

## PREACHING AND WORSHIP

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him." John 4:23.

The nature and strength of our churches today are due in large measure to the worship of their members and to the preaching to which they have listened during the years of their existence. While the subject which has been assigned to me would easily lend itself to a historical treatment, I doubt very much if you would be interested in hearing it. Perhaps your attitude can be expressed in the words of the man whose memory and eyesight were failing simultaneously. The treatment of one had an adverse effect on the other, so his doctor told him that he would have to decide which one he preferred to have treated. He said, "Well Doc, treat my eyes because I would rather see where I am going, than to remember where I have been."

### I. Preaching.

Preaching is conveying truth through personality to personalities. It has to do with a body of truth on the one hand and human beings on the other, and it aims to bring the two together in the meaning of life. Preaching the glorious gospel of Christ is the greatest task that has ever engaged the mind and energies of mortal man. Because preaching deals with immortal souls, and that which man cannot give and money cannot buy, this glorious task challenges the very best that noble lives possess. Think and say what you please about a great pulpit ministry, it is the best service to which any man can give his hands, his head, and his heart. It is a tremendous responsibility to be an ambassador of Christ, the representative of the God of holiness, and the mouthpiece of the God of truth.

Preaching the gospel of Christ certainly demands and deserves the most thorough preparation of both the messenger and his message. The preacher must be a diligent student. God's Word commands him to study. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15). The work challenges him to study. Persistent study is the solemn duty of every preacher who ventures to stand in the pulpit as a spokesman for God and an instructor of the people. If he fails to study and prepare, he will close the door to personal efficiency and greater usefulness.

Some ministers have failed because they have taken Rousseau's advice about the writing of love letters and applied it to the preaching of sermons. His instructions were: "You should begin without knowing what you are going to say, and end without knowing what you have said." That advice should never be applied to preaching.

Having been called and commissioned to speak to men for God, it is never right for a preacher to appear before the people unprepared to preach. An unprepared preacher always leaves a bad impression. A preacher cannot conceal his lack of study, no matter how hard he may try. People can tell whether his gun is loaded or empty. Even children can do that. A small boy said, "Mother, can I be a preacher when I get to be a man?" His fond and proud mother replied, "Of course you may, if you want to. Why do you want to?" "Well, I guess I'll have to go to church all my life, anyway, and it's a lot harder to sit still than it is to stand up and holler." A preacher must do more than "stand up and holler." Not even emotionalism can

conceal a preacher's lack of preparation. Two young boys attended a church service where an unprepared preacher had scarcely begun to speak until he started to weep. The boys sat and listened and watched as the preacher wept his way through. Finally, one boy said, "Jack, what is that old codger crying about?" Jack replied, "Well, Buddy, I guess if you had to stand up there and preach for an hour and a half, and didn't have any more to say than he has, you'd cry too." One day Alexander Pope sat in a church while a dull and unprepared preacher was speaking. Bored by his obvious lack of preparation, Pope wrote these lines on the flyleaf of a book:

"I whisper, gracious God,  
What have I done to merit such a rod;  
That all this shot of dulness now should be  
From this Thy blunderbuss discharged on me?"

Any preacher who enters a pulpit without a prepared message thereby disappoints his thoughtful hearers, defeats the purpose of the hour, disparages his ministry, and dishonors his Lord.

It is impossible for any man to have an effective and successful ministry in any church over a period of many years without conscientious, consistent and continuous study. The preacher who depends on tricks, verbal novelties, or the exploding of little homiletical firecrackers has already filed a petition in bankruptcy as a herald of God.

We cannot treat preaching lightly without doing violence to our heritage. The apostles were so certain of the priority of preaching that they frankly stated that it was not right for them to give up preaching the Word of God in order to serve tables. The only person who disparages preaching is one who can't preach. It is always a case of being down on what one is not up on. It is still true that "The biggest job of the preacher is to preach, in spite of the fact that the trend of the times is to make him an ecclesiastical gang-foreman." But, preaching is the preeminent privilege of the preacher.

In these days of restlessness, frustration and confusion, many church members would like to have a preacher of a lavender and rose-water gospel who says, "You must repent as it were, believe in a measure, or be lost to some extent." If the people are to be helped, they must hear the Word of God rather than the doubts and opinions of men. When any messenger of the Lord brings to his task the dedicated labors of a believing heart, an humble spirit, an open mind, a devout attitude and an obedient will, the Holy Spirit will add His blessing and power to the spoken word and it will accomplish its intended purpose.

In 1930 King George V of England was about to open a conference on disarmament, and his message was to be relayed by radio to the United States for rebroadcasting. Just as the broadcast was about to begin, a careless workman stumbled over an electric cable in the radio station in New York City and broke it. To have repaired the cable would have taken at least twenty minutes, and by that time the address would have

been delivered. Harold Vivian seized the ends of the broken wire, and held them grimly and gallantly, as the current conveying the royal message was transmitted. The electrical charges shook his body and caused him considerable pain, but he did not relax his grasp. Resolutely he clung to the cable until the millions had heard the message of the King. What a picture of the preacher in action--gripping the Lord with one hand and the people with the other, and letting the living Word pass through his vitalized and vibrant personality! What a privilege to be a connecting link between Christ and sinners!

## II. Worship.

The one mark which forever differentiates man from all other forms of life on earth is that he is a worshipper; he has a bent toward and a capacity for worship. Worship is characteristic of all men everywhere through all time. Because worship is inherent in man, the Bible speaks much, and often, about it. Judging by the many times that it is mentioned in the Bible, worship is exceedingly important.

### I. The Meaning of Worship.

The Greek word which is used for worship in the New Testament is "proskuneo." The root meaning of this word is very illuminating. Literally, it means "to do the dog to." The imagery here is of a dog that is submissive and obedient to his master in whose presence he is crouched. This word, when used in connection with the child of God, portrays a grateful soul prostrating himself before God in humble and adoring worship. An example of this is presented in Acts 10:25, where we read, "And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius, met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped."

Worship is a noble word. It means to attribute worth to an object. It is an attempt to dignify a person who deserves special esteem and respect. Worship is an attitude or act whereby we acknowledge the supreme worth of God, and cheerfully offer ourselves to Him for the doing of His will.

In the Bible there are one hundred and ninety references to worship, with the following variations of meaning: to bow down, to do obeisance, and to venerate. It is the homage which is paid to an object that is adored. For example, we say of a mother, "She just worships that child," or of a miser, "He worships his money," meaning that both the mother and the miser are bowed in voluntary reverence and avid concentration before the objects of their consuming desires.

This many-sided activity of worship should be the most profound and meaningful of all experiences. Unfortunately, it is usually very casual, and far too often it is extremely superficial. Deliberately coming into the presence of God is an awesome and sobering experience. This is true because it demands keen spiritual sensitivity, deep reverence, genuine humility, and keen longing.

Genuine worship is responding with gratitude for what God is, what He has done, and what He will do. Worship is the unifying strand of life, and without it life becomes many tangled threads. Worship elevates life, and without it man's horizon is horribly low and his dreams are painfully cramped.

Many things are involved in worship. One is love. You can't worship God unless you love Him. To love God because of the numerous expressions of His grace and goodness is one of the most reasonable things. Admiration is involved in worship. We have great admiration for God because of the excellence of His holy nature. Wonder, or a kind of delightful astonishment, is involved in true worship. When God spoke to Abraham, the patriarch fell on his face in holy wonderment. Moses hid his face in wonderment before the presence of God in the burning bush. An encounter with God always brings wonderment and awe. Reverence, veneration, adoration, homage, thanksgiving and praise are also involved in worship. Effective and acceptable worship calls for an intelligent comprehension of the value and desirability of the One Whom we worship, and a contemplation of His character and love.

Worship is the nourishment of the mind upon God's truth, the quickening of the conscience by God's holiness, the cleansing of the imagination by God's beauty, the opening of the heart to the love of God, the devotion of the will to the purpose of God, and the yielding of the life to God for the accomplishment of His plan for it and through it.

When a man worships, he has a personal encounter with the holy God. In the presence of God man is made aware of his own sin, which has separated him from God. Not wanting to stay away from God, he is led to confess his sin and ask for forgiveness, man is reconciled to Him and comes into possession of a wonderful peace. In contrition, humility and gratitude, man dedicates himself to God and receives great satisfaction in so doing.

## 2. The Motive for Worship.

All of us worship somebody or something. Whatever receives our first allegiance, whether it be God, family, friends, pleasure, work or money, that is what we worship. But when we worship anyone or anything other than the true and living God, we become idolaters.

Worship is the need of every soul. It was the need of the pure soul of Christ, Who set a perfect example for us to follow in this important matter of worshipping God. This great need was emphasized repeatedly in the Psalms. "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together" (Psalm 34:3). "For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised" (Psalm 96:4). "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name" (Psalm 96:8). "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 96:9). "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" (Psalm 107:8). "Let them praise the name of the Lord: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven" (Psalm 148:13).

Christ said, "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10). Our Saviour

testified that God's heart is yearning for worship when He said, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23). What an astounding statement! Indeed, the worshipful heart is the object of the search of our Heavenly Father. This fact should provide motivation enough to change us into worshipers "in spirit and in truth." There is every good reason why we should worship God. Anyone who does not worship God accepts a low rating for himself, dwarfs his own life, fails to attain life's greatest goal, and is a failure in life's most important business.

### 3. The Manner of Worship.

There is a lot of misunderstanding about the worship of God. Many have the idea that they are worshiping God if and when they condescend to drop in at a church service occasionally. Some people think that because they attend a religious service, and reverent in their demeanor, join the singing of the hymns, listen respectfully to the preacher, and place a contribution in the offering plate, they have really worshiped God. Over against this delusion are the words of Christ in John 4:24, which are startling in their plainness and pungency: "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Worship is a spiritual exercise, therefore, it must be free from all pretense.

We worship in singing, praying, reading the scriptures, giving and preaching. Preaching is worship when people evaluate their lives in the light of the sermon, when they begin to think about themselves in relationship to God during the sermon, and when the sermon leads them to make some personal Christian decision.

Our worship will not be pleasing to God and profitable to us without two things, namely, preparation and participation. It is just as important for each worshiper to prepare his mind and heart as it is for the preacher to prepare the sermon. After all, the quality and effectiveness of the sermon are determined by both the speaker and the listener. A congregation is not chiefly to be sung to, prayed for, and preached at.

Personal examination is necessary in preparation for worship. What is your purpose in attending church services? What do you really want? You cannot expect to receive a blessing if you are not aware of the fact that you need one. Do you need and want the forgiveness of sin, restoration of faith, impartation of wisdom, ministrations of comfort, and endowment of God's power? Another essential in preparation for worship is an attitude of expectation. Rarely do we enter God's house really expecting God to speak to our hearts through the hymns, prayers, scriptures and sermon.

Participation in worship is vitally important. We do not participate in a feast unless we eat. Neither do we participate in worship unless we appropriate what is provided and offered to meet our needs. Far too many church attendants are spectators instead of worshippers. They do not know that worship is an experience and not a performance. They are present in body, but they refuse to participate in the singing, praying, reading, giving and appropriating. They go to

church for amusement and entertainment, and go away disappointed without receiving a blessing. They observe and appraise, and go out to criticize. They say the sermon was poor, the choir looked sleepy, the solo was a flop, and nobody shook hands with me. Get that word "me." Where is the worship of God in all that?

Henceforth, let us be true worshippers instead of critical spectators! Let us worship God in spirit and in truth each time that we frequent His house, and then let us go out to serve God in His world!