THE REQUIREMENT OF PRAGMATICS IN A HERMENEUTIC FOR HOMILETICS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON PREACHING

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Introduction

Communication is the intricate process of encoding and decoding information between two parties, a speaker and a hearer or an author and a reader.¹ In discourse, the interchange between the two parties is an inferential activity involving the expression and recognition of not only information but also that of intentions.² In other words, the act of communication itself, whether written or spoken, involves the conveyance of both what is said (semantic meaning) and what is meant by what is said (pragmatic meaning).³ To understand the latter, one must first consider the former as well as any contextually available information.

For instance, suppose someone says, “That person is in the grip of a vice.”⁴ Given a basic understanding of the English language, but no further context surrounding the utterance, a literal interpretation might render the idea of a person trapped in the jaws of a metal tool used to


² Tim Wharton. Pragmatics and Non-Verbal Communication (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2. Verbal communication is more than a simple encoding/decoding process and as such any attempt to characterize that communication should reflect that it is an inferential activity involving both the articulation and acknowledgment of intentions.

³ Abraham Kuruvilla, Privilege the Text: A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching (Chicago: Moody, 2013), 56. Pragmatics is what the author is doing with what the author is saying. It is this transhistorical intention that conquers distanciation thereby making it last throughout the ages.

⁴ Paul Grice. Studies in the Way of Words (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 25. Grice provides this same example but draws the conclusion that to fully understand the meaning of the utterance one would need to know the identity of the person, the time of the utterance, and the meaning of the utterance on that particular occasion it was delivered.
hold objects firmly in place. However, the pragmatic meaning – the meaning *in context* – would likely convey a completely different picture altogether, one which portrays a person struggling to overcome an addiction or bad habit. This basic illustration demonstrates the necessity of implementing an interpretive method, a hermeneutic, which considers both semantics and pragmatics, understanding that the authorial doings are built upon the authorial sayings. This type of hermeneutic will henceforth be referred to as a *pragmatic* hermeneutic, not denoting its practical or logical sense but rather its requirement of an understanding of the authorial doings.

If a pragmatic hermeneutic is deemed valuable for the interpretation of *any* text, how much more beneficial is in the interpretation of the Bible, especially for Christians? While the Bible is indeed textual with similar features to that of any other text, such as having an author and referent, what differentiates the Bible from all other texts is that God Himself is both the author and referent, thereby making this a special text and hence requiring a special hermeneutic. No other text has the power of life transformation like the Bible, conforming humanity into the likeness of Jesus Christ and no other endeavor is geared toward life-change like preaching.

This paper will discuss the primacy of pragmatics as it pertains to a preaching hermeneutic, and the implications of that view on preaching. I will discuss why one’s view on pragmatics in preaching matters regarding spiritual formation and discipleship. Through this

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5 Scott M. Gibson, and Matthew D. Kim, editors, with Bryan Chapell, Abraham Kuruvilla, Kenneth Langley, and Paul Scott Wilson, contributors and responders. *Homiletics and Hermeneutics: Four Views on Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 51. Both semantics and pragmatics are essential for interpretation, in that pragmatics in built upon a solid understanding of the semantics.

6 2 Tim. 3:16 states that all scripture is God breathed. God is also the singular referent in that the Bible is all about Him and His relationship to creation.

7 Rom. 8:29-30, Gen. 1:26-27. The goal of restoring the image of God in humanity. Jesus is the picture of the perfect Man, the ideal world in front of the text that we are to be conformed to.
process I will take the position that biblical interpretation for preaching must include a hermeneutic which considers pragmatics. I will argue that without an understanding of the authorial doings, there can be no valid application which confronts its listeners with the truths of the biblical text and calls for their alignment to the will of God.

**Primacy of Pragmatics**

Pragmatics as an independent field of study is still a relatively new discipline within semiotics, finding its inception in the late 1930s by Charles Morris and Charles Pierce but experiencing a resurgence some thirty years later through the work of J.L. Austin, J.R. Searle and H.P. Grice. Morris is responsible for the classic threefold division, still widely in use today, between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics whereby syntax is concerned with “the relation of signs to one another”, semantics with “the relation of signs to objects”, and pragmatics with “the relation of signs to interpreters”. Rather than focusing on word or sentence meaning like his predecessors, Grice in the late 1960s focused on utterance meaning – what a speaker means by an utterance. According to Grice, what a speaker means by an utterance in discourse can be separated into two parts, the first being what the speaker said and second being what the speaker implicated by what the speak said. What ensued from Grice’s demarcation between that which is said (semantics) and that which is meant by that which was said (pragmatics) was a revival of great proportions which saw the field of pragmatics develop “more rapidly and diversely than

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9 Stephen Neale, “Paul Grice and the Philosophy of Language.” *Linguistics and Philosophy* 15, no. 5 (1992), 523-524. Accessed March 3, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25001485. Grice is best known for his innovative work in philosophy of language, but also made important contributions to metaphysics, ethics and to the study of Aristotle and Kant. He coined the terms “implicate” and “implicature” in order to draw a distinction between what the speaker was saying and what the speaker meant by what they were saying.
any other linguistic discipline”.

Ever since the 1970s, the rise in popularity in the field of pragmatics has spawned numerous offshoots specializing in the areas of cognitive, discursive, social, and historical pragmatics.

**Definition of Pragmatics**

Despite the phenomenal growth and popularity of pragmatics as a field of study, a widely agreed upon definition remains elusive. This is due in part to the problematic nature of drawing a line between semantics and pragmatics. On one hand you have those who would argue that task of semantics does nothing more than carry its literal meaning, and on the other hand are those hold that the “meaning of a linguistic expression is identical to its use.”

In contemporary linguistics, the narrow view of delineating pragmatics sometimes referred to as the “Anglo-American” tradition, defines pragmatics as a “methodical analysis of discourse with the endeavor of understanding what and how people mean by the use of language in a particular context with a particular goal in mind.”

In other words, the goal of pragmatics in the narrow sense is to uncover the intention of the author by what they are saying – *in context*, revealing what Kuruvilla calls the “authorial

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10 Bublitz Wolfram, and Neal R. Norrick, *Foundations of Pragmatics* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2011), 2-3. As a result of Grice’s work in 1970s, syntax and semantics are no longer privileged fields of linguistics as these have been replaced by pragmatics.


13 Wolfram and Norrick, *Foundations of Pragmatics*, 3. There are two general ways of delineating pragmatics, the narrow view [the Anglo-American] and a broad view [Continental/European]. The narrow view relies on the context of utterance meaning and is the view championed in this argument.
doings”

14, what Ricoeur calls the “world in front of the text”

15, and what Hirsch refers to as the “transhistorical intention”.

16 All three of these concepts bear witness that there is more to the text than just the surface-level semantics. Therefore, the function of ones’ hermeneutic must draw out and explicate the authorial doings of the text. This is particularly important for a preaching hermeneutic, as one considers the divine nature of the biblical text, for without an understanding of the authorial doings, there can be no valid application for life change.

Pragmatics, Preaching, and Pericopal Theology

In the context of preaching, the text is the Bible – the very word of God – divinely authored and communicated to humanity in written format with the intended purpose of life transformation, conforming us into the likeness of His son, Jesus Christ. 17 Considering then its intended purpose of life transformation, what portion of the Scriptures is considered a manageable size for both homiletical and liturgical use? The pericope (Gk. περικοπή, ‘section’) refers to a passage of the biblical text meant to be read in an ecclesial setting. 18 The public reading of the Scriptures has always been an essential element in the liturgical practice of the church. 19 Nehemiah 7:73b-8:12 describes the gathering of God’s people in a liturgical context for

14 Kuruvilla, Privilege the Text: A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching, 39. Kuruvilla states that pragmatics is what the author is doing with what the author is saying, the authorial doings of the text.


17 2 Cor. 3:18 tells us we’re “being transformed into the same image.” To be transformed into the same image is to be conformed to the resurrected and glorified Christ, to be made the same as He is (Rom. 8:29).


19 1 Tim. 4:13 Timothy is to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching. Set in a liturgical context, Neh. 7:73b-8:12 describes the formal gathering of God’s people, the public reading of and exposition of the biblical text, and the response of the hearers.
reading and exposition of Scripture with the intended purpose of covenant remembrance and renewal. It is through the public reading of the Scriptures, pericope by pericope, week in and week out, in an ecclesial setting that the faithful are confronted with the truths of the Bible. Only in this fashion, segment by segment, it is possible to encounter the enormous scope of the entire corpus of the Bible.

The pericope is manageable both in its conveyance and consumption as it provides both the speaker and listener a smaller segment of the entire corpus of the biblical text to work with. This smaller segment is no less authoritative, nor prescriptive than the entire corpus but rather carries with it equal weight and effectiveness in its ability to bring God’s faithful back into alignment with His will. As such, the intended purpose of the pericope is also that of the entire corpus – the transformation of lives for the Glory of God by the exposition and elucidation of the text, revealing the theological thrust while conveying it in such a manner that leads to the conviction of its hearers.

Therefore, as each pericope is preached segment by segment, week after week, lectio continua, there is a progressive, incremental transformation in the lives of the congregation, one pericope at a time with the goal of covenant renewal. This gradual realignment process is made possible in part because each pericope has its own theological thrust – each has its own pericopal theology. Unlike systematic or biblical theology which functions on a more general level


21 Kuruvilla, Privilege the Text, 91. Kuruvilla draws attention to the “self-contained” compact nature of the pericope which allows for a more focused consideration of the “depth and force” of the text.

22 Wesley A. Kort, “Calvin’s Theory of Reading.” Christianity and Literature 62, no. 2 (2013): 189-202. Lectio continua refers to a scheduling structure for preaching one which preaches through a book, verse by verse or section by section. Adopting Zwingli’s lectio continua approach to preaching, John Calvin followed this liturgical practice preaching through most of the Bible.
addressing broader themes, pericopal theology allows the preacher to focus on the specific matters germane to the text in that particular pericope. Systematic theology can however support pericopal theology in that it can provide a guardrail of sorts which helps to maintain consistency of the pericopal message with that of the overall canon. While it is imperative that the preacher focus on the particular pericope at hand, it can be beneficial to look beyond that specific pericope to the wider book, testament, and canonical context for both coherence and consistency.

**Implications of Pragmatics on Preaching**

The preaching of pericopal theology has been shown to be progressive in nature, seeking to incrementally reveal the world in front of the text which is God’s ideal world pictured in Scripture to His creation for the purpose of bringing them into alignment with His will. Through the weekly preaching of pericopal theology, one might begin to assemble these pericopal “puzzle pieces” into a clearer picture of God’s ideal world, enabling one to understand elements that might previously have been difficult to reconcile. In this light, the progressive revelation in pericopal theology is dispensational in nature.

The benefits abound in preaching pericopal theology, yet there appears to be a lack of traction within academia and a lack of scholarly interest. Why are homileticians slow to adopt a

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23 Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text*, 114. Both biblical and systematic theology operate at a general level whereas pericopal theology operates with more specificity.


26 A cursory search for scholarly resources referencing pericopal theology returns minimal results, mostly spearheaded by Dr. Kuruvilla. What does this say about the state of modern-day Homiletics when there is so little scholarly effort (other than Kuruvilla) being put forth on such a critical and crucial topic as pericopal theology?
hermeneutic which is centered on pericopal theology? A quick survey of one of the more popular and competing methods, Haddon Robinson’s “Big Idea”, is necessary.

A Survey of the “Big Idea”

The late Haddon Robinson coined the phrase the “Big Idea” in his Biblical Preaching which described his method of expository preaching whereby both the proposition (exegetical/homiletical) could be described in one unifying idea consisting of a subject and complement.27 While the Big Idea has gained traction with homileticians ever since the 1980s, the core issue in this approach is the reduction that occurs as one attempts to compress the sermon into one sentence.28 Kuruvilla refers to this sermonic compression as a “distillation of the text”, one which takes the pericope and attempts to abstract and synthesize the “Big Idea” from it.29

Any hermeneutic which analyzes the biblical text to gold-mine some essential truth or “Big Idea” from it, will inevitably – in the “refining” process – lose valuable cultural elements and be left with some distilled version of its former glory. In this distillation process a two-fold tragedy occurs as one not only loses the cultural elements which are the forensic evidence of the text’s authorial doings but one is also dangerously close to no longer requiring the plenary verbal inspiration of God’s word in settling for a distillation of it. The danger lies not only in the


29 Ibid., 828.
distillation of the text but the preaching of that distillation to a congregation who no longer
experiences what the original author intended, instead receiving a watered-down remake at best.30

In sum, the modern-day traditional evangelical sermonic machine receives the
biblical text (pericope) as input, compresses and distills it into a one-sentence, single serving
product which is then coated with textual proofs, sprinkled with illustrations, and tossed out to
the congregation for its weekly consumption. How did the church get to this point where we
settle for anything less than what the original author/Author intended for that pericope? Why
have preachers stopped discerning the authorial doings and the theology of the pericope? For
without discovering the theological thrust of the pericope there can be no valid application, and
without valid application there can be no life change.

Therefore, the essential element that stands in the heart of any sermon is the
theological thrust of the pericope as it not only reveals what the author is doing with what the
author is saying (transhistorical intention) but additionally offers a multiplicity of applications
both specific and relevant to its hears giving them “direction for life and godliness”.31 The
following section will take an exegetical look at a pericope in Genesis 39 with the intent to
discover its theological thrust, focusing on the move from pericope to praxis.

An Exegetical Look at Genesis 39:1-23

In the Joseph narrative, this pericope in particular focuses on Joseph’s integrity in
both slavery and imprisonment and how that enabled him to be an agent of divine blessing to
others. As an exercise to demonstrate how the theological thrust of the pericope is discovered,

31 Kuruvilla, A Vision for Preaching, 123. See “Relationship Precedes Responsibility” for an
understanding of how the call of listeners to the alignment of God’s will is sanctification-oriented not justification-oriented.
the initial step must involve a close inspection of the meaning, form, function, and relationship of words within the text (pericope).\textsuperscript{32} A careful review of this pericope reveals the use of a literary technique in narrative motifs called a chiasm.\textsuperscript{33} The chiastic structure of this pericope indicates why the Lord’s presence and prospering followed Joseph in every situation.\textsuperscript{34} The outer portion of the chiastic structure (A-A’) shows that the Lord’s presence was with Joseph both in slavery and imprisonment, his superiors – acknowledging the Lord’s presence with Joseph – showed favor to Joseph, and the Lord prospered both Joseph and his superiors. The central portion of the chiastic structure (B, C, B’) emphasizes the character of integrity required of those who are to be used as agents of divine blessing to others. The literary structure alone provides the necessary clues to the expositor that there is more to this pericope than simply the semantics – the author is doing something with what the author is saying! These forensic elements intentionally deposited by the author are left here as a hint to the authorial doings of the pericope, therefore further inspection is warranted!

A closer examination of the text reveals numerous parallels between sections A and A’. In 39:2 and 39:21, we see “the Lord’s presence with Joseph” (וַיְהִי יְהוָה אֶת־יֹוסֵף) both in slavery and imprisonment. Furthermore, we see the Lord’s “blessing” (ברך) of Potiphar and all he owned in 39:5 and the Lord’s “lovingkindness” (חֶסֶד) extended to the jailer and all he owned


\textsuperscript{33} Bernard M. Levinson, “At the Intersection of Scribal Training and Theological Profundity: Chiasm as an Editorial Technique in the Primeval History and Deuteronomy”, BYU Studies Quarterly, supplement (2020): 85. The chiasm is a literary device in which textual content is ordered in an ABCB’A’ chiastic or “x-shaped” pattern.

\textsuperscript{34} See “Chiastic Structure of Genesis 39:1-23” within this paper.
in 39:21. We not only see Joseph himself prospered in 39:2, but we see others “prospered” (צלח), same verb, in both 39:3 and in 39:23. The same Hebrew term (שר) is also used in reference to Joseph’s superiors both in slavery and in prison. Potiphar as “captain” in 39:1 and the jailer as “chief” in 39:21-23. Joseph was said to have found “favor in his [Potiphar’s] sight” (ח ֵ֛енн יָָ֖יו) in 39:4 and “favor in the sight of the chief jailer” (ח נֵֹ֔ו בְע ינ ָ֖י שַַׂ֥ר) in 39:21. In the striking amount of parallels witnessed in Joseph’s time both in slavery and imprisonment, the author is doing something with what the author is saying. The Hiphil participles in 39:2-3 and 39:23 (נַצְלִיחַ) point to the on-going nature of not only the Lord’s blessing upon Joseph but also His blessing on others (39:5). The far reaching scope of this blessing can be seen in use of the Hebrew term “all” (כֹל), fives times in Joseph’s slavery (39:3-6) and three times in his imprisonment (39:22-23). All that Joseph touched was blessed – people and property alike – everything that was placed in his “hand” (יָד) prospered. As a result of Joseph’s prosperous touch, Potiphar had come to trust him to the degree that he relinquished control of everything he had to Joseph, lit. “in his hand” (בְיַד). Clearly, Joseph was a young man on the rise with God’s hand upon him, acting as an agent of divine blessing to those around him in every situation.

The outer portions of the chiastic structure clearly demonstrate that the Lord’s presence was with Joseph enabling him to be successful and prosperous as well as be a divine blessing to others both in slavery and imprisonment. The reason God chose to use Joseph as an

35 While the Lord’s blessing (ברך) is not specifically listed in 39:23, it is by extension of the Lord’s lovingkindness (חֶסֶד) as He blessed not only Joseph but also his jailer and all that Joseph put his hand to.


37 Biblical Studies Press, The NET Bible First Edition Notes (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 39:6. The Hebrew term “left or abandoned” (עזב) indicates the degree to which Potiphar had come to trust Joseph with his affairs.
agent of divine blessing can be found in the inner portions of the chiastic structure (B, C, B’).

The middle section tells the well-known story of Joseph’s temptation and his ability to overcome and escape that temptation with his integrity intact. Perhaps the reiteration in 39:4 and 39:6 that Potiphar had left everything in Joseph’s “hand” – except for Potiphar’s wife (39:9) – was a foreshadowing of the sordid events that were to come. After noting his outward appearance (handsome), Potiphar’s wife makes an outward sexual proposition to Joseph to come “lie with me” (שָׁכֵּרָה שֵׁנִּי), in 39:7 and 39:12. Undoubtedly this manner of proposition by an older more established woman would have been welcomed by a young seventeen year old man of lesser status, yet Joseph rejects her advancement.38 Joseph attempts to reason with her in 39:8-9 reminding her that he has been entrusted with much, he has been elevated (no one is greater in this house than I), and he has been given everything (except his master’s wife [אִשֶּׁת־אֲדֹנֶה]).39 Interestingly, in her request for him to “lie” with her, Joseph finds it appropriate in 39:9 to remind her of where her loyalty should “lie” as Potiphar’s wife, lit. “you are his wife” (אֲרָחָנה אֶשְׁתַּלְחָ), and also where his loyalty “lies” – not only to Potiphar his earthly master but also to God his heavenly master. Joseph rightly acknowledges that not only would such an act be a sin against man, but ultimately against God. What is evident in this exchange between Potiphar’s wife and Joseph is the necessity to guard one’s integrity from the temptations of the world, sexual or otherwise – for if one is to be used as an agent of divine blessing, the character of one’s integrity must remain pure.


39 Derek Kidner, Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 202. Of all that was afforded to Joseph by Potiphar (freedom, trust, and promotion), Joseph was keenly aware of the one item not afforded him – Potiphar’s wife.
The on-going nature of the testing of Joseph’s integrity can be seen in the phrases “day after day” (יֹֹ֣ום׀ַיִֹ֑ום) in 39:10.40 The repetition of the terms “left his garment” (ע זַָ֥בַב גְדֹֹ֖ו) and “he fled” (וַי ֹ֖נ ס) in 39:12-13, 39:15, and 39:17 reinforce the idea that the sexual propositioning was not a one-time occurrence, nor was Joseph’s repeated refusals. She pursued and he fled. On one occasion she traps Joseph alone in the house and in response he flees, leaving behind his garment in her hand. Using the term “garment”, the author is not merely specifying an article of clothing left behind but rather he is doing something with what he is saying – the author is reminding the reader of Joseph’s prior “garment” issues.41 In 39:13 the theme of the “hand” (ֵ֔יָדָ) reemerges but this time it is not pointing to Potiphar’s trust in Joseph as in 39:6, but rather it now demonstrates Joseph’s loyalty to Potiphar. With Joseph’s garment in one hand and a failed attack on his chastity in the other, Potiphar’s wife flips the script and charges Joseph with an attack upon her modesty. An accusation of this nature and magnitude would most certainly demand severe punishment or possibly death, however what is witnessed is the hand of God ever so present upon Joseph. Perhaps it was Potiphar’s prior dealings with Joseph, knowing the blessing that came through him, or that Potiphar was not fully convinced of the level of his wife’s involvement and truthfulness – whatever the case, he opted to place Joseph in prison.42

The concluding section (A’) finds Joseph in a new locale, “given” (נתן) into jail by Potiphar in 39:20, but yet the Lord’s presence is still with Joseph (39:21) “giving” (נתן) him


41 Gen. 37:3 In reference to the garment (כֻּתֹנֶת) Joseph’s father gives him. Gen. 37:18-33 The garment that his brothers stripped him of before throwing him into the pit and would later provide as evidence of Joseph’s death.

favor in the eyes of the chief jailer, and “giving” (נתן) him the charge over all of the prisoners.

Once again, God’s blessing is upon Joseph and he prospers and all that he touches is blessed and prospers. Unmistakably, God was able to use Joseph as an agent of divine blessing to those around him in every situation because he kept his integrity intact. “The integrity of God’s people facilitates their becoming agents of divine blessing to others.”

In sum, a thorough review of the semantics of the pericope through its literary devices such as chiasm, parallelism, and repetition, reveals that there is more to this pericope than simply the semantics – the author is doing something with what the author is saying. Proper exegesis of the pericope yielded the exegetical proposition that Joseph’s integrity enabled him to be an agent of divine blessing in every situation. In consideration of that proposition and the pericope’s authorial doings, the theological thrust can be stated as such: integrity in every situation enables us to be an agent of divine blessing. As such, any sermon on this pericope should rightly emphasize, through its application, the integrity in all matters (sexual or otherwise) of God’s people as agents of divine blessings to others in every situation.

**Why Pragmatics in Preaching Matters**

As mentioned in the introduction, a preaching hermeneutic that is rich in semantics but devoid of pragmatics, is at best incomplete, and at worst dangerous for only valid application comes from understanding the authorial doings (pragmatics) of the text. Valid application is the lifeblood of the sermon as it confronts its listeners with the truths of the biblical text and calls for their alignment to God’s will. So, why does pragmatics in preaching matter? Because without pragmatics there would be no valid application, and without valid application what is the point of

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the sermon? Stowell says, “An effective sermon is measured not by its polished technique but by
the ability of the preacher to connect the Word to the reality of the listener’s life.”44 I would
further his point by asserting that the mechanism by which the preacher connects the Word to the
reality of the listener’s life is that of valid application – derived from the theological thrust of the
text. For without an application which is relevant and specific to its hearers, the authorial doings
of the text as well as its listeners are lost.

Spiritual Formation

When the apostle Paul instructed Titus that he “must teach what is appropriate to
sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1), his goal wasn’t that Titus merely convey biblical truths, but rather
that his preached “doctrine” would provide to his hearers specific instructions for godly living.
Those specific instructions – derived from the theological thrust of the pericope – conveyed a
picture of God’s ideal world, the world in front of the text, and invited His faithful to participate.
In so doing, God’s faithful are conformed to His image, realigned with His will, and brought
back into covenant faithfulness.45 Bill Hull refers to this same realignment process as spiritual
formation – the never-ending, life-long, inside-out transformation of a Christ-follower where the
“outer person decays, yet the inner renewal continues.”46 The work of spiritual formation is
God’s active work in us, but we are not passive in the transformative process. The apostle Paul
acknowledged this cooperative participation in Philippians 2:12-13, saying, “Continue to work
out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act

the Bible to People, ed. Keith Willhite and Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 125.


46 Bill Hull, “Spiritual Formation from the Inside Out,” in The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of
according to his good purpose.” Similarly, in Colossians 1:29 Paul said, “To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.” What the apostle is not suggesting is works-based righteousness but rather a simultaneous working on the part of both humanity and God. For it is God’s grace that fuels this transformed life, yet not without our participation and effort. Dallas Willard aptly conveyed this sentiment saying, “While it is true that apart from Christ we can do nothing, it is also true, that if we do nothing it will be apart from Christ.” Therefore, while spiritual formation must begin as an internal transformative process (initiated and sustained by the grace of God), it inevitably becomes an external transformative process as faith demonstrated through action. This is what the apostle James clearly taught in James 2:14-16, that “faith is not true faith unless it acts.” In sum, it is only through the understanding of the authorial doings of the text (pragmatics) that valid application can be attained, and that application when preached reveals God’s divine demand on His people, calling them to obedience as they respond in faith by His grace to the lifelong transformative process of spiritual formation.

Discipleship

The incremental progressive revelation of God’s ideal world as pictured through the sermon, provides an implicit facet of Christlikeness and models for the Christ-follower what it


means to be a disciple. In effect, the preacher acts as a “curator of the text”, allowing its listeners to experience through the sermon what the original author/Author intended for that particular pericope. In other words, that pericope teaches a particular facet of Christlikeness to the disciple and how they are to appropriate that in both character and action. The cumulative effect then of preaching according to the lectio continua approach would be continual transformation of the disciple into a more complete image of Christ as they navigate this new life in His kingdom.

As previously mentioned, spiritual formation in the life of the disciple is the work of both God and the disciple simultaneously. What role then does the disciple play as he appropriates what it means to be Christ-like? In 1 Timothy 4, the apostle Paul suggests to his apprentice Timothy that there is an element of spiritual “training” that a disciple must undergo, saying, “Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” What is this spiritual training Paul is referring to? Spiritual disciplines. It is in this spiritual training, or spiritual disciplines, whereby the disciple can – through spending time performing a particular practice – learn to be more Christlike in both character and action. Just as in spiritual formation, it is only through the understanding of the authorial doings of the text (pragmatics) that valid application can be attained, and that application when preached reveals God’s divine demand on His people, calling them to obedience – showing them what it means to follow Him – as they embark on the lifelong transformative process of discipleship.

49 Abraham Kuruvilla, Privilege the Text, 260. Kuruvilla refers to the implicit facet of Christlikeness as “Christiconic”.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show the primacy of pragmatics as it pertains to a preaching hermeneutic through a historical look at pragmatics, the importance of pericopal theology in preaching, and the implications of that view on preaching considering Robinson’s “Big Idea”. The assertion was made that the essential element at the heart of any sermon is the theological thrust of the pericope which not only reveals what the author is doing with what the author is saying (transhistorical intention) but is the only method which provides a multiplicity of applications both specific and relevant to its hears giving them direction for life and godliness.51 In an effort to support that assertion, an exegetical view and outline of Genesis 39:1-23 was provided. This paper discussed how pragmatics in preaching matters in the spheres of spiritual formation and discipleship in that it is only through the pragmatics that valid application can be attained, and that application when preached reveals God’s divine demand on His people, calling them to obedience as they respond in faith by His grace to the lifelong transformative process of spiritual formation and discipleship. Through this process I took the position that biblical interpretation for preaching must include a hermeneutic which considers pragmatics and argued that without an understanding of the authorial doings, there can be no valid application which confronts its listeners with the truths of the biblical text and calls for their alignment to the will of God.

What we are experiencing in modern-day evangelism is the distillation of the Word. Where the powerful and potent Word of God has become a watered down, single-serving, bite-sized, semi-palatable portion of what the preacher believes the passage means. If there ever is a

51 Kuruvilla, A Vision for Preaching,123. See “Relationship Precedes Responsibility” for an understanding of how the call of listeners to the alignment of God’s will is sanctification-oriented not justification-oriented.
time in history when both preachers and the church need to return to God’s Word – it’s now! Preachers need to return to preaching according to the lectio continua approach and adopt a hermeneutic that considers pericopal theology in an attempt to understand the authorial doings of the text, not simply the authorial sayings.

I believe that the Bible is the very word of God, divinely authored and communicated to humanity in written format with the intended purpose of life transformation, conforming us into the likeness of His son, Jesus Christ. I believe when reading Scripture for valid application, you must consider both what the author is saying (semantics) and what the author is doing with what the author is saying (pragmatics), for both are dependent on one another. I believe the preaching of pericopal theology is progressive in nature, seeking to incrementally reveal, segment by segment, God’s ideal world pictured in Scripture to His creation for the purpose of bringing them into alignment with His will. I believe that valid application is important for spiritual formation and discipleship alike because the goal of the application is the same in both regards, the conforming of its listeners to the image of Jesus Christ for the glory of God and for the sake of others.

I believe as a local pastor one of the most prudent ways of working on valid application for sermons is to be plugged into the lives of the members of the local church. As their pastor and preacher, it is crucial that I understand the areas of struggle within my community. Jesus often used agricultural examples within His parables because He knew His audience and what was relevant to their daily lives. Therefore, I plan to work on mining valid applications by keeping in mind the real people who have real lives in my congregation, seeking to understand where they struggle so that the Scripture might guide them through valid applications and conform them into Christlikeness.
Exegetical Outline: Genesis 39:1-23

Exegetical Proposition: Joseph’s integrity enabled him to be an agent of divine blessing in every situation.

I. Joseph was an agent of divine blessing in slavery. (vv. 1-6a)
   A. The Lord’s presence enabled Joseph to become prosperous. (vv. 1-2)
   B. Potiphar demonstrated trust and favor toward Joseph. (vv.3-4)
   C. The Lord prospered Potiphar’s house on account of Joseph. (vv. 5-6a)

II. Joseph overcame temptation and escaped with his integrity intact. (vv. 6b-19)
   A. Joseph resisted temptation from Potiphar’s wife. (6b-12)
   B. Joseph endured the false accusations from Potiphar’s wife. (13-19)

III. Joseph was an agent of divine blessing in prison. (vv. 20-23)
   A. The Lord’s presence enabled Joseph to become prosperous in prison. (vv. 20-21)
   B. The jailer demonstrated trust and favor toward Joseph. (v. 22)
   C. The Lord prospered the jailer on account of Joseph. (v. 23)

Theological Focus: Integrity in every situation enables us to be an agent of divine blessing.

Chiastic Structure: Genesis 39:1-23

A Joseph prospers in slavery (39:1-6a):
   The Lord’s presence; superior’s trust/favor; Joseph’s prospering
B Attempted seduction of Joseph (39:6b-7)
   C Joseph’s integrity (39:8-12)
B’ Accusation of Joseph (39:13-19)
A’ Joseph prospers in prison (39:20-23)
   The Lord’s presence; superior’s trust/favor; Joseph’s prospering


Levinson, Bernard M. “At the Intersection of Scribal Training and Theological Profundity: Chiasm as an Editorial Technique in the Primeval History and Deuteronomy.” *BYU Studies Quarterly*, supplement (2020).


