

The Conclusion

How you finish is almost as important as anything you do in teaching or preaching. It has been wisely pointed out that you can recover from a poor introduction but not from a poor conclusion. The way you finish your message will either reinforce your message and drive the point home or it will confuse and bewilder your listeners and, potentially, undo any good done by your teaching.

I like to think of concluding a sermon in the same way pilot might view landing a plane. It's not an original analogy but it's a very helpful one and when I have used it over several years especially in an African context, everybody understands what I have been trying to teach, whether they have ever been on a plane or not.

- i. Know *where* and *how* to land *before* you take off. It's important to know your destination before you set off, and also to know how your journey will end. Have your conclusion clearly fixed in your preparation notes and, ideally in your mind, and don't leave it to 'how you feel led' at the end of your talk. It's no difficult – or pleasant – to discern when a preacher is trying to conclude his message but doesn't know how.
- ii. Come in to land earlier rather than later. Leave your listeners wanting more and not wishing you would hurry up and finish.
- iii. Don't give false signals. Don't be like the preacher who, having preached for half an hour, then closes his Bible or says, 'in conclusion' and continues for another 10 minutes; or the preacher who says, this is my last point, only to follow it with, 'and this is my second last point'. Don't be like the preacher who says 'lastly' and then lasts.
- iv. Don't confuse landing with take off. Don't use the conclusion to introduce a new point or a new element of teaching.
- v. Make your landing as quick as you can. Some conclusions are as long and drawn out as the message itself. Whenever I travel overseas I try to avoid going through Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam. It's a vast, expansive place and once you have landed, it can take you a full 15-20 minutes to taxi to the stand point and it's wearying and frustrating after a long journey. Some sermons touch down and then take for ever to taxi to a standstill. Avoid that tendency.
- vi. Only land once. Keep your conclusion simple, to the point and not multi-layered or multi-pointed. Don't appear to land and then take off again only to land and take off again and so on. You will leave your listeners very confused and very uncomfortable. Several years ago my wife and I visited some missionaries in Northern Tanzania and flew into the village on a small Cessna aeroplane. There was just a grass airstrip here and as we approached it we could see children playing on it, excited at the prospect of an aircraft coming in to land. The pilot sent a radio message to the waiting missionary who chased the children away. We descended and prepared to land, only for the children to return, thinking that this was an elaborate game being played with them. We had to suddenly accelerate and climb again while the children were, once again, cleared from the airstrip. This happened three times before we were able to land safely and without incident, by which time we were very uncomfortable and weary. Don't inflict that sort of thing on your hearers; they will not thank you for it!

Summary:

"The conclusion is the final movement of the sermon, so it crescendos to a climax. The preacher repeats or restates the central proposition (the main theme) to refocus the thoughts of the audience on what God expects of them. The conclusion will evidence two features, *cohesion* and *resolution*. Cohesion: The audience now hears in concise statements all the important points of the sermon. Resolution: The audience now has the feeling that the destination set out in the purpose during the introduction has been reached."¹

¹ Richard, Ramesh 1995 Preparing Expository Sermons Grand Rapids Baker p127