

## BUILDING BETTER CHURCHES THROUGH PREACHING

Thank God for our churches; also for faithful preachers. Grateful for all He has done through both, but we are not satisfied with either. Anxious for improvement of both. As a whole preaching of today is not what it should be and is not equal to exigencies of the times.

Preaching is communication of truth by man to men. It has in it two essential elements--truth and personality. Preaching is communication of Divine truth through human personality for human redemption and spiritual development. It is the divinely appointed method of winning the lost, building up the saved, and propagating the principles of the Christian religion.

Think we are agreed that preaching of our day does not grip the consciences of men as vigorously as did the preaching of our fathers. Why? Men are the same; sin is the same; God is the same; His Word is the same; then, the reason must be that the character of the preaching has changed.

It helps us to know what laymen think of the ministry. Many think there are three sexes--men, women and preachers. Many think of the life of a minister as simplicity itself--all that he has to do is to be able to draw his breath, an inference, a crowd and his salary. Before the War a preacher and I were talking about the fact that few were entering the ministry. Discussing reasons for it and results of it. He lamented that it had been a long time since he had heard brethren of churches praying the "Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into His harvest." Said they used to do it, but not now. His son said, "Don't you fellows think the reason the people have quit praying for the Lord to send forth more laborers is because they have been so disappointed with the kind He has sent them in answer to their prayers?" Attended Ministers' Meeting preceding Tennessee Convention--poor address--fellow behind me said, "If that bird ever sticks that auger in me again he will have to hit me in the back while I am running from him." Preacher preached at a conference--made a failure; others leaving and speaking in very uncomplimentary terms about his effort, but one official said, "Well, you can say what you please about that sermon, but you have to admit it was inspired." Others ridiculed the idea, and asked why he said that. Replied, "No man could preach that poor a sermon without Divine aid."

If we are to build better churches through preaching, we must have three things:

### I. Better Preachers.

Assume that each has ability to preach, experience of grace, assurance of salvation, good reputation, good character, call from God, unquestioned sincerity and willingness to sacrifice. Just think of our glorious task--being a real Christian, a good example, acquiring numerous friends--no substitute for them, always need them, cannot have too many, more have the happier and richer will be, representing Christ in the world--which is a privilege not granted to angels--preach and teach for Him, interpreting Christ to others--by lips and by lives, holding forth the Word of life--declare living Word, echo thoughts of Jesus, point others to wicket gate, and feed souls of redeemed, helping people to get right with God, aiding the saved in victorious living, and wielding an uplifting influence. Who is sufficient for these things? Realize my unworthiness and inability for the task. Must become more Christlike, more loving, more devoted, more compassionate, more sacrificial, more completely yielded to His will. He longs for better men in the gospel ministry. None of us are as good as can be, ought to be, or He wants us to be. Should constantly strive to be better man.

### II. Better Preparation.

A call to preach is a call to prepare. Preparation is necessary. It largely determines the degree of one's success and usefulness. Two phases of preparation:--

## 1. The Preparation of the man.

### (1) Physical preparation.

A good sound body is to a preacher what a good foundation is to a house. The physical man must be strong to meet the demands on the modern minister. The sounder the body the more effective his preaching will be.

### (2) Intellectual preparation.

Bible does not put a premium on ignorance. A man who has learned something has not committed the unpardonable sin by doing so. Other things being equal, a preacher should have some sense. He actually needs to know something if he is going to teach others. One man spoke on versions of the Bible. Another said, "We want to keep our people ignorant so they will think we are smart." Another said, "Missions were born in hell." Jesus took time to prepare--thirty years for a three year ministry. Gave apostles special training. Cannot improve on His example. Paul was well prepared. Wrote, "Study to show thyself approved unto God." Preach what we know. Know what we learn. Learn by study. Got to keep up with our age intellectually. Can't preach to it from behind. People will listen to man who knows more than they do. Mind constantly giving must be constantly receiving. Fight for time to read, think and study. If we fail to prepare we stand in our own light, and in light of those to whom we try to minister, and thereby say the biggest and holiest task in the world is not worth preparing for. I have never known a great preacher who was not a great and diligent student.

### (3) Spiritual preparation.

We are apt to become so busy in answering calls for service that we neglect our own spiritual life. Our tendency is to think in terms of others and become professional. When we read the Bible we think of others instead of self; looking for sermons. We cannot lead others where we have not gone. No ministry can be a spiritual one or an effective one without prayer. God's greatest preachers have been mighty in prayer. Dr. William Evans' illustration about "no prayer, no power." Bible study is an oft-repeated scriptural injunction on the Christian ministry. Neglect of the Word is appalling. Dr. Scroggie's impression of American ministry. Zondervan's statement about books preachers buy. Dependence on the Holy Spirit. He has resources which can never be exhausted. If fail to depend on Him our preaching will be powerless.

## 2. The preparation of the message.

Intelligently select a subject or text, reflect on the purpose of the sermon--arrest attention, arouse interest, give instruction, convince the intellect, stir the feelings, influence the will or inspire action, then, pray for divine guidance, faithfully study and work. To prepare a real message requires long hours of hard work. It is a lot easier to move a little box of sermons than it is to dig down, work hard, and fill up a new one, and that is one reason why some change pastorates so often. Cannot build a great church quickly. Short pastorate is one of the curses of our modern church life. Dr. Gravett at Galilee Church for 59 years.

## III. Better Preaching.

It is a high privilege to hold the highest office from Him Who sits on heaven's throne. The life of a minister is filled with many high hours--fellowship with God's people, experiences with them in joy and sorrow, have conferences with those whose lives are blighted and broken by sin, etc. But the highest hour is when he stands in his pulpit to preach the glorious gospel of Christ. A congregation is looking up to him for guidance and help. Those who are rich in Christian experience have come for a fresh vision of the crucified One. There are struggling ones who need strength for the Christian race. There are lost ones appealing to the preacher to point them to the Lamb of God. What a glorious opportunity! What a tremendous task! What a pressing responsibility both

to God and man! One certainly ought to preach prayerfully, dependently, objectively, earnestly and expectantly. The task calls for our best, the people need our best, we owe our best, and the Lord expects our best; and our best is not good enough.

If we would only listen attentively, I believe we would hear our Lord and our people saying, Preacher:--

1. Preach the Gospel.

All of the gospel is truth, but all truth is not the gospel. We can preach philosophical, scientific, and even biblical truth without preaching a word of the gospel. The gospel is the good news that God loves all men, Christ died for all men, He was buried and He arose from the grave, and in Him salvation is offered to all men. The Gospel of Christ is the message which has been given to us, it is the message which has been given to us, it is the message that men need, and the only message that will produce the desired results.

2. Exalt the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the essence of the gospel message and the only hope of lost men. A Spirit-filled preacher will strive to send his hearers away saying, "What a wonderful Saviour! What amazing grace!" He has failed if they say, "Isn't he a clever preacher?" Cannot exalt Christ enough. Must preach Christ--His virgin birth, victorious life, vicarious death, victorious resurrection and visible return.

3. Comfort the broken-hearted.

Many bewildered minds and sad hearts. They need the enlightenment of Divine truth and consolations of Divine grace. Preach to broken hearts. There are some in every audience.

4. Encourage the people.

They have enough troubles and discouragements without the preacher adding to them. One prominent Baptist minister in Kentucky, whom I love dearly, who never sounds a note of encouragement. One lady heard him and said, "If I thought conditions were that bad I would take a gun and blow out my brains." What a pity! Devil's best weapon is discouragement. Why should a preacher be used of him to accomplish his purpose? Scolding--Vaughn.

5. Expound the Word of God.

"Preach the Word." That is our duty. God will bless His Word. Expository preaching is that which comes out of the Scriptures and is explanatory of them. Making an earnest plea for more of it for two reasons: --

(1) For the sake of us who are preachers.

a. It will provide us with sermon subjects.

b. It will guarantee variety in our preaching.

c. It will compel us to handle big subjects.

Tempted to evade the greatest texts because of their transcendent glory and majesty. Better to have a great text and a poor sermon than nothing great.

d. It honors the Word of God.

e. It enables us to be without rivals.

f. It affords many opportunities to "skin" those who need it. Not howl much about "Thus saith the Lord."

g. It will insure freshness.

An expository preacher who is a diligent student will never be "preached out."

(2) For the sake of our listeners.

a. It insures a better knowledge of the scriptures.

This is a day of education and enlightenment, and very great ignorance of the Bible

b. It gives the Holy Spirit a chance to work.

c. It helps to build up believers.

d. People are starving for it.

e. It is effective.

f. It is enduring.

More and better expository preaching will greatly help to increase church attendance and to build better churches.