

THE PEERLESS PREACHER

"And the common people heard him gladly." Mark 12:37.

This scene is laid in the precincts of the Temple in Jerusalem shortly before the crucifixion of Christ. Representatives of the various parties of the Jewish people, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, scribes and lawyers, asked Christ questions on all sorts of subjects -- religious, moral and political. While they sought to embarrass Him, Christ replied to them with all ease, dignity and felicity. Then He finished by putting to His unfriendly interrogators a counter-question.

A crowd of spectators had gathered around to hear all that was being said. They listened to the ensnaring questions put to Christ, and to His prompt and direct answers. Their sympathies were with Christ who single-handedly defended Himself against all comers. They admired His self-possession and quick answers. They especially enjoyed the discomfiture of His foes, who belonged to the privileged classes of society, and for whom they did not have any love. The classes were against Christ and the masses were sympathetic with Him. But this was not the first or only occasion on which this was true of the masses. All through the four gospels there are indications of Christ's popularity with the masses as distinguished from the classes.

Human rights have never been without a champion. God has always raised up seers, prophets, preachers and teachers who have heard the cry of humanity and have given their lives for the common weal. There have been periods in history which have been dark, and where the masses have been down-trodden, but sooner or later God has sent them a deliverer. He has never allowed any of His people to suffer indefinitely. This was one of the reasons why God sent His only begotten Son to this earth. "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Christ came to supply every need which the human soul craves. Wherever He went He found some who were happy to hear what He had to say.

In a few words this short text describes the magnetic influence of the mightiest personality this world has ever known. The common people were interested in Him as a man among men. By "the common people" is meant the people without intellectual culture, wealth, power or exalted rank. The very phrase is suggestive of human inequality, and implies that the gradations of class obtain among men. There are differences in physique, in stature and in strength which are obvious to all. There are still greater differences between the minds of men. They were greatly influenced by His life in the midst of the common scenes of earth. The way in which He was received is worthy of thought and investigation. Down through the centuries men have given themselves to the great task of trying to understand the secret of His attractiveness.

The simple fact that the rank-and-file listened to Him with delight is ample proof of the magnetism of the preacher and the fascination of His message. This is a significant statement because it describes the sort of impression that our Lord made on the ordinary man. The Scribes and Pharisees spurned His message and rejected Him, but the masses listened to Him with joy. What was their verdict? "Never man spake like this man." "They were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes."

While the self-confident and the self-righteous were put to shame and confusion, the common people heard Him gladly. Why was this true? There were several reasons for it.

I. He was their friend.

They firmly believed that He really and truly cared for them. He saw things from their viewpoint, and then boldly spoke His own convictions. He championed their cause. For years they had been oppressed by the technicalities and the minute

interpretations of the law. Christ cleared the air by getting down to the fundamental things of the Spirit. He made religion a joy instead of a sorrow, a blessing instead of a curse, a boon instead of a burden. He gave vocal expression to their thoughts and desires. He dared to speak out their sentiments. Many of the people of His day were timid and afraid of the higher powers, but Christ knew that He was right, and consequently He did not fear any man. From the beginning of His ministry Christ gave Himself unstintedly to all who needed Him. He was always a friend to the friendless, and an ever-present help in time of need. Instead of going to the upper classes He went to the common people. He made it His business to help them in every way possible, so that when He spoke they were always glad to listen to Him. Being a friend Himself, He made friends easily. He gladly shared the burdens of others. He never assumed the air of superiority which finds expression in exclusiveness. They considered Him as one of their number. He did not speak to them from a height of official distance and supremacy, but in their own language, with illustrations drawn from their own daily lives, and as one who knew them and their ways.

II. He was sympathetic with them.

Christ frequently came in contact with the suffering, and when He did He healed them. Often He dealt with contrite and penitent sinners by forgiving their sins and saving them. They realized that Christ was intensely interested in them as individuals, both in their physical and spiritual well-being.

III. He emphasized the worth of each soul.

Personality was very sacred to Christ, and He stressed its value at all times. He always placed first things first. He associated with the outcasts of His day. He did not recognize any class distinctions or artificial barriers which men had erected. He saw values where others did not, and He offered to help those whom the synagogue and society had refused to aid.

Christ saw real possibilities in every person. In Mary Magdalene He saw traits of true greatness. In vacillating Simon Peter He saw glorious possibilities for usefulness in building His church. Our Lord always saw latent powers in many people and wanted to have them developed. When He spoke to the people He made each one feel that he was of infinite value. Because He was willing to give all a chance to climb in this life and to make the most out of themselves, the multitudes were pleased to listen to Him.

IV. He had the message which they needed.

Christ spoke to them as one who had authority and who had a right to be believed. There was a note of certainty in what He said. His statements were not above the level of their comprehension. His teaching was the most amazing of any to which they had ever listened. Martin Luther once said, "If I were God and the world treated me as it has treated Him, I would kick the blessed thing to pieces." On the other hand, Christ loved the world and provided salvation for all who would believe on Him.

V. He taught the principle of love.

Christ loved everybody, even His enemies. Because He sincerely loved all He drew around Him many different kinds of people. He taught them that they should love each other.

Christ was positive rather than negative in His approach in all His work. The Ten Commandments are negative in character while the commandments that Christ gave are positive. He was a builder and He knew that any structure that was to endure must be built on mutual good will and love. Therefore, He taught people to love each other.

VI. He offered hope to them.

Others were filled with despair, but Christ looked into the future and saw good coming forth. He recognized that evil was in the world, but He refused to be pessimistic about the final outcome of everything. His life was not surrounded by fears and evil forebodings. Life presented many problems to Christ, but they did not overwhelm Him. Wherever He went He shed abroad optimism. No wails or complaints were ever uttered by Him. He was master of every situation, and all difficulties disappeared under His matchless power.

Christ never turned away unhelped any person who was in trouble, pain or sorrow. To the epileptic boy He stretched forth a healing hand, to Simon Peter who was sinking in the water He put forth a saving arm, and to the sinful woman He offered sympathy and forgiveness. He turned darkness into light, and restored hope to those who were despondent. Christ scanned the horizon from every angle, but did not see any reason for gloom. His heavenly Father was in control of the universe, and no one need have any fear. This spirit He sought to impart to all of His followers. He taught them that the clouds would soon disappear, but that the sunshine would last forever. Because of His cheerfulness and hopefulness Christ always had attentive listeners among the common people.