

Introduction

"Somehow or other, we have got to get every person ready to listen to what we have got to say. We have got to overcome inertia, to arouse attention, to excite interest and to prepare the way. We have got to get people from where they are to the point where they will give us a ready hearing."¹

Your introduction should be brief and to the point and should aim to do at least three things:

i. Attract their attention

The privileged and somewhat 'exalted' physical position of the speaker gives you a head start here but you want, with your opening words, to attract the attention, not only of your listeners' ears but of their minds and hearts. Some punchy statement or even well-chosen title for your message may be sufficient. It sets the wrong tone for what is to follow. I heard recently of a Pastor who announced to his congregation that on that Sunday evening he was going to preach on the member that was going to split the church. A full house turned up to hear him preach from James and the dangers of the tongue.

Avoid, like the plague, the gimmicky and the joke; it sets the wrong tone for what is to follow.

By way of example, here is my introduction to a recent sermon I preached on 1 Peter 4vv12-19, with the theme of 'Reacting to Suffering'

In the summer of 64 – AD64, not 1964, the city of Rome was ablaze. A massive fire swept through the narrow streets, fuelled by the closely packed wooden buildings, and for 9 days it burned uncontrollably.

The people of the city believed that the fire had been started deliberately and by no less a person than the Emperor Nero who wanted to rebuild the city. His soldiers prevented all attempts to put the fire out and even started new ones but it wasn't only the city that was in flames.

The fire also inflamed the anger of the citizens of Rome, many of whom lost everything. Nero diverted the resentment that was focussed on himself by blaming the Christians with whom he was already displeased because they refused to worship him as a god.

A terrible persecution of believers followed. Many believers were made to wear the 'tunica molesta', a tunic soaked in petrol or wax, and were then impaled on stakes and used as human torches to light up Nero's garden parties. Others were wrapped in the skins of wild beasts and torn to pieces by dogs, while yet others were crucified. It was during these days of unspeakable horrors that the Apostle Paul and Peter himself were martyred.

It was in the days and weeks immediately before that persecution broke on the early Church, but when the impending signs were already there, that Peter wrote this letter, warning his fellow believers of what was to come and how to react to it.

¹ Olyott 2005 Preaching Pure and Simple Bridgend Bryntirion Press p77

- ii. Arouse their need
It's important that your listeners, right from the start, have the attitude that you are going to say something that is of enormous relevance to them; that you are going to say something that will be of direct personal benefit to them. The passage of Scripture may, at first reading, seem far removed or inapplicable to their modern day lives and western situations, but as you introduce your message you make a direct connection that arouses within them a need to listen carefully or they may miss something important.

One helpful thing to do here is personalise or contemporarise the biblical subject in order to increase its obvious connection with our listeners. For example, from Isaiah 40, don't preach on 'How God addressed the discouragement felt by his people in exile' but on 'God's cure for discouragement'. Don't refer to how God dealt with David, or Abraham or Paul but how God deals with 21st century people – like the ones sitting in front of you

- iii Address your theme
Your introduction is your lead into the message you have prepared, so here you can state your theme, perhaps using the carefully crafted summary statement from the previous stage in the preparation process. This is your springboard from which you launch into your message.

As with your conclusion, it's a good idea to have your introduction carefully thought through and prepared and written out, or even memorised, and I recommend leaving it to the last in terms of preparation, when you are most familiar with what you are going to say.