disobey the commandments (Dt.8:11). “Forgetting” is parallel to “forsaking” (Is. 49:14) and “rejecting” (Hos. 4:6). Forgetting is an important term and concept in the New Testament as well as the Old. The Greek words are *lanthano* (vb.) and *lethe* (noun). James 1:22-25 speaks of being “doers and not hearers only.” The one who is merely a hearer is like a man who looks at himself in the mirror and then forgets what he has seen, “but the one who looks into the perfect law . . . and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing” (v. 25). As in the Old Testament, “forgetting” is nearly synonymous with disobeying, or at least with lack of fervor for the will of God.

The Greek terms, *mnemoneuo* and its cognates, are similar in denotation and connotation to *zakar*. The Greek may lean slightly toward “mere mental recall,” but the leaning is not severe. We are to “remember” those in prison (Heb. 13:3), probably meaning that we should pray for them; and we are to remember our spiritual leaders (Heb. 13:7), meaning that we should submit to them. God has “helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy” (Luke 1:54). And Paul commends the Corinthians because they remember him “in everything and maintain the traditions even as [he] delivered them” (1 Cor. 11:2). In the New Testament, memory changes attitudes and actions, as when the disciples remembered Jesus’ predictions of his resurrection, and they believed (John 2:22, 12:16). Similarly, the church of Ephesus should remember from where they had fallen, repent, and do the works they did at first (Rev. 2:5, cf. 3:3).

Blair's summary of the Old Testament concept of memory also pertains to the New Testament concept: an "active relationship to the object of memory that exceeds a simple thought process. Memory awakens a past event to realization because of its present significance. 'Remember' connotes consciously to 're-member' oneself to the object."⁶ Quoting Brevard Childs, Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke says, "*Remembrance equals participation.*"⁷

Memory in Biblical Contexts of Preaching

The theme of remembering appears throughout the Bible, but three portions of sacred Scripture bear special consideration to help answer this paper's research question (what might a biblical theology of remembering contribute to homiletics?) Moses addresses the people of Israel in Deuteronomy, and there we see him emphasize memory. The prophets do the same, as do the Epistles, the closest approximation we possess of what preaching to believers sounded like in the early Church.

Deuteronomy

The covenant people were poised, ready to enter the Promised Land, but they had not witnessed the redemptive acts of the Exodus as their fathers had, and they were not present when YHWH made the covenant. Yet these people, not just their fathers, are the covenant subjects of the same God and are still participating in the ongoing story of redemption. However, having not witnessed God's mighty deliverance, they must now depend on memory as the link between the past and the present.⁸ Thus the book of Deuteronomy, Moses' farewell address to Israel, stresses time and time again that they must remember. What must they remember and not forget? Their slavery in Egypt (16:12, 24:22); their deliverance, often with wonders (5:15, 6:12, 7:18-19, 8:14, 15:15, 16:3, 24:18); the making of the covenant at Horeb (4:9-13, 23); YHWH himself (4:39-40, 8:11, 14, 18, 19); the commandments (11:18, 26:13); their rebellion in the wilderness and God's discipline (8:2, 14-16, 9:7, 24:9); Amalek (25:17-19); and the days of old (32:7).

The prompting of memory occurred both nonverbally and verbally at the major festivals, Passover and Booths. That is, the ceremonies, rich with sensory experience (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch) recounted the Exodus nonverbally, and the regular reading of the Law at those festivals reminded the people verbally of the covenant stipulations. Waltke elaborates on the verbal mode:

The founding generation uniquely experienced the events that gave birth to Israel as a nation. . . . Their children, however, do not see these events (11:5), and they must not expect God to repeat them (30:11-14). Rather, God speaks to future generations through their periodic reading of the covenant (17:18; 27:3; 31:9-13, 26) Israel perceives God principally with their ears, not with their eyes. Memory becomes the divine instrument for maintaining the continuity of Israel and for upholding the divine welfare of those within it. Memory actualizes the word.⁹

Waltke's choice of the term "actualize" echoes Childs who explains that "actualization occurs when the worshipper experiences an identification with the original events. This happens when he is transported back to the original historical events. He bridges the gap of historical time and

participates in the original history.”¹⁰ He continues: “Actualization is the process by which a past event is contemporized for a generation removed in time and space from the original event. When Israel responded to the continuing imperative of her tradition through her memory, that moment in historical time likewise became an Exodus experience.”¹¹ Taking his stance as a “remembrancer,” Moses recounted past events to convince the present generation that God should be counted on today. By commemorating and recalling the past—the Exodus in particular—God’s people are moved to align themselves with God’s ongoing covenant stipulations.

One way actualization occurs, the way that is most important to this paper, is by the creation of discourse—sermons. Notice how Moses performs actualization by identifying the generation which came out of Egypt with the current generation standing before him:

When your son asks you in time to come, “What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?” Then you shall say to your son, “We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day.” (Deut. 6:20-24)

Moses’ use of identification is not simply a rhetorical strategy; it is an exposition of a theological fact. The people of God are *one* people.

Similarly, in Deuteronomy 26:6-9 he conflates time: “The Egyptians treated *us* harshly and humiliated *us* and laid on *us* hard labor. Then *we* cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard *our* voice and saw *our* affliction, *our* toil, and *our* oppression. And the Lord brought *us* out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders.” Not only does Moses enfold the past into the present (cf. Deut. 5:2-5), he also gathers in the future generations: “It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before the Lord our God, and with *whoever is not here with us today*” [emphasis added].¹² (Deut. 29:15)

The rhetorical situation which Moses faced is similar to the one Christian preachers face today.¹³ We too stand on the brink of full deliverance, but we too are separated from the great deeds of redemption. So Christians lean heavily on memory to keep our hope alive and faith strong. Our ceremonies, particularly the Lord’s Supper, and our discourse, particularly our Scripture reading and sermons, should prompt memory to actualize the past with compelling power.

The Prophets

The prophets were remembrancers par excellence. They drummed a metronomic cadence of covenant stipulations, incentives, and warnings. As spokespersons of YHWH their cadence was so uniform and unceasing that Andrew Thompson claims they were in danger of being monotonous: “Even a casual reader will find the same themes over and over again: God’s goodness, God’s deliverance, God’s law, the people’s rebellion, God’s judgment, God’s salvation. Short oracles are stacked together by the dozen, prophecy after prophecy, repeating the

same thing.”¹⁴ Harkening back to the Exodus and Sinai, the prophets relentlessly drummed a message of deliverance, gratitude, and obligation.

One way they avoided the potential snare of monotony was by varying the form and mood of their prophecies (I comment on this in the last part of this paper), but they never varied the content. Jeremiah reminds the people of the ten commandments (7:9); Habakkuk echoes Deuteronomy when he warns of foreign conquest for covenant breakers (Hab. 1:5-11, Deut. 28:49-51); and Amos, like Moses, actualizes the past by conflating it with the present: “God brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness” (2:10).

The prophets’ rhetorical situation, like Moses,’ also parallels the task set before Christian preachers. Thompson states:

They both (Israel and the church) live under the same covenant LORD, who does not change in his character or affections. They both live in the light of his past deeds for their good (whether the promises to Abraham, the Exodus, the Davidic Kings, or the climactic salvation found in the death and resurrection of Christ). They both live under his demands for love and obedience as his people. And they both live in hope that God’s promises of ultimate salvation and judgment will be fulfilled. Our hope is the return of Christ, the Second Advent, when he will defeat his enemies and pour out his grace to his church. The church’s covenant situation is remarkably similar to Israel’s.¹⁵

The parallel rhetorical situation is also present in the Epistles.

Epistles

Like Moses and the Prophets, Paul and the other NT letter writers regularly remind the recipients of what they already know and believe. A handful of examples demonstrate this:

(Rom 15:14-16) I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. But on some points I have written to you very boldly *by way of reminder*, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles.

(Phil 3:1-3) Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. *To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.* 2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. 3 For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh

(Jude 5, 17) “Now I want to *remind* you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe You must *remember*, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

(2 Peter 1:13-16) I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of *reminder*, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to *recall* these things.

(2 Peter 3:1-2) This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of *reminder*, that you should *remember* the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.

New Testament scholar James Thompson argues that the epistles are the best examples we have of what preaching to believers sounded like in the infant Church.¹⁶ Thus, to preach to the Church, as the apostles did, we should stir memory.

Furthermore, when the recipients of epistles are preachers, such as Timothy and Titus, and the Holy Spirit through the Apostle instructs them how to pastor the Church, we contemporary pastors pay special attention:

(2 Tim. 2:8, 14) “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel . . . Remind them of these things, and charge them before God.”

This command is especially important for us because *we* are to remember Jesus Christ and then remind *parishioners* of him and his commands.

(Titus 3:1) “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work.”

In addition to these overt instances and commands of reminding, the general structure of epistles also demonstrates that preachers are the Lord’s remembrancers. That is, the well-known structure of indicative-imperative suggests that the authors of the epistles saw one of their tasks as reminding the Church of what they had learned previously and then exhorting them to obedience based on that theology. Just as the Lord began the Decalogue with the indicative, “I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt,” so Paul and the other writers stir the recipients’ theological memory of redemption so that they will live in fidelity to their deliverance. The proof of memory is fidelity.¹⁷

Thus far in this paper, lexical and contextual data are supporting the thesis that when preaching to people in the covenant, we should see the stirring of memory as an important function of preaching. Turning now more explicitly to theology derived from this data, the thesis can be explored in more depth.

Theology

The Christian Faith, as well as the Jewish, is grounded in history. We do not follow cleverly devised stories, but rather the Word made flesh who was born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, died, was buried, and rose again. The cross (and the Exodus) happened in space and time. Thus, preachers in the Bible such as Moses, the Prophets, and the Apostles reminded their auditors over and over again of facts historical and facts theological. The two cannot be, or at least should not be, separated. Blair summarizes the Bible’s sermonic argumentation which is grounded in history: “What God has done is regarded [consistently in the Bible] as offering conclusive understanding of what he is doing and what he will do.”¹⁸ Both Israel and the Church

are witnesses and heralds. In a sense, all expository preaching is simply repeating what has already been stated.¹⁹

In Noth's phrase, we actualize actualizing history by "re-presenting" it.²⁰ Unlike God, who is both omniscient and omnipresent, so that all history is immediate to him, "man in his inevitable temporality cannot grasp this present-ness except by 're-presenting' the action of God over and over again in his worship."²¹ Theologian John Davis, states that when the Church re-presents the old, old story of redemption "through word, sacrament and Spirit, the assembly experiences sacred 'time travel,' reexperiencing with the Lord and his people the power of the saving events of the past, as well as tasting the reality of the future new creation in the 'down payment' of the Holy Spirit."²²

Preachers might ask: how does actualization occur when the preacher reminds the listeners of what God has done in the past? How does "sacred time travel" occur when the preacher re-presents the old, old story? Theologically, the answer may be that God's words do things. They have performative power, what a speech-act theorist would call "illocutionary force." Just as matrimony is inaugurated with the statements "I do" and "I pronounce you husband and wife," so do God's words accomplish what they name. When God said, "Let there be light," there was light. And when the Lord Jesus said, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood," a new covenant came to be. Through the ministry of God the Holy Spirit, the Word is a lamp that illumines, a fire that consumes, a hammer that breaks stony hearts, a sword that pierces, a mirror that reveals, and milk that nourishes. When the preacher faithfully re-presents redemptive history and asserts again the doctrine that God has already revealed, then, to quote Childs, "The worshipper experiences an identification with the original events He bridges the gap of historical time and participates in the original history."²³ We see the hand of God smite the Egyptians on our behalf, part the Red Sea for our deliverance, and provide manna and water for us in the desert. We see the sun darkened and feel the ground shake when our greater Moses performed a greater deliverance. We too stand at the empty tomb to and hear the angel, "He is not here. He is risen." Memory becomes participation. To quote Blair again, "The past is brought into the present with compelling power. Action in the present is conditioned by what is remembered."²⁴

If the performative power of God's words helps explain the theology of actualization (although the process is still, admittedly, beyond our ability to fully comprehend), then it should be obvious that preachers must do exposition. The power is in the Word. When preachers do a good job of reminding believers of what the Church knows and believes, and when God give their words performative power so that those words kindle faith, then the commonplace functions of preaching I mentioned early in this paper—to explain, prove, and apply—take place without too much rhetorical labor.

Preachers may also ask why believers need to be reminded. The short answer is because we forget. Aslan said it this way: "I give you a solemn warning. Here on the mountain I have spoken to you clearly: I will not often do so down in Narnia. Here on the mountain, the air is clear and your mind is clear; as you drop down into Narnia, the air will thicken. Take great care that it does not confuse your mind."²⁵ A confused mind ("forgetting" in the sense of mental recall)

leads to straying feet (“forgetting” in the sense of forsaking). So preachers serve as remembrancers so that the minds of the faith-family will be clear.

The conviction that preachers must do exposition needs no further elaboration for members of the EHS, but to conclude this paper, a brief list of practical implications may be beneficial. If the reminding-function of preaching is central, not peripheral, when preaching to people in the covenant, then expository preachers want to know *how* to serve as God’s remembrancers. A bland and bald recitation of salvation history, as if we were reading the genealogies of the kings of North Umbria, will not prompt memory and kindle faith because another theological truth comes into play here: God has ordained his truth to be conveyed through human agents. Those agents must embody the Word as clear, passionate, sincere, and creative messengers like the prophets and apostles.

Practical Suggestions

Preaching-as-reminding will come as good news to some preachers who have been shamed into believing that every sermon has to be an original work of art. But other preachers will raise a skeptical eyebrow. “Preaching-as-reminding sounds monotonous,” they say. “Repeating what believers have heard since they were children sounds like a homiletical nightmare, like preaching at Christmas fifty-two weeks a year.” But preaching-as-reminding should not be empty repetition, formalistic and perfunctory. Rather, it is the work of soul-watchers who minister where the air is thick. Our people (and we) need reminders of the great truths of the Faith. Furthermore, take heart that listeners often enjoy reminders. We are like the hobbits who “liked to have books filled with things that they already knew, set out fair and square with no contradictions.”²⁶

None of the suggestions below are likely to be “news” to members of the EHS. They are just reminders. Other suggestions could also be added dealing with the importance of delivery which prompts a reciprocal response from the audience, illustrations that make old truths “present,” and effective Scripture recitation, but the three suggestions below dealing with homiletical purpose, style, and arrangement are enough to point the way on how preaching-as-reminding can avoid monotony.

1. The Purpose of Preaching: Present Worship.

Remembrancers do not lecture about the text. They worshipped God as they prepared the sermon, continue to worship as they step into the pulpit, and prompt the congregation to worship as they listen. Based on his observations of preaching in Ethiopia, Victor Anderson advises western preachers to conceive of a good sermon as “one that ushers the audience into a heightened sense of God’s powerful presence at the preaching event.”²⁷ Anderson contrasts “comprehension,” an indispensable goal of every sermon, with “apprehension” which “draws listeners into concrete experience and particularly touches pathos.”²⁸ To illustrate this concept, Tim Keller uses the analogy of parents feeding their child baby food. The child may be uninterested, so the parents taste the food: “Mmmm! Yummy!” They model the response they want and the child follows their lead. They are partakers and prompters about the glory of the food. Likewise, preachers have to taste and see the glory of statements like these: “God is the

creator and owner of all that is”; “heaven is our hope”; and “whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.” To mix my metaphors, when the preacher burns, the people catch fire. Much of this “burning” comes through the nonverbal channels of delivery, but such delivery cannot be conjured *ex nihilo*; it is the fruit of meditation.

2. Style: Clothe Stirring Thoughts in Stirring Words.

Commenting on Cicero’s three offices of the orator, Augustine said that “teaching” relates to doctrine/content, but that “delighting” and “moving” depend on style. The *way* we say *what* we say is crucial to avoid monotony when reminding believers of what they already know. Listeners are rarely moved if the sermon is not phrased movingly. This is one of the lessons we learn from the prophets. Their message was potentially monotonous, but they found fresh ways to speak the repetitive message about the covenant curses and blessings. Thus, a genre-sensitive handling of those texts will help us capture the same moods and forms they used. For example, Greidanus suggests that “when the prophecy is in poetry, the sermon can emulate the prophecy’s use of concrete imagery. When the prophecy spins out a metaphor, the sermon can follow suit and allow the audience to participate in this new and often surprising vision.”²⁹

Three specific tools of style may help God’s remembrancers. The first is the **refrain**. Fred Craddock, a master stylist, points out how a recurring line or phrase can build intensity, as when Marc Antony repeats in his funeral oration for Julius Caesar, “and Brutus is an honorable man.” Each time he speaks that ironic line, it generates new insight for the crowd and intensifies their emotions.³⁰ Senior members of the EHS may remember our second conference, held at DTS, when Calvin Miller preached from 1 Corinthians: “We preach Christ crucified.” As he urged us to declare the gospel without spin, regularly and simply, he used the refrain: “What do we preach? Just a pronoun, a verb, a noun, and an adjective. ‘We preach Christ crucified.’” While it is hard to capture the dynamics of that oral event in the medium of print, perhaps you can imagine a small group of sincere homileticians receiving this reminder by a senior member of their guild. Every time he asked “What do we preach?” and answered: “Just a pronoun, a verb, a noun, and an adjective,” he imparted no new information, but he moved us to do what we already believed.

Closely related to the refrain is the **epitomizing phrase**. In a fascinating study of the instructional techniques of the rabbis in the first century, Birger Gerhardsson states:

When a teacher’s words are accorded considerable authority and when an attempt is made carefully to preserve them . . . brevity and conciseness are important virtues There was a very active consciousness of the importance of such concentration, of condensing material into concise, pregnant—and if possible also striking, pithy and succinct—sayings.³¹

Gerhardsson quotes one of the ancient rabbis who exemplifies the pithy saying: “A sharp peppercorn is better than a basket of gourds.”³²

Followers of big idea preaching already know the value of communicating the essence of the sermon in a crafted sentence, so why not take this homiletical wisdom to the next level: big idea *ministry*? In his books and sermons, John Piper often repeats this dominating thought: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” Piper relates all topics (missions,

preaching, children's ministry, giving, etc.) to that overarching concept. It reminds his audience of their *raison d'être*. Tim Keller does something similar with this sentence: "Jesus lived the life I should have lived and died the death I should have died." That sentence is a thread woven into many sermons, a kind of *supra* big idea.

A third stylistic device is **parallelism**. When an orator rhythmically restates an idea rather than saying it only once, it has a greater chance of stirring the affections of the listeners. Black preaching has used these devices, of course, for centuries. White preachers have much to learn from them.

3. Arrangement: Use Induction When the Truth Sparks No Surprise

A final reminder on how to preach the old, old story to folks who know the story is to use induction. Homiletician Robin Meyers calls induction "midwifery": "It is essentially Platonic because the Preacher as Teacher often helps us to remember and reaffirm what we already know."³³ Clergyman and novelist George MacDonald struck the same note: "The best thing you can do for your fellow man, next to rousing his conscience, is not to give him things to think about, but to wake things that are in him; that is, to make him think things for himself."³⁴

Much more can be said about preaching-as-reminding, but my hope is that this paper will expand our concept of the purposes of preaching. We are not only teachers of those who are untaught, persuaders of those who are skeptical, and exhorters of those who are listless. We are also, especially when preaching to believers, "the Lord's remembrancers."

¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1959), 115-116.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen%27s_Remembrancer. Accessed August 27, 2013.

³ Edward P. Blair, "An Appeal to Remembrance: The Memory Motif in Deuteronomy" *Interpretation* 15 (1961): 43.

⁴ Stephen D. Renn, ed. *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 2005), 804.

⁵ s.v. "Memorial," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), Publishing Co.) electronic version.

⁶ Blair, "An Appeal to Remembrance," 42.

⁷ Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 504.

⁸ Much of the material in this section is gleaned from Brevard S. Childs who has written the most thorough study in English of the biblical theology of memory: *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, in the monograph series *Studies in Biblical Theology* no. 37 (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1962).

⁹ Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 504.

¹⁰ Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, 82.

¹¹ Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, 85.

¹² Other portions of Scripture such as Ps. 95:6-7 also conflate past and the present: “Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart, as at Meribah, as in the day in the wilderness” And enthronement psalms such as 47 announce the *future* as present today.

¹³ The term “rhetorical situation” is a technical term of rhetorical theory first developed first by Lloyd F. Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* vol. 1 (1968): 1-14. Bitzer defines it as “a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse . . . can so constrain human decision of action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence.”

¹⁴ Andrew Thompson, “Community Oracles: A Model for Applying and Preaching the Prophets” *J of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* (10/1, 2010): 53.

¹⁵ Thompson, “Community Oracles,” 42.

¹⁶ James W. Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul: Homiletical Wisdom for Today* (Louisville: WJK, 2001).

¹⁷ I am indebted to Russell St. John for some of the thoughts and wording in this section. Email correspondence, July 2013.

¹⁸ Blair, “An Appeal to Remembrance,” 41.

¹⁹ Approaching Christian preaching from a secular standpoint, communication scholar Michael C. McGee defines the genre of Christian “sermon” and concludes that the primary feature of the genre is “thematic reduplication.” It moves deductively from a an immutable premise derived from “Ultimate Authority” to tautological restatement of that premise as exemplified in particular situations. “Thematic Reduplication in Christian Rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*.

²⁰ Martin Noth, “The ‘Re-presentation’ of the Old Testament in Proclamation” (1952), trans. James Luther Mays, rpt. in Claus Westermann, ed. *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation* (Richmond: John Knox, 1963), 76-88.

²¹ Noth, “Re-presentation,” 85.

²² John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 92.

²³ Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, 82.

²⁴ Blair, “An Appeal to Remembrance,” 43.

²⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 21.

²⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1954), 9.

²⁷ Victor D. Anderson, “Learning from African Preachers: Preaching as Worship Experience,” *J of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 10/2 (2010): 84.

²⁸ Anderson, “Learning from African Preachers,” 99.

²⁹ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 260.

³⁰ Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 175.

³¹ Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*, trans. Eric J. Sharpe (Copenhagen, Denmark: 1964), 136-137.

³² Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript*, 137.

³³ Robin R. Meyers, *With Ears to Hear: Preaching as Self-Persuasion* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 1993), 56.

³⁴ George MacDonald, *The Gifts of the Child Christ*, vol. 1 (rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker), 27.