

The Single Idea

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I'm going to be academic for the next three sessions. This is "The School of Preaching," right? So, welcome to class because we're going to be reading a textbook, is what we're going to do. I don't know any other way to explain the central idea of the text, and along with that to explain literally its idea and how it all works, without simply going through the book; and this is how we're going to do it. Anyway, I've taught this class twice. We had an extension Bible college at our church, and we did use this textbook. You guys all have the textbooks? You guys all have the book? Haddon Robinson's?

Okay, this book is really good. What we did was I went through it two different times and broke it up into nine weeks. We had midterms, we had finals, and I would tell the students what was going to be on the test. We went through it. We literally went through the book itself. But, along with that, I added all these other books into it. I integrated into the syllabus itself, Jerry Vines...oh, this is a great one. This book right here by Merrill Unger on preaching, I got it for \$1, and it's out of print. I will tell you next session how to get it. Between Two Worlds, by John Stott, excellent exposition; and then Anointed Expository Preaching by Stephen Olford. So, there are these books, and we have lots of others that I have, but these are just the main ones that we brought, okay?

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "The primary task of the church and of the Christian minister is the preaching of the Word of God. The decadent periods and eras in the history of the church have always been those periods when preaching had declined." I believe we're in those times. It is such a need to learn how to preach the Word because that's where the authority is. We're proclaiming God's Word, and God backs His Word. It's His authority. So, Haddon Robinson's book is the book; Power in the Pulpit by Jerry Vines, a wonderful, wonderful book. I'll be quoting from that book. He has some same chapters as Haddon Robinson's, so there's a lot of integration of that book itself. Augustine said, "When the Bible speaks, God speaks," and that's a great quote. It's a good thing to remember.

In preaching, one must convey the meaning of the text. To fail to convey the meaning of the text results in a failure to preach what the Bible says. So, that's what's at stake here. I mean, if we're not preaching the Bible, and we're not preaching what the text says, we're saying what the Bible does not say. That's very, very serious. The biblical model for presenting God's truth is expository sermon. An expository sermon makes plain what the Bible passages say and give a good application to the lives of the hearers. Expository preaching is not merely preaching about the Bible but preaching what the Bible itself says.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, "Expository preaching is the art of explaining the text of the Word of God, using all the experiences of life and learning to illuminate the exposition." This is why it's hard to explain how to do it because our personal relationships are involved in it, our maturity level is involved in it, there are certain gifts and abilities...and plus, most importantly, I know John's talked about it, the call to preach. It's kind of hard to preach, if you're not called to

preach. It's not like an occupation that you choose, it's one that God chooses for us. All that's involved in preaching, so it's so difficult to say, "Here's the steps, one through ten." It's almost impossible to do that. That's what we're going to talk about. We're going to talk about the impossibility of it during this session. It's going to be fun.

What's the big idea? That's what I want to talk to you about—what is the big idea? Here it is, it's the C-I-T, it's the central idea of the text. That's what I want to talk to you about, and then the complement points prove the idea or explain the idea of the text. Okay, so what's the big idea? Psalm 119:18 says, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law." Robinson says, "When people attend church, they may respond to the preacher like a novice at the opera. They have never been told what a sermon is supposed to do. Commonly, many listeners react to the emotional highs. They enjoy the human interest stories, jot down a catchy sentence or two, and judge the sermon a success if the preacher quits on time. Important matters, such as the subject of the sermon, may escape them completely." I know that in this class we've been talking about the difference between a topical, textual, and expository sermon and to be able to know the difference.

This is hard. This hurts me, and I know any of you that have been pastoring for any length of time know this is true. People will attend the church for years, then they'll move out of the area, they'll attend a church that is not teaching the Bible, and they'll say, "Pastor, he teaches just like you." It's hard because you've seen these faces, you've seen them in the audience, you've seen them with notes, but somehow the brain is not connecting, and they don't know the difference. There are some pastors, unfortunately, that don't know the difference. So, we need to be committed to teaching the Word. We need to be committed to expository preaching.

Now, discussions of outlining usually emphasize the place of Roman and Arabic numerals along with proper indentation; but these factors, as important as they are, may ignore the obvious. Here's the obvious: An outline is the shape of the sermon idea—I'd underline that; I bolded that—and the parts must all be related to the whole. The outline explains the idea of the text. Now, I'm going to get into this, and in your pages that we handed out, I gave examples of them, and we'll be looking at those examples.

It's a wonderful thing when you can encapsulate the thought of the passage in 18 words and include your outline in those 18 words. I mean, that is masterful, if you could do that. You know, a fog in the pulpit creates a fog in the pew. If we don't know and we can't encapsulate in our own minds what we're going to say, how in the world do we expect those sitting in the pews to get what we're saying? "Oh, I get it, those are bad vibes." I hate that term "vibes." No. If you don't know what you're going to say, how can you expect them to know what you said? I mean, that just doesn't make sense. We have to know what is the thought of the passage, and then we have to be able to articulate the argument of the idea.

Raul L. Howie?? listened to hundreds of taped sermons and held discussions with laypeople. He concluded that the people in the pew complained most unanimously that sermons often contained too many ideas. That may not be an accurate observation. Sermons seldom fail

because they have too many ideas, more often they fail because they deal with too many unrelated ideas. That's so important. What we hear a lot of today is called read and ramble. That's a good term. They sit up there and they read, they read the passage, they tell stories, and so often they're the hero of every story they tell. They get up and tell the stories, and then they quote again, and then they tell the story of the cat chasing the dog in the tree. It's just absolute nonsense. You get all done and go, "What did they say? I know the passage they read, but they never really explained the passage."

Haddon Robinson says, "Some expository sermons offer little more than scattered comments based on words and phrases from a passage, making no attempt to show how the various thoughts fit together as a whole. At the outset the preacher may catch the congregation's mind with some observation about life, or worse, jump into a text with no thought at all about the present. As the sermon goes on, the preacher comments on the words and phrases in the passage with sub-themes and major themes and individual words all given equal emphasis. The conclusion, if there is one, usually substitutes a vague exhortation for relevant application, because no single truth has emerged to apply. When the congregation goes back into the world, it has received no message by which to live because it has not occurred to the preacher to preach one."

Phillip Brooks, in his Eight Lectures On Preaching said it this way, "We hear a great deal about preaching over people's heads, there is such a thing, but generally it's not the character of the ammunition but the fault of the aim that makes the missing shot." Laziness. I've actually heard this, I don't know why I do this. I need counseling. Why do I do this? Sunday nights, after I'm tired, I watch sometimes Christian television. I don't know why I do. I actually heard a preacher quote Matthew 10:19-20. Let me read it to you, "When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for [it] will be given to you in that hour; 20 for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." Now, the context of that, he is speaking to Israel, Jesus is, that they're going to be persecuted, they're going to be brought before the authorities, but don't worry about what you're going to preach. We need to worry about what we're going to preach. This has nothing to do with persecution. That's an excuse. That's laziness. I think within the first two minutes of a pastor, you can figure out if they've studied or not. You can figure out if they have something to say or if they just have to say something. I think you can pick up on it.

Robinson goes on, "A major affirmation of our definition of expository preaching, therefore, maintains expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept. That affirms the obvious. A sermon should be a bullet, not buckshot. Ideally each sermon is an explanation, interpretation, or application of a single dominant idea supported by other ideas, all drawn from one passage or several passages of Scripture." So, let's talk about the importance now of a single idea. Students of public speaking and preaching have argued for centuries that effective communication demands a single theme. Virtually every textbook devotes some space to a treatment of the principle of a single idea.

When we're preaching, we have to say, "What is the thought of this passage?" And, I will tell

you, and I will be honest about this, that there is great weeping and gnashing of teeth until I know what that is. John was talking about last session how 24 hours it's on your mind—how am I going to convey the meaning of the text? How am I going to convey the message of the passage? It's not for me to invent one, it's for me to discover what God said and what God meant. And, it's difficult. Until you can encapsulate that thought in your mind and then be able to explain it, it's a difficult passage. As John said, I was awake last night thinking about Genesis 48. It's just this thing that weighs on you because you have the burden to explain the passage to the congregation. To fail to explain the message to the congregation is a fail to preach the Bible, it's a failure to preach the message.

Warren Wiersbe, "When the captain doesn't know what port he is heading for, no wind is the right wind; and when the preacher does not know what he is trying to accomplish in his message, no service is a good service. Have a specific aim for each message and be sure to tell your congregation what it is." This is left without saying, but I'm going to say it, "We need to give a title." We need to have a title. We need to try the best we can, as sure as we can, to encapsulate the passage. We know what the thought is, so how do we give it a title. Then, let me say this, "Read the passage." I don't understand it when pastors get up to teach and they don't read the text. Do they expect the congregation to know the passage by heart? You can't expect that. They have to read the text that they're going to cover.

Terminology may vary—"central idea," "proposition," "theme," "thesis statement," or "main thought"—but the concept is the same: an effective speech centers on one specific thing, a central idea. I call it the thought of the passage, that's what I call it. That's kind of my little spin on it. Every time I teach, just before I give the outline I say, "Here's the thought of our passage," and then I say the thought, and we'll get into this in just a moment, about 18 words. You're encapsulating the thought of the passage in 18 words. Then, I announce it in my introduction, and then I follow it by the complement which should be the points that explain the thought of the passage. Now, does that make sense? So, we have the thought of the passage, we should try to get a title for the thought of the passage, encapsulated in a few words, and then after that we give the thought of the passage followed by the complement which is the outline that explains the thought of the passage.

Now, I'm going to show you today in our notes sometimes you can actually put together in 18 words not only the thought of the passage but the complement of the passage. You can actually do that in 18 words. That is a wonderful life, that is a wonderful world when that happens, and it can happen. I'll show a few examples this afternoon.

Robinson, Donald G. Miller, not related to John Miller, in a chapter devoted to the heart of biblical preaching insists: ". . . any single sermon should have just one major idea. The points or subdivisions should be parts of this one grand thought. Just as bites of any particular food are all part of the whole, cut into sizes that are both palatable and digestible, so the points of a sermon should be smaller sections of the one theme, broken into tinier fragments so that the mind may grasp them and the life assimilate them . . ." So, every sermon should have a theme, and that theme should be the theme of the portion of Scripture on which it's based.

Now, we start with the text. We have to have a text, and we'll get into this deeper I believe it's in the next segment we'll be talking, but we have to choose a text based upon who we're speaking to, what we're doing, maybe we're already in a book of the Bible, we don't have to worry about the text, we just continue from last week and so forth. We have all of that. But as I was mentioning, John was stealing my stuff. I always start with this, and I should just repeat what he said because that's what I was going to say. This book is wonderful, Talk Thru The Bible. I love it. He gives a key verse; he answers who, what, where, when, and how. He gives an outline. He tells us who the recipient, who the writer is, what the date is, everything. It's probably about five or six pages to cover an entire book. Anytime I've gone through any book of the Bible, this is the first thing off the shelf. I grab it. I love it. I think it's simple. I think it's wonderful. I think every Christian should probably have one. It's a great devotional read on any book of the Bible. You can read Psalms, Proverbs. Just grab this. This would help you to have an understanding of what Proverbs is all about. So, you start with that.

I'm going to give an instance. Okay, the book of Ephesians. So, you have an epistle, and every epistle has the same basic break, not necessarily number of chapters, but it all has this break. Every epistle starts with doctrine, and after doctrine it turns to duty—always. He always starts with doctrine, and then he goes to duty. So, you've got Ephesians, which is the riches in Christ, or the wealth in Christ. You've got the first three chapters of Ephesians that deal with the wealth of the Christian, then chapters 4-6 is the walk of the Christian. That's good to know that because when you're teaching this book, you want to make sure that the practical aspect of it is really going to be dominant in chapters 4-6 because that's the practical section of the doctrine that has just been taught.

In Ephesians 4, the transition in Ephesians 4:1 says, "Therefore,"—what's the 'therefore,' there for? Everything that he has just previously said regarding the wealth of the Christian that's been provided through Jesus Christ—"I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." That word "worthy" means to weigh the same or to balance. So, we are to balance who we are doctrinally in Christ with the duty that we have to live out the new life. That's the transition, so here's the example I want to give: walking in wisdom, Ephesians 5:15-17. Here's the thought of the passage: in Christ the believer receives wisdom to walk carefully utilizing the time and understanding God's will. Here are the complements: 1) verse 15, wisdom is walking carefully; 2) verse 16, wisdom is making use of our time; and 3) verse 17, wisdom is understanding God's will. So, there you go.

What a wonderful thing to be able to incorporate not only the thought but the complement all in 18 words. There's no fog in the pew. There's no fog in the pulpit. You know exactly what the theme is. You know exactly where you're going, and you're explaining it to them in a simple 18 words.

Alan M. Stibbs says, "The preacher must develop his expository treatment of the text in relation to a single dominant theme." H. Grady Davis says, "A well-prepared sermon is the embodiment, the development, and the full statement of a significant thought." J.H. Jowett said, "I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching, not ready for writing out, until we can express

its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as crystal. I find the getting of that sentence is the hardest, the most exacting, and the most fruitful labour in my study.” Amen, amen, and amen. This is the hard part, right here. You’ve got to read that passage over and over and over again. You need to get out a pen, or on your computer, and start marking key words that you see there, and we’ll see an example of this in just a moment, key words that you see. You want to look where the breaks are. You want to look where the thought changes. You want to examine it over and over and over again and see what is the predominant thought of this passage.

What is it? “To compel oneself to fashion that sentence, to dismiss every word that is vague, ragged, ambiguous, to think oneself through to a form of words which defines the theme with scrupulous exactness—this is surely one of the most vital and essential factors in the making of a sermon: and I do not think any sermon ought to be preached or even written, until that sentence has emerged, clear and lucid as a cloudless moon.”

Warren Wiersbe said, “Teachers of homiletics call this sentence by different terms: the

sermon proposition, the them sentence, the ‘big idea.’ This sentence is to the sermon is what the spine is to the skeleton, and the foundation to the house: it holds things together and helps to determine what the final product will become.”

Now, here’s the question: why preachers/teachers don’t have a central idea of the text? Again, this is Haddon Robinson saying, “Okay, why don’t we do it? Why is this not being practiced?” First, stating the main subject of a Scripture passage may be the most difficult area of sermon preparation—to that I say, “Amen, and amen.” It takes time. First of all, this is how I do it, everybody has their own little way. I read it and read it and read it. I go through; I start outlining it. I try to look where the changes are. I try to pay attention to key words. After I’ve done that, and I’ve come up with an outline, and I even try to put it together into a single thought, then I turn to other sources. I want to allow God first to talk to me. I want God to speak through me.

So, I want to look at it, and I want to try to figure it out myself. What I often find, to my credit, that others had the same ideas I had. So, that is the Lord just showing us, “Hey, you know what? They prayed, they looked just like you did, and we can do this thing.” I mean, the Lord can help us. So, we can go through this thing. Sometimes we’re a little off, and there’s times, I kid you not, that I have changed my outline five or six times. That’s the beauty of having a Mac, you can change it, and I will change it and change it and change it.

Secondly, most pastors are extremely busy. This is where the priority of studying the Word has to come in—pastor-teacher, care for-instructor, both. We have to have time to study. I know that we’ve had many conversations about this. It’s nonnegotiable time. I call Saturday, sacred Saturday. That’s the day that I finalize the message. I tell you, if I go out in my car, I’ll be sure I’ll get in a wreck, something will happen, so I’m very careful on sacred Saturday. I very rarely go, every once in a while I will, but that is for Sunday. I am preparing, I’m trying to get my mind straight, I’m trying to get the thought and everything in line. While we’re extremely busy, there

has to be a point of nonnegotiable time. You owe it to the Lord and your people to preach the Word. You've got to have the time. You've got to make the time. You don't, "Oh, I have quality time." Come on. We've got to have the time. It should be time and quality time.

Thirdly, some preachers simply are lazy and refuse to do the hard work of identifying the subject of the text. That's unfortunate. The preacher's responsibility is to communicate what God already has said, then the central idea of any given sermon must reflect the central idea intended by the author himself. We're not trying to come up with the idea, we're trying to find out God's idea. That's what we're doing. This is why expository preaching is so powerful because we're preaching what God said. We're not preaching what we want God to say, we're preaching what God said.

Robinson, again, said in the Old Testament, "The sermons of the prophets are called 'the burden of the Lord.'" These proclamations were not a few appropriate remarks derived because the prophet was expected to say something; instead, the prophet addressed his countrymen because he had something to say. So, here's the example, Ezekiel 12:10 says, "Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, "This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem as well as all the house of Israel who are in it.'" Zechariah 9:1, "The burden of the word of the LORD is against the land of Hadrach, with Damascus as its resting place (for the eyes of men, especially of all the tribes of Israel, are toward the LORD)." Malachi 1:1, "The oracle"—or the burden of the Lord—"of the word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi." So, the sermons of the apostles were without exception the proclamation of a single idea directed towards a particular audience.

It was Donald Sunukjian concluded, "Each of Paul's messages is centered around one simple idea or thought. Each address crystallizes into a single sentence which expresses the sum and substance of the whole discourse. Everything in the sermons . . . lead up to, develops, or follows from a single unifying theme." Example: On the day of Pentecost Peter stands up in Acts 2. The people say, "Oh, they're drunk with new wine. What is going on here," and they're drunk and all this other stuff. So, Peter launches into this sermon in Acts 2. You get to verse 36 and he actually gives the thought and the complement of the passage. Notice what Acts 2:36 says. He says, the idea stated, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain"—here it is—"that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." So, that is the thought of the passage. That's what that whole sermon is about, "You've crucified the One that was the Son of God. You're the ones that did it." That's what that sermon, that's what it hammers home.

On the other end, Acts 13, Paul uses a deductive arrangement, his major idea stands at the beginning of the sermon, and the points that follow amplify and support it. The statement found in Acts 13:23 declares, ". . . according to the promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus." In Acts 20, again Paul speaks to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock." Robinson goes on, "If we preach effectively, we must know what we are about. Effective sermons major in biblical ideas brought together into an overreaching unity having thought God's thoughts after Him. The expositor communicates and applies these thoughts to the hearers. In dependence upon the Holy Spirit, the preacher aims

to confront, convict, convert, and comfort men and women through the proclamation of biblical concepts. People shape their lives and settle their eternal destinies in response to ideas."

Let's look now, what is the definition of an idea. We're talking about the CIT, the central idea of the text, so what is an idea? An idea moved into the English from the Greek word, and it means "to see" and therefore "to know." So, an idea sometimes enables us to see what was previously unclear. It's common to hear the phrase, "Oh, I see what you mean," is what is. That's what we're doing when we're preaching. We're opening the text, "Oh, that sermon on the day of Pentecost was confronting those that murdered God's Son. We were the ones that nailed Him to the cross."

Jerry Vines, "This definition contains several words that provide clues for developing a good theme statement," here it is, this is excellent. "The 15-18-word parameter is intended merely to be a guide for being concise yet thorough." So, we're not going to be super dogmatic, but generally speaking, shorter sentences will be remembered. They're a lot easier to deal with. You start getting over 18, it gets muddy, so 15-18 words. "If you find yourself with less than 15 words, you probably are not saying enough. If you have more than 18 words, you're likely saying too much and should make an attempt to be more concise. Avoid being legalistic, however. Say what needs to be said."

I tell you, I will take that verse, put it on my computer, I will work it over. I will just work it over. I'll just keep going through it, going through it, going through it, going through it. I just keep working it over and over and over again. I look at it and say, "This is wonderful. It just fits. I just explained the thought, and along with the thought of it I literally described the points of how the thought is brought up." I mean, I completely did that in 18 words.

Jerry Vines, "The CIT will crystalize in your mind the single patrolling idea of the passage." A sermon should be a bullet not buckshot. Ideally, a sermon is an explanation, interpretation, and application. We already read it. Robinson goes on and says, "Ideas sometimes lurk in the attics of our minds like a ghost. At times we struggle to give them winspy ideas a body, 'I know what I mean,' we say, 'but I just can't put it into words.' Despite the difficulty of clothing thoughts with words, we have to do it. Unless ideas are expressed in words, we cannot understand, evaluate, or communicate them. If we will not or cannot think ourselves clear so that we say what we mean, we have no business in the pulpit. We are like a singer who can't sing," that's a problem, "an actor who cannot act, or an accountant who can't add."

The formation of the idea: The definite idea with scrupulous exactness, we must know how ideas are formed. When reduced to its basic structure, an idea consists of only two essential elements: a subject and a complement. Again, we've been mentioning, what's the idea, the central idea of the text is the subject; and then the complement is the outline to explain the idea, is what it is. So, when we talk about the subject of an idea, we mean the complete definite answer to the question, "What am I talking about?" That's what it is. So, we give the thought; now, what am I talking about? A subject cannot stand alone. By itself it is incomplete, and therefore it needs a complement. The complement completes the subject by answering the

question, "What am I saying about what I am talking about?" Does that make sense?

Moreover, behind every subject there is a question either stated or implied. If I say that my subject is "the importance of faith," the implied question is, "What is the importance of faith?" "The people that God justifies . . ." forms a subject because it answers the question, "What am I talking about?" But the unstated question is, "Who are the people God justifies?" If the words subject and complement confuse you, then try thinking of the subject as a question and the complement as the answer to that question. The two together make up the idea.

Let's look at an example. Okay, 1 Timothy 6:1-2. The title of this is, "Honor in the Workplace." So, here's the CIT, the central idea of the text, this is the thought: Spiritual freedom in Christ does not annul our human responsibilities of honor and dutiful service in the workplace. Now, how do we answer this? 1) Well, in verse 1, serving a non-Christian master, the witness of God; 2) verse 2, serving a Christian master, the benefits of believers. So, there it is. It's in the thought of the passage, and there is the question and then there is the explanation of the idea itself.

An example of a subject, "the best of a person's character," to be precise the subject is: What is the test of a person's character? That question must be completed to have meaning. We do not know what the test of a character is, a variety of complements could be added to this subject to form an idea, and here are a few: The test of a person's character is what it takes to stop him. The test of a person's character is what he would do if he were certain no one would ever find out. The test of a person's character is like the test of an oak, how strong is he at the roots. Each new complement tells us what is being said about the subject, and each new complement forms a different idea.

Now, finding the central idea of a text. Again, Donald McDougall rightly says, "Our task is not to create our own message; it is rather to communicate the author's message. Our task is not to create the central theme; it is rather to find the author's central theme, build a message around that theme, and make that theme the central part of all we have to say." Here's how we go about this. First, we read purposefully. This is Jerry Vines. He says, "As you read, remember that you are moving toward a particular purpose—that of finding out what the passage means and how it applies to you and your people. Many times a clear design begins to emerge after a few readings." Again, Jerry Vines in his, *Power in the Pulpit*, says, "Sometimes the writer himself will give us a clue as to the meaning of the passage. John, for example, tells us why he included the particular miracles in his gospel in John 20:30-31. The reader is helped if he will remember John's purpose as he reads each of the miracles recorded. In his first letter John states several reasons for his epistles' composition. These reasons provide vital clues to the meaning of his material. John also gives the key to the meaning of revelation at the very beginning of the book, Revelation 1:9."

We read purposefully; secondly, we read obediently. This is where it begins to hit home because this is where sometimes when we study we leave our offices with our faces still back on the desk because God rips our faces off. This is where God exposes us. We're going to be

teaching this timeless truth and we go, "Wow! I've been running from this truth. I haven't been following this truth. This is going to be a difficult message to preach when I'm not living it myself." This is where we read obediently. Jerry Vines, "Once you begin to get a preliminary idea about the gist of the passage, one final approach should be to employ in your general reading. Read the text obediently. As you read the Scripture, your own heart will be confronted with many truths. The preacher must never confront his people with Bible truths that he himself has refused to face in his own life." Of course, James 1:22, let us not be simply hearers of the Word, but doers of the Word. That's why I think as pastors we grow because we're constantly confronting ourselves with God's Word. We know what the Bible says. So, judgment begins where? With the household of the faith, with us. We have to deal with it.

Robinson says, "Finding the subject and complement does not start when we begin construction of our sermons. We pursue the subject and the complement when we study the biblical text." Yes, we start reading the text, we start taking note, "because each paragraph, section, or subsection of the Scripture contains an idea, we do not understand a passage until we can state its subject and complement exactly." We can say it in 18 words. "While other questions emerge in the struggle to understand the meaning of the biblical writer, these two ("What precisely is the author talking about?" and "What is the author saying about what he is talking about?") are fundamental.

I want to quote from Dr. Warren Wiersbe's book, *The Elements Of Preaching*. I didn't bring that, I should've brought that. It's called *The Elements Of Preaching* by Warren Wiersbe. He says, "This proposition should have the following characteristics," and he gives six characteristics: 1) It should be biblical, a timeless truth that is worth preaching about. 2) It should be important and relevant to the needs of the congregation. 3) It should be definite and clear, uncluttered by abstract language or literary embellishments. 4) It should be accurate and honest and not promise more than the preacher can produce. You don't lay a foundation for a skyscraper and then build a chicken coop on it. 5) It should be interesting so that the listener is encouraged to want to listen to the development of the theme in the sermon. 6) It should usually be stated in the present tense, what God does for us today and not what He did for Moses centuries ago. "Jesus helped Peter when he was sinking," is a valid statement; but for a sermon thesis, it would be better stated, "In the storms of your life, your Savior is present to help you."

Examples of forming an idea, and he gives a couple of examples. These are really good examples. It's kind of fun. As we read through it, you'll be thinking it through. Check this out. Robinson says, "In some biblical passages the subject and the complement may be discovered with relative ease, but in others determining the idea stands as a major challenge. Psalm 117 is an example of an uncomplicated thought. The psalmist says, Psalm 117:1-2, 'Praise the LORD, all nations; Laud Him, all peoples! 2 For His lovingkindness is great toward us, And the truth of the LORD is everlasting. Praise the LORD!'"

We do not understand the psalm until we can state its subject. What is the psalmist talking about? We might be tempted to say that the subject is praise, but praise is broad and imprecise. The psalmist isn't telling us everything about praise. Nor is the subject praise of

God, which is still too broad. The subject needs more limits. Here's the subject: "Why everyone should praise the Lord." Notice the complement to this: "The Lord should be praised, first, because His love is strong, and second, because His faithfulness is eternal." There you go right there. That's a great two verses right there, and there's the thought and the complement, right there in those two verses. It's important to go through the process of stating the subject and the complement to get at the ideas. Ideas are slippery creatures that can easily escape your grasp.

Okay, here's another example: 1 Timothy 4:13, "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scriptures, to exhortation and teaching." So, the title is, "What Should The Focus Of Ministry Be?" That's a great title. Okay, so what's the idea, the subject? The church's ministry is to be centered in God's Word, and practiced through reading, preaching, and teaching. Do you see what he did there? He gave the thought along with the whole complement in 18 words. That's magnificent. In 18 words he just gave us the subject, and he gave us the complement. There it is. That's the sermon right there. There's a sermon in 18 words. So, now what do you do? Here's the complement. Here's how you outline it: 1) give attention to public reading of Scripture, you would explain that; 2) to exhortation; and then 3) and teaching. So, there's your subjects right there. It's public reading, exhortation, and teaching.

Let's look at some examples now and the central idea of the text and the thought of the passage. Okay, here it is: "What Makes God Angry?" This is Romans 1:18-23. Here's the thought of the passage, God's righteous anger is revealed against those who suppress the truth and to those who pervert the truth: 1) Verses 18-20, unbelief is suppression of truth; 2) verses 21-23, unbelief, perversion of truth. There you go. You've got the thought and the subject matter all in one verse. It's one little statement, little 18 words, you have that sermon put together.

"Faith Illustrated," Romans 4:1-16, the thought of the passage, God has provided salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from works, rituals, and rules: 1) Verses 1-8, Abraham's righteousness apart from works; 2) Verses 9-12, Abraham's righteousness apart from ritual; 3) Verses 13-16, Abraham's righteousness apart from law. There it is. Does that make sense? Even if you need to lie, tell me it is. Okay.

"Peace With God," Romans 5:1-11, the thought of the passage, being justified by faith results in being reconciled to God and rejoicing in His peace and security: 1) verse 1, peace with God; 2) verses 2-8, joyful hope; 3) verses 9-11, confident salvation. So, here's the summary. Subject/idea - the complete definite answer to the question, "What am I talking about?" Again, the central idea of the text, and the complement is the answer to the question, "What exactly am I saying about what I'm talking about?" is what it is.

I'll close with Jerry Vines. He says, "The lack of healthy organization understandably gives the impression that the sermon is rambling, structureless, never-ending message. Identifying the main thrust of the passage will give the sermon focus and clear direction." There's something I want to do, and I'll be totally open to this. I'm going to give you my e-mail address. If any of you

want to mess around with this and do this, just send me an e-mail. I'll get back to you in the next year or two, but...No, I'll get back to you. If you guys are preaching, you guys are teaching, you're going to put a message together, give me the passage that you're going to teach, and let's kind of go back and forth.

My assistant pastor is filling in for me tomorrow night, and he's going to be speaking. He gave me the thought of his passage, and I went back and said, "No, no, no, no. Okay, how are you going to explain the thought of the passage? It's too vague." Right then I started working with him. I wrote it down, "What about this?" We just started, both of us, playing with it. We have to do this, and we'll just work on it and work on it and work on it and pretty soon we'll get to the point and say, "This is really good. I mean, this says it. This is the thought of my passage, and then along with all of that it gives the complement, which is the outline, that explains it."

So, email is Terryhlebo@ccrialto.org. If you're going to preach a message, you're going to mess around a little bit, I want to see you do that; and I want to see your outline, I want to see your thought, and I want to see how it all comes together. Okay? Any questions about what we just talked about? I know, this is Academia 101. Man, we'll do it again in a minute, and we'll do it again tomorrow morning. I don't know how else to really convey all of this. You'd have to sit down systematically and take each one of these points and then just say it. I don't know how else you can get this across, but this is the heart of the message. It really is. I mean, if we can't get this, then I don't know what we're going to say. We have to say it, and this is the only way to do it. We have to find the heart of why God gave that passage. We have to, and then we have to give points. Okay?

You know what? I will say this, I've taught this class two times. I taught it in 2015, and I taught it in 2017. In 2017, when I taught this class the second time, I'd been doing it since. It's unfortunate, all those other years I didn't do this, but after I understood this, and I taught this, I taught through this book twice, I realized how important this really is. It is. I mean, it's like singing and you can't sing. It's like cooking the books and you can't add one plus one. I mean, this is it. This is it. So, 2017 is when I committed to doing that. I can go back through all my sermons and I don't care if I do a topical sermon, I give it a thought, I keep myself focused on that thought, and I keep myself focused on the outline that explains the thought, and I do that. I wish I could say that I started sooner, but it was from my reading and teaching this book two times that I finally said, "Okay, I got it." But, you don't have to do what I did. You could do it now.

Anybody else? You know what? It's interesting. Sometimes when you begin to study the passage, like yesterday I had a couple hours yesterday so I started working on Sunday, I'm doing Genesis 48. I started reading the passage, reading the passage, and I started working on it. I'm already working on it. It's funny, sometimes you can read the passage and right away you go...I just taught Genesis 47. The whole thought of the chapter is blessings. It's about blessing. I mean, Jacob stands before Pharaoh, he blesses him when he meets him; he blesses him when he leaves. The next passage, Joseph, it records all the blessings that Joseph brought to Egypt—the wealth that came to Egypt and everything else. The last blessing is Israel being blessed. They're given the best of the land, they're blessed, the whole thing is

blessing. It came pretty easy.

Sometimes, I think we'll talk about it in the next one, or maybe we'll talk about it Monday, it's like when that illustration comes or that thought comes, you grab it. It'd be nice if you could get it at the very beginning, but sometimes you just gotta keep working through the passage, working through the passage. You're looking up words, you're looking up phrases, you're trying to see the thoughts of it, and then finally you come across something and say, "That's it." It just becomes visible. I wish there was...and we're trying to explain how we do it, but sometimes it is that way. Sometimes it's not at the beginning, I wish it was. But as you work it through, your brain will begin to see the pieces starting to fit together, and you'll go, "Okay, I got this." So, there isn't a...you can't...it's not that simple, so you just have to be committed to doing it.

I do sit down and I purposely, after I've spent time in the passage, I sit down and attempt to write that thing out. I will work on it and work on it, and hey, even I start studying on Monday, I just do. Then, I study some on Tuesday, and you study a little bit Wednesday. Then, I study Thursday, Friday and then I finish it Saturday. So, I'm studying all the time. There's times during that time that I'll look at it again and say, "Ahh," and I'll change it again. I'll just keep working on it and working on it until I get to that point. I don't even know how to say this, you just know that you know that you know, that's it.

I don't know if that answers that, but...by the way, I don't know if it's the next one or not, it's like illustrations. When I come across an illustration, I have a folder, I drop it in the folder. You've got to take it when you can get it, and there are some wonderful illustrations, and you guys that have computers, I used to have scraps of paper, I had a file. I used to do like John does, have a paper file thing, and I would find an illustration, I would photocopy it, and put it into a little binder. Then, when I'm teaching I'd go, "Oh, I'm going to go through there," and you'll, because you saved it, it happens to meet the need at the moment. So, when you come across something, put it down. Put it down. Oh, this touches you, put it down. Grab it. Grab it when you can. Does that answer it?

You know what? I try to do it, just like I mentioned, I try to do it on my own, and then after I've exhausted that, that's when I read it. Right now I'm going through Genesis. I think I'm reading 21 books on Genesis, and I taught it like over 20 years ago, and I'm reading books I've never read before because I want to be challenged by some, so I'll read other books. Wiersbe is wonderful. We'll talk about this in our next session. He's one of the ones that you can buy his sets, and you won't be sorry you bought his sets. Some individuals, you'll buy their sets and go, "I'm sorry I bought those things," because they will excel in certain books and you'll go, "You can't do better than this." The next book you'll go, "Is that the book?" So, Wiersbe is wonderful. Wiersbe himself said with Maclaren, he goes, "I gotta be careful I don't read Maclaren or I'll preach Maclaren," so yeah, you've got to be careful because Wiersbe is phenomenal. He's hard to find fault with, he really is. He's a conservative. He loved the Lord. John had him out a couple of times, and it was wonderful. You had him out. He did a thing on preaching, and yeah, Dr. Wiersbe, what an awesome person.