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### INTRODUCTION

Preaching is still the most popular form of public address. In spite of the fact that hosts of people never hear a sermon in their lives, and the Church is widely proclaimed as decadent, dying or dead, it is still true that week by week more people regularly hear sermons, than, any other kind of public utterance. A good sermon is still likely to top the poll when we achieve the performance of taking a referendum of the entire population as to which kind of public address ranks highest in the thought of the people.

To be sure, preaching is terribly criticized, especially by those who never hear it. A few years ago a world-famous socialist, John Spargo, said: "It is very doubtful, to my mind, whether all the preaching that will be done in America during the next twelve months, let us say, will add as much to the well-being of America as the work of one honest, efficient farmer, or that of a humble school-teacher in some little red schoolhouse." Oh dear, what an indictment! Surely we preachers should creep into our air-raid shelters and stay there. But Mr. Spargo confessed, concerning preachers: "Never in the world before was there a class commanding such a vast hearing." Now, that's strange. This preaching which is so futile (Mr. Spargo was writing about the futility of preaching) commands the greatest hearing! Probably the late Sylvester Horne was nearer the mark when he said: "Preaching can never lose its place so long as the mystery and wonder of the human spirit remain. Amid all the changes of thought and, phrase the wonder of conversion remains to be the supreme joy and glory of the preacher."

There will always be preachers and preaching, because there will always be men who want a new grip on life, who need strength to battle with temptation, and comfort in the day of sorrow, and who feel their need of the presence and power of God.

There are some subjects concerning which profound thinkers discuss very learnedly, which are as clear as day to the initiated, and preaching is one of them. There are men who hear the call of God to enter into the ministry of the Word, there are many who feel a divine urge to preach, and there are hosts (in the aggregate, if not in individual congregations) who listen to preaching as the message of God.

What is the secret of good preaching? A man should not preach at all, unless he has a message. A fondness for talking, a love of display, or a desire for prominence should not be a motive impelling any man to preach. At the back of all

really good preaching are a consecrated life, a prepared mind, a gift of utterance and a message to, help the souls of men.

What shall we preach? It may be thought that the answer is simple. Preach the Word of God, the message of the Scriptures. That is a good answer, if we understand what it means. It is possible to preach from the Bible and bring no message. We may preach on Bible themes and do nothing but confuse people. A man may use the Bible to promote error. Many people who teach what we consider erroneous doctrines claim to support them with an abundance of Scripture. Men may talk about the contents of the Bible--Bible Geography, Bible History, Natural History, or a host of subjects found in the Bible--chronology, ethnology, genealogy and what not--and never be a preacher. The eighteenth century Deists were expert, many of them, in Bible knowledge, but they were not preachers--they had no message for men's hearts.

The Scriptures present God as a Redeemer, and the message of the Book has to do with all that is involved in salvation--salvation from the guilt, the power, and the consequences of sin. Hence it is that human need in all its forms--because, all human need is related in same way to the facts of sin and salvation becomes the great concern of the preacher. Preaching is the message of the Word of God applied to life; it is that which makes preaching living, vital, and effective. There are preachers who start from the Scriptures, and expound its truth, and apply it to men. There are others who begin with a life situation, and seek the message of the Book relating to it. R. G. Gillie, in "*The Minister and the Modern World*," spoke of three sources of preaching material: (1) One's own experience; (2) the Bible; and (3) life as we know, it. You may wonder why he did not put the Bible first. His thought was that if we have the right to preach at all, it is because we are witnesses to truth that has been Written in our own souls. The fundamental ground of our certainty of sacred truth is what God has done in us. Coleridge once wrote in a letter: "In the Bible there is more that finds me than I have experienced in all other books put together." Thus he believed the Bible was inspired, because it found him at greater depths of his being, and brought with it irresistible evidence of having proceeded from the Holy Spirit. With such an experience as that, a man may well begin to preach to the needs of others, for he is bound to end with the gospel of redemption as revealed in the Bible. From whatever angle we approach this subject, the Word of God is the primal source of the message we have to deliver. Even if a text is not used at the beginning of a sermon, no fault can be found with the message if it is our own, our own witness, which we have received from the Word of God and seek to apply to life.

You wish to preach. We assume then that you have a message. God has spoken to you through his Word. Now you want to become more qualified; to be the best preacher that you can be. James Gibb, in "*Making Proof of the Ministry*," said that three primary qualifications are a knowledge of God, a knowledge of man and a knowledge of the Bible.

We need to know God in the intimate personal way that grows out of constant communion with Him. It is doubtful if any of us prays enough. Few men really master the discipline of prayer, or gain the knowledge of God that comes alone through "the sweat of the soul." We need to know man in his struggles, his temptations, his sufferings, his sin and his yearning after God. The message, to be effective, should meet these needs of men. That is what makes preaching worthwhile. A preacher may be effective in preaching to an audience of strangers if he deals with the great common needs of human life. But the most effective preacher will be the man who knows the lives of his people--their problems and temptations, their joys and their sorrows, and brings the message of God to meet them. Get to know your Bible. "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth (Tim. 2:15). As a preacher you read your Bible for your own devotional life, and that is an essential thing if you are to be a vital preacher. It is part of the process by which you know God. You need to study it also with a view to teaching it. It is possible that a man may find daily nourishment for his spiritual life in the word of God, without his ever coming to a clear understanding of the Scriptures such as a teacher should have. Some people adopt a special diet of scriptural nourishment, and find that it answers their needs very well, but the limited diet they use may be very unsatisfying to people with robust spiritual appetite. A man who aims to preach should know something of the accepted principles of interpretation of the Scriptures. He needs to know the difference between the Old and New Testaments. He should know the main sections of the New Testament, and the purpose of each. Certainly he should know how to direct sinners in the gospel way, and teach disciples the great practical doctrines of the Christian life