

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Q & A on Preachers and Preaching, Part 1**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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#### **2000**

We thought we would extract some more good information from John by way of Q&A and thought I might today prime the pump with some things I want to draw out of him by a set of predetermined questions. And we're going to start off with a few prepared questions. All of this, you'll remember, started in our plane trip to San Francisco and we sat across the aisle from each other and you were reading John Piper's new book, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy* and just...we just began to talk about preaching. And out of it came a whole series of questions and a whole bundle of ideas that have turned in to what we're doing. Just one other preliminary thought and that is that if you go to the book on *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, you'll discover in chapter 19...a chapter with 26 questions already have been posed to John and answered, so we're not going to duplicate that. All of those have been answered there. While we were on the plane, you wrote out a little thing on a little piece of paper, you probably remember this, giving it to me, and you talked about the Master's Seminary's purpose of training men to display the glory of God by the exposition of God's Word. You might want to elaborate just a little bit, that's a little different take on preaching.

JOHN: Well, I think the ultimate goal of everything is to glorify God. I think we've affirmed that from the standpoint of Scripture, that in all things God would be glorified, that whatever you do whether you eat or drink, 1 Corinthians 10 says, you do it all to the glory of God. The ultimate end of everything is the glory of God. That, of course, is...is made evident when you get a glimpse of heaven and every being in heaven is occupied with glorifying God so that preaching is just another way to glorify God. And the way it does it is by the exposition of Scripture. God is glorified when He is made manifest, when He is revealed and He is revealed through the pages of Scripture. So the purest and truest expression of preaching is ultimately then to the glory of God. And when we are faithfully expositing the Word of God, we are, by doing that, bringing glory to the God of Scripture who is revealed there.

DICK: That would be a real indictment of man-centered preaching.

JOHN: Totally.

DICK: The preaching that glorifies the preacher and glorifies the audience.

JOHN: Yeah, I think you have to come to the conviction that the whole purpose of your life and the whole purpose of everything you do and particularly the purpose of preaching is to glorify God, regardless of what happens to people in the process. I mean, in the end, that is in the power of God and in the purposes of God and in the counsel of God to do what He will do in the lives of people doesn't dispossess them of responsibility, but in the end it's God's...it's God's power and plan that unfolds. And the goal of preaching is not manipulation. I mean, that's why I've said through the years, even when we preach we have to stop short of manipulating people's will, short of singing 48 verses of "Just as I am," or whatever else may manipulate people, I think we...we come to the point where in our preaching the purpose is to glorify God and when people understand who God is, that becomes a proper motivation for the right response.

DICK: In today's literature on preaching and discussions, you get preachers together and they start talking, one of the politically correct words they use is, "I'm an expositor, I do exposition." And I don't want to migrate fears...or there are hundreds upon thousands upon ten thousands of preachers who claim to be an expositor and are anything but... So here would be a very, very significant question in your minds...what are the key features, kind of the sine-qua-non that would distinguish a real expositor from one who claims to be and, in fact, really is not...two or three elements that would make an expositor stand out.

JOHN: Well, first of all, to...to be legitimate an expositor, you have to explain the text. And that rarely occurs in preaching. And when I say "explain the text," you have to explain precisely what God meant when He inspired that text. I think maybe you can understand that, that's simple enough. That is not taking a text of Scripture, finding an outline and bouncing your way through a homiletic...homiletical format. That is not explaining the text. Explaining the text means giving to the people precisely the message that God intended when He revealed that Scripture. That's going to take you beyond superficiality because frankly, there isn't anything superficial about the mind of God. And there isn't anything cute or clever about the mind of God. Everything about the mind of God is profound. Everything about the mind of God is systematic. Everything about the mind of God is clear. Everything about the mind of God is cohesive. Everything about the mind of God is orderly. And that is how the text should be explained and a true expositor is involved in explaining the intention of God in the revelation of that text which means you have to reconstruct the context, not only the book context but the historical, geographical, even the...I suppose you could say...the cultural context which might include religion and philosophy and history and all of that that makes communication communication at a given point of time. So that's what true exposition does. There are a lot of people who bounce around the Bible and there are people who find an outline and do some homiletics in a passage of Scripture, but that doesn't necessarily explain the intent of God in the text.

DICK: And so many would call it contextual preaching which is one element. Others would call it exegetical preaching which means they've grappled. I think Calvin described it defined it in two terms, just two words that are easy to remember, and it starts with explication and application, that was kind

of his basic....

JOHN: Well I think whatever the terms are, and, you know, terms come and go and get redefined, even the term exposition by virtue of your question, you're indicating to me, has been redefined from what we would understand it to be. So we keep losing terms to those people who want to redefine terms to accommodate their...their less than commitment...less than strong commitment to what they really mean. So I would say whatever the term is you use, if you're going to do Bible exposition, you're going to explain the original intention of God who inspired the author with that text. And again, when you do that, inevitably you're going to put God's glory on display because God's glory is woven into the fabric of every text.

DICK: Let me move from the concept to the practice and within the framework of you always desiring to be an expositor and driving to be an expositor from the time you started here in 1969 till today, how has your preaching changed within the framework of that common definition of exposition?

JOHN: Well, you know, I don't think that style-wise it's changed a lot, two things, probably, have changed. One is, I know more now than I used to know.

DICK: That's important...

JOHN: And I'll know more next week than I know this week. And I'll know more next month than I know this month because I continue to study and I continue to read. So there's a progress in information that makes my preaching progressively deeper and wider and higher and longer, in that sense. (Laughter) And I've saved longer for the last. But that's inevitable. And I don't mean I preach longer a given sermon, it just takes me longer to get through a given text.

DICK: So that would explain why when you came you'd go through a book of the Bible in a matter of months.

JOHN: Well not necessarily. The reason I did that early on was because I came in to a church and I'm sure most of you don't know this, this church was founded by a Methodist, a historic Wesleyan, Arminian Methodist pastor by the name of Don Householder. He came out of the Trinity Methodist Church in Los Angeles, founded this church. And...and the next pastor was Dr. Richard Elvey, and they were both good men, honorable men, faithful men. Dr. Elvey would have been a step kind of removed from Dr. Householder but Dr. Elvey's ministry, he was very short because he, as his predecessor both died of a heart attack. So they...Dr. Householder didn't have...well he had about a twelve-year ministry, and Dr. Elvey, a very brief ministry here. So I felt it was necessary to come in and sort of teach some theology. The doc...the church had a doctrinal statement that was about that long, literally. And the motto of the church was that old thing in essentials unity and non-essentials charity and most everything was a non-essential. So there was a tremendous amount of charity when

it came to doctrine. And I felt that I could take the long road, you know, going through a book, but probably would serve my ministry here better if I laid a pretty firm foundation. So immediately I did a rapid-fire series on the book of Romans and I actually did go through the sixteen chapters of Romans in about half a year and...but I did that on purpose because I felt like I needed to really capture the argument of the book on a big scale and I didn't think people would maintain that argument very well if I got too bogged down because they didn't have any frame of reference for that. And so that's why I did that.

At the same time I did that, I did preach through the gospel of John just in those same early years and I preached in the gospel of John for about three and a half years. So it...it really was by design that I went rapidly through Romans in order that I might move them to a firmer base theologically. But back to the original question.

The two things that have changed, as I said, what has changed is that I know more now just because of all these years of studying and reading. And secondly, that has prolonged my going through a book because what I now perceive as a deeper and truer understanding of the text is informed by all these years. So there is a sense in which I gave them, you know, maybe in the early years, I gave them all that I knew that was there, but I really didn't know everything that was there.

DICK: Yeah, your treatment of Ephesians that you went through earlier and then later would be a good thing to look at to see the difference.

JOHN: Right. And I can honestly say, too, Dick, that I think I went through Romans three times and each time it took me longer. The first time was by design to be brief. The second time I thought I was getting at it. The third time it took me longer because...not that I interpreted the text any differently, but that I could see the depth and the richness of what was there. And I think that's part of progress. You know, 1 Timothy 4 Paul says to young Timothy, "Let your progress be known to all men." And I think the people in the church certainly should see that progress. It should be evident as your ministry goes on. Now, I think maybe caught up in the early years of ministry, somebody might say, "Well you didn't spend time in study." I did, I spent as much time then in preparation, probably more time than I do now. It's just that as time goes on, the well gets a lot deeper. And your...your learning Scripture from other books that you're preaching that inform the passages you're working with at the present time too, so that enriches you.

DICK: You've been doing this now for about 32 years here and long after most guys would have resorted back to the first two-thousand messages I preached, and just kind of warm them up and put them out. What is it that keeps you...or who is it that keeps your feet to the fire of exposition? What fires your jets on a daily, weekly, monthly basis that's made you faithful to that for a lifetime?

JOHN: Well, I just feel it's...it's the greatest thing that I can do with my life. I mean, I can do something else, but it wouldn't have anything near the value of what this does. This is what I've been called to do, this is my passion. This is what I love. I don't know that the preaching is particularly the first love. The discovery is really the first love. I mean, I am tremendously energized even now in the preparation. And it isn't that I love the work, it isn't that I love to fuss around with Greek verbs. In itself that's work. But I love what it yields. I love what it yields. I love the discovery of the truth because I'm so caught up in the wonder of the mind of God. To me what makes preparation exhilarating is this is the mind of God, this is getting to know God. This is understanding the Lord that I love and serve. That is what challenges me. It isn't that I need a sermon. Frankly, I could get up on a Sunday with no preparation and probably keep people interested for a while. I've done it. (Laughter) I don't know how long I could do it, but...

DICK: Not recommended.

JOHN: Well I wouldn't want to do it years ago, but I mean now, you know, I can pull it out of the air from past study. But what drives me is this amazing exhilarating discovery of nuances in the mind of God, tremendous depth and...and profundity that I find revealed in the pages of Scripture. That's the thrill to me. And, of course, once I capture that, then there's a certain amount of energy and passion with which I want to communicate that with others. But I would say it is that...it is that. And I think that's built on my view of Scripture and my view of what preaching is intended to do. I have a very high view of Scripture and I daresay I don't know how a person could be a sustained expositor if they didn't have that. I mean, even if you have the view of Scripture say of Mark Knoll or people like the guy at Cambridge who has written a book on justification, Allister(?) McGraph(?), these guys who equivocate on ...on a firm view of inerrant Scripture, I don't know how they could really be a lifelong expositor because you...you have to have that high view of the text so that you literally bring your soul into utter submission to every text and you believe that in that text God is going to manifest Himself in supernatural truth. Now that is what drives me...

DICK: So you're driven by your theology.

JOHN: Driven by my view of Scripture and I'm driven by the fact that I believe in every passage of Scripture God is on display and His mind is on display. In fact, I...I think I tried to say this when I was talking about this. The greatest defense of the Scripture is the Scripture itself because the genius of it manifests the mind of God. It can't be human. The very depth of it is so overwhelmingly divine, and so it speaks for itself. I think that's what drives me is that sense of the truth of Scripture and the revelation of God in it. And that's back to the original statement that I made, I believe a true expositor...that's what we want to train here...is trained to reveal the glory of God through the exposition of Scripture. I just want to put God on display...the wonder of God, the wonder of God in Christ, the wonder of the Spirit of God and the mighty work that the trinity does.

DICK: One of the things that I observed when I first met you in 1980 was you're an avid reader. And, of course, everyone expects you're going to read to study for a message. But the one thing I discovered quickly is you read beyond your prep. You used to study here at the church.

JOHN: Right.

DICK: Four days a week for your messages. Today you're studying at home. But I can remember you always talked about a stack of books and journals you had next to your little recliner at home and each night you'd sit down and read some. Maybe you could explain a little bit of what that habit has done to benefit your preaching and the kind of books and journals you're interested in in reading.

JOHN: Sure. First of all, I had to get rid of the recliner, as I got older.

DICK: Okay. For the young guys that's okay.

JOHN: Yeah. For a young guy he can have a recliner. As you get older and...you've got to stay upright. (Laughter) First of all, your bifocals don't work when you're lying....Secondly, you're gone, you know. Well I can only tell you, I...over the weekend I reread Dr. Thomas' book on Biblical...Choosing a Version of Scripture because I just need to refresh my mind on the lower criticism area on the manuscript things. I just...just really needed to kind of update myself on that. I found it very helpful. I'm in the process of reading the biography of David Brainard written by Jonathan Edwards, it's a rather long, 600 page edition of that biography, but that's a classic missionary biography that really, I don't know if people know this, but it was Jonathan Edwards really editing of David Brainard's missionary journals. You know, Brainard died in 1747 and he didn't even get launched into missionary service until 1742, his life only lasted five years. He had tuberculosis when he started and spent most of those very rigorous times coughing up blood and died five years later, but it was his biography that affected really literally all the missionaries in that came out of that era that you would know anything about, everybody from Henry Martin, William Carey, you just name them, they all had read Jonathan Edwards' stuff on David Brainard. And so, I'm reading that because I just...there are some rich, rich things in the life of Brainard in terms of his personal humility. He was the most self-effacing person, had no confidence in himself and his biography had a tremendous impact.

I just read the other day because it was sent to me and because he's a friend, Irwin Lutzer's (?) book, Ten Lies About God which I found just kind of things I was familiar with, but Lutzer has a good way of saying things and he's very right. At the front of the book he shows that if you don't have the right view of God, everything is skewed. And that's back to the whole idea that people who don't sit in Bible exposition never really get the right view of God. And if you sit in man-centered preaching, you may be pretty good on the superficial view of man and you're really woefully limited on the view of God.

I also read another book that...this last weekend...that was sent to me by Steve Lawson called Made In His Image and it's a little paperback about a couple hundred pages in which he shows the tragic results of seeker-friendly kind of preaching. And essentially it's the same thing, it cheats people out of understanding God. And since you basically, literally cannot live the Christian life to the place that God wants you to live it, unless you're lost in wonder, love and praise, unless you're consumed with who God is, this cheats the church as well. So I didn't choose to read those books because I was thinking about that, I read them because they were...they were sent my way. So just anything that I think is going to sharpen my focus, I tend to read books on theology and biographical books written by people who have a handle on theology.

A great book that you men need to read is Pierce Carey's biography of William Carey. That's great reading, redone by Peter Masters from Metropolitan Tabernacle. That is an outstanding biography. It's really a very great help to me in understanding why God uses certain people. And if you look at these people, what you find in common is this incredible tireless self-discipline. And, of course, in the case of Jonathan Edwards, you ask, "How can Jonathan Edwards be doing what he's doing, writing what he's writing, preaching constantly in his church and at the same time writing a massive biography on David Brainard?" Just the tirelessness of these people, Calvin and Luther and their prolific lives and producing things. I told the missionaries over in Italy and I told the Italians, I said God's going to turn history on great preaching and He's going to turn it on people who have a far-reaching impact. And it isn't going to come out of one sermon, it's going to come out of a body of work. You know, there are people over in Italy like there are everywhere in the world, missionaries sitting around in seminars, ad infinitum ad nauseum trying to come up with strategies and what God is looking for is some relentless prolific preacher and teacher whose body of work literally impacts a whole civilization. And that comes out of...you can't do that long haul unless you're in the Word because...otherwise you're going to wind up...you know, I talked to a guy recently who left the pastorate and I said, "What are you going to do?" He said, "Well I've discovered this little truth about marriage and I'm going to spend the rest of my life going around sharing that truth." And frankly, you know, I said, "Well welcome to the...welcome to a useful...a uselessness. I mean, you've gone...you've just entered into a wasted life. You can run around...run around the rest of your life telling people that same little thing? You know, don't you realize what's there?" I mean, here I am after all these years and I haven't begun to exhaust...I mean, I'm just barely getting to the end of the New Testament and there's the whole Old Testament. I mean, look at Genesis, I can't even...I can't even get through that thing at any kind of pace that would ever even hopefully imagine I could cover the Old Testament. I mean, if I die in the second half of Genesis, this would be good. (Laughter)

DICK: Moving on to a more positive thought...in the middle of Genesis. I think most people would think a pastor sits down on Monday and starts to figure out what he's going to preach about on Sunday and that's his weekly plight. You seem to have started some time before that, at least in your mind thinking, where you're headed and what you're going to do, so that the question would be just in

this sense, how many weeks ahead do you really start to think about a message before you actually deliver it? What's the dynamic in the study that allows for that?

JOHN: Well I think one of the things that you must do when you start a book is read the whole book because you don't want a muffin interpretation in chapter one and get hit between the eyes in chapter 4 when it gets straightened out because there's something in the book that implies that your original understanding is wrong. And, you know, that's very...a very real issue. So when I start a book, I will read that book so that I, you know, know the whole flow of the book and then I will read many introductions because I find and I get commentaries that typically..I know when I write my commentaries, I don't do a lot with introduction, but I don't even write the introduction to a commentary until I've completed the book and then I go back and put the introduction together because I can't explain an overview of the book until I've expounded the book, unless I want to run a pretty high risk of what I think is there. So I think commentators do that as well. That's pretty much the traditional way. You write a commentary, then you go back and you put the introduction together because now you understand what's in the book.

And so typically when I start a book, I read through a lot of introductions so that I get an overview and that I get the issues and the problems and the things. In the Study Bible, for example, the material that's in the introduction is the product of the study of the book. It's not preliminary to it. So that...that gives me a sense of the flow of the book. And then once I get in to the book, I know where the book is going. I mean, I'm reading ahead of what I'm preaching. But in actual work, I don't do the actual work until the week I preach it. So when I come to begin that study typically maybe Monday, but surely on Tuesday I really start to grapple with things. I...I already know what's in the text because typically I've done some preparation. I mean, like I'll prepare sometimes five verses, only preach one...so I'm already ahead for the next week. Like this week I'm going to go back to Genesis chapter 4 but I...I...where did I get to? Verse 4 or 5, and I've already prepared through verse 16. So this week I just have to do some refining. So I'm ahead of myself. But typically I don't actually do the work until that Tuesday when I launch everything...but I know where I'm going.

DICK: But you know what work you're going to do when you get there.

JOHN: I just don't know how long it will take me to get through that until I get into it.

DICK: Another practical question that I think is important. Your preaching is known to be concise, it's clear, the synthesis is there. People are saying, "Now I see it," having heard your explanation. Most preachers would love to be that clear. The question is, what process, what reflective process, what process of analysis do you go through on a regular basis to clarify and crystalize in your mind the central truths of a particular passage you're going to preach that really makes you stand out from most preachers?



JOHN: I...I have no idea. I don't know why...

DICK: This is the Babe Ruth technique.

JOHN: No, I have absolutely no idea. I mean, maybe you should tell them...why I don't know, you're objective, you're sitting out there listening. I don't know why it's clear. I mean, I don't know why when I study a passage it comes out clear other than to say I...and I'm saying this in all honesty...I really believe that I'm just trying to understand it for myself and I just...I'm just really not some great intellect. I mean, I'm just a normal person and I think that's why when I understand it, other normal people understand it. (Laughter) I really believe that. I'm...I just think I have to work at it to understand it. And once I've understood it, anybody can understand it. Because I think it's...I think I just have the sort of normal mind and I can approach things in a pretty typical way. I don't know why that is. I don't know why what is clear to me is clear to other people, other than to say I...maybe the Lord just wired me to..to be the preacher to every man, you know.

DICK: I think that's part of it. I think that's part of it. But as I've observed John in various settings in the present, you have an insatiable curiosity, you have a curiosity level and drive that goes way beyond the average human being. So if you can get a curiosity pill to up your level, would be a long way. Secondly, there's the drive of the athlete that you were that comes into your study, which is part of your personality that says "I'm not going to quit till I've got this thing wired." But thirdly, there's a reflective process I think in your study. You tend to move fast in what you do which gives you a little more time to sit back and just reflect and think, and even, I think, in your explanations about prayer that you're preaching, but it's a constant attitude of prayer, and asking the Lord to show you the meaning, that you've carved out time to reflect and think and clarify and get rid of the dross.

The other thing that you do and you mention it but I'm not sure it was emphasized is typically when a guy gets the first draft of his message, he thinks the job's done and he's ready to go and go play golf or do whatever. But once you get your first draft, you're going to refine it two, three or four more times before you...

JOHN: Yeah...If I had been preaching my first draft all these years, I would have been out of the ministry long ago. I mean, that's just a starting point.

DICK: I think that multiple processing of that helps a great deal. I think the other part is you're committed walking into the pulpit with a manuscript that's not pure prose, it's not a manuscript ready to go to press as a chapter, but what you've studied...you might want to comment on why you think that's so beneficial on the long run and maybe a habit men ought to develop from day one.

JOHN: There's a couple of things. What contributes to this reflective process is...read...I read myself clear. Okay? I read until it's clear. Read the Scripture till its clear, read whatever commentary, whatever theology...I just keep reading and reading and reading until it's clear in my mind. And then I...in the manuscript...I write until I think it's logical. I really...I believe God is infinite logic, I think God is infinitely logical. He is the ultimate in reasonableness so that you have to come to the fact that this is not bits and pieces of spiritual stuff sort of hung at random out there, but that there is an absolute infinite, logical, reasonable genius, the likes of which can only exist in the mind of God, and that this thing should come out so reasonable, so clear because that's true...the mind of God, His mind is so perfectly ordered. And so I read and I study until it is clear in my mind, crystal clear. And then I write until I have been able to take that clarity and put it down.

So the rough draft for me is lots of bits and pieces that are forming that clarity in my mind. But if someone were to pick up that rough draft and I've stored them away, you know, just kept some of them, not all of them, somebody in the future might pick those up and wonder, you know, how the message ever came out clear. But if you were to pick up my final draft, you would see that it went from the bits and pieces of that struggle for clarity into writing it out clearly. And I'm not necessarily looking for words and I'm not trying to be prosaic, and look in a dictionary and find synonyms and long words and fancy words and clever words, I'm not trying to come to you in clever words of man's wisdom. What I want is to write that out crystal clear in terms of its sequential flow and I find that reading myself clear and then writing myself clear is an important process. And between those two things is that...is that reflectiveness, is sitting back and saying, "Now how do I...how do I work this into clarity?" And truthfully I, you know this because we do this, I can talk myself clear, I can talk out something and in that process clarify it in my mind, better than I can sit back and do it. And I can write it and clarify it better than if I just sit back cause I can't always recapture it. But if I write it...that's why I prepare with a pen. I...because I think through my writing.

DICK: Yeah.

JOHN: I clarify it.

DICK: I think it's significant to the outcome of what it is you're going to do.

Let me...this might put you on the spot, it might not...but you're ready to launch in to Luke 5 when you get back to Luke...

JOHN: I've got to finish 4...yeah.

DICK: Take Luke 5:1 to 11 which is Jesus and Peter and Peter falls at his feet and says, "Depart from me," and so on and so forth. How would you approach that text? As you've come through Luke 1, 2, 3 and 4 and you're ready to do 5, just your basic approach to that.

JOHN: Well, in all honesty I haven't really gotten there yet because I have to finish 4. And I've been thinking about the...there are some things at the end of chapter 4 with regard to healing which are very, very important, and they are the first healings in the gospel of Luke. So I know that is coming and before I get in to Peter in chapter 5, "Depart from me for I'm a sinful man," and that's a great section, before I get to that I'm...I'm in the process right now of thinking through...how am I going to present to the people this matter of healing? I can't just say well here's a healing because to the reader this is the first healing ever did. If you're only reading the gospel of Luke, this is new. So just what I did with the demon passage, I have to expand on what I think is important to understand with regard to how Jesus dealt with demons and expand that whole thing and deal with it in contrast to what we're seeing today in quote/unquote deliverance ministries. So I'm going to have to...I'm going to have to get your book on When the Healing Doesn't Come and go through some of your cataloging and listing and read some other things and go back to some of my notes and some of the material I've written in the past, and frame up a context for the people to understand this healing in the broader picture of the gospel accounts and healings as it's revealed in the New Testament and throughout biblical history. So I'm really at the point now where I'm pulling back some of that material and trying to catalog that in my mind because not next Sunday, but maybe the Sunday after I'll get into that. So I'm sort of pre-thinking that. The passage in 5 is a rather simple narrative passage to deal with that illustrates a great point. And I kind of know where I'm going with that, it's only a matter of framing it up.

DICK: Let's talk about, a little bit, about moving from the...from the study part and the exegesis and filling your dump truck full of all kinds of info and ideas and theology and so forth. After you've done all that hard work that primarily is what our curriculum is all about, the exegesis classes, the theology classes, hermeneutics and so on, how do you pull it all together? I mean, you've got this mass of material, you're like every other preacher, he's not going to preach at all, he'd kill his audience if he tried to, how do you decide what you're going to put in and what you're going to leave out? What tact you're going to take? How you going to build interest in it? Still be true to the text?

JOHN: The first thing I do is create an outline, and that doesn't come till the very end. And I know once I've got an outline, then I've got some kind of a process that I can take people through. That is, to me, a practical thing. That's...that's an application thing, in a sense, cause now I'm moving away from just the understanding of the text into manageable material. And before people can apply it, they have to be able to manage it mentally. So I create the outline. And then where I think there needs to be an illustration, a biblical illustration or whatever kind of illustration, I'll stick that in. Now I've got material that I think is ready to preach.

I don't exactly know even then how it's going to come out. And that's the adventure of it. And that's why typically I can't always preach a sermon. Like I prepared for Sunday, one sermon for the morning, one at night, I couldn't preach through either one. And that's because in the dynamic of

preaching I do some of my best thinking, at least to me. It may not be the case to the people listening. (Laughter) But my mind...my mind is never more...never more alert and never better at processing information than when I'm preaching because it really is a desperate...you're running in a desperately acute level and my mind functions well at that point and so I'm saying things I didn't necessarily think of. They're in the flow of the process. They're in the progress of logic and it's pulling things that I never wrote in my notes, but I studied, there's a dynamic there. There's an adventure there that I never want to be a slave to what I've prepared. I...that's the work of the Holy Spirit. That's, you know, that's just that wonderful dynamic that happens in preaching. And since I don't believe that there's any necessary spiritual benefit in the homiletics, I'm not a slave to that. I do think the benefit comes in the truth and the clarification of the truth is the issue, whether you make it through the outline or not. So I just take what I have there. I know the well is much deeper. I've made some choices in what I've put down, but I sometimes leave something out that I can't get rid of when I start preaching. It comes back and I think it's...it's necessary to achieve what I need to achieve at that moment. And I think a lot of that is I have to believe is prompted by how the Spirit of God is pulling that truth together and how my mind is assembling that information at the time I'm preaching.

DICK: Yeah, one of the things you men might want to do is go to the back of rediscovering expository preaching and there's a facsimile of a preaching manuscript from a message in 1 Timothy 6, the man of God, and get a copy of the tape. We suggested this is the preaching ???, get a copy of the tape from Grace To You and sit down and listen to the tape with the preaching manuscript in front of you and discover what he didn't preach that's in the manuscript and what he did that's not there just in terms of the dynamic, which I think putting it in manuscript form opens up a freedom to do that kind of thing, than if you walked in with a little 3x5 card or try to preach without notes at all, your mind is so cluttered.

JOHN: Well and I'm not that smart. You know, Spurgeon had a 3x5 card with like three lines on it and it's ridiculous to think of what he said coming out of his head, but it did. You know, he spent a couple of hours preparing a sermon, all week reading, and a couple of hours coming down with three little lines on a card.

DICK: Photographic memory helps.

JOHN: Yeah, and I don't have that. Plus, I also in the future, if you're going to exposit the Scripture, I want to write it out because, you know, if I write down two or three words about something, you know, I come back later, three years, I look back at those notes, what does that mean? It doesn't mean anything to me because I can't remember everything I said. So the more full that manuscript is, the more I'm able to retrieve that same information at a future time and if I'm interpreted it properly the first time, then I can put that away and use it again.. Now in my life, preaching now when I do cross-referencing, I go back to my notes if I haven't written a commentary on it. If I have a commentary, I can always look at that. But I'll go back to my notes and see how I handled that. Sometimes I'll go to

my notes before I go to a commentary because the notes are more condensed.

DICK: The question is often asked...I remember Keith Willheight(?) who now teaches at Dallas, that his PhD. dissertation at Purdue and it was a comparison of you and Chuck Swindol and your style of preaching, both had been in your church about the same amount of time at about the same time the book of Galatians. And his conclusion was you were a texturally oriented preacher and Chuck was an audience-oriented preacher. So the question is...I know you don't totally ignore the audience...from your perspective, how important is audience-orientation, and maybe we define that by application? One of the students put it this way, do you preach in order to invoke a specific response from your hearers? And if so, how does this affect your preparation and delivery?

JOHN: More important than me ignoring the audience is the audience ignoring me. So I want to be sure they don't ignore me. In all honesty, I don't really know...I don't really know that I take the audience into consideration at all in my preparation. By that I mean, I don't think to myself, now will they get this or do I need to simplify it? I learned through the years that if I get it, they tend to get it. I don't say, "Well such-and-such might be there and so-and-so might be there, so maybe I ought to say this or that, or not say this or not say that?" That never enters my mind.

DICK: So you sort of leave that over to the Spirit of God to apply it.

JOHN: Well my assumption is this is the Word of God for His people and my responsibility is to deliver it and God knows what His people need. And God has made it clear to them and the Spirit of God will take the Word and apply it to their lives. One of the reasons I don't say...Now, okay, now after this sermon here are five things I want you to do...is because those might not be the five things the Holy Spirit wants them to do. I don't need to do that. I don't need to tell you, "Okay, now we've talked about this, now here's what I want you to do. Go do this...go do this...go do this." What I want to do is change your thinking, I want to change the way you think about God, the way you think about Christ, the way you think about the Word of God, the way you think about your life, the way you think about everything. And as you think, you are, right? So I'm really just trying...I'm trying to change people's minds. I'm trying to fill people's minds with the truth and the truth then controls the way they behave. I don't need to come to them and say, "Now, do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that," I mean, there's a place for that in general. But you don't even find that in the epistles, any kind of specificity. You find general commands in the epistles of Paul as he writes to the churches to avoid immorality, or this or that or that of the other thing. He doesn't...he doesn't become specific about things and all the instruction about marriage, you know, he doesn't say put a frozen teddy-bear in a love note in the freezer so your wife will go get the lasagna and get the frozen teddy bear and she'll come, you know, she'll remember you love her. I mean, you know that kind of stuff. That was in a book, by the way. But so...I don't...I'm only trying to....I'm only trying to bring the Word of God to bear on how people think...how they think about God, how they think about their lives, how they think about the truth and I think that has its own impact. So I...this is an interesting thing you ask me,

because I...I preach here, I go to Italy, I go to Ukraine, I go to wherever I go, to Brazil, I go anywhere and everywhere, Grace To You goes anywhere and everywhere without regard to what's going on in the audience, we essentially get exactly the same response. And I have...I have not purposely tried to ignore the society around us, but the Word of God is itself sharper than any two-edged sword, right? It cuts and it cuts in a very penetrating way.

DICK: So two generic responses...you're always preaching for understanding and obedience without particular regard for a language group or couple...

JOHN: Yeah, that's a good way to say, preaching for understanding and obedience and the Word of God changes how people think and how they think then controls how they act. And then that manifests itself in the areas of life.

DICK: Let me ask..I think we've got time for one more question. When you came here in 1969 the people didn't have the appetite for the Word that they have today 32 years later, or even five years after you were here. Any tips on how to...if I can put it this way...grow an appetite in a congregation that's not used to expository preaching without sort of jamming it down their throat and killing them in the first six months you're there and looking for a new pulpit because you've got a dead congregation?

JOHN: I would say do two things. Preach exposition that exalts Jesus Christ. Nobody will argue with that. So preach a gospel, preach Hebrews. Preach Colossians. Preach particularly the gospels because the text is narrative largely, it has drama, it has pathos, it has interests. That's...rather than going in there and say, doing a series on the church or a series on...you know, trying to change the church. Preach Christ, exalt Christ.

And secondly, preach material that is going to have a dramatic effect on their own spiritual lives. And if they see the power of the Word of God to change their lives, they'll be open to the power of the Word of God to change their church. So that's essentially what I try to do. I came and I preached the gospel of John, and that's just powerful material and Christ was being exalted all the time. You who have come here, you know I've been going through Luke. There isn't anybody, whether they're used to exposition or not, who is not compelled by...by Luke's gospel. It's just powerful stuff. And it's dramatic. And I think that's...that's, you know, exalting Christ is critical. It should be being done all the time anyway.

And then I think emphasizing the things that change people's lives before you go in and try to restructure the church. And I did that by getting in to Ephesians and in Ephesians we were just talking about how we were, you know, once dead in trespasses and sin and how the Lord had changed our lives. And now we need to walk worthy. And we got in to all of that and we saw the Lord begin to change some lives. And then they were eager to have Him change their...the church. And it was after

that I went in to the book of Acts and showed how the church ministered. And then I went in to 1 Corinthians to show what the church needed to be. And we got more refined in that area. So I would say exalt Jesus Christ, lift up Christ, lift up God. Preach the Psalms.

I went clear through, people don't know this here in the early years, I went clear through Psalm 76 after going through the Old Testament on Wednesday nights. And in those early years we filled this place on Wednesday just like we did on Sundays. So I used Wednesday to go through the kind of over-viewing the books of the Old Testament and then taking one Psalm. I did that through Psalm...I think...76 before starting to do different things on Wednesdays.

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