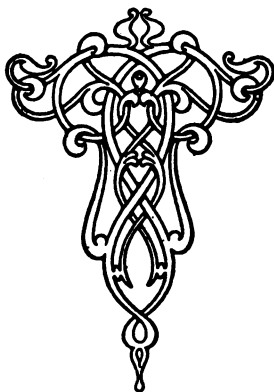


EVANGELISTIC SERMONS



TOGETHER WITH PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS
FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE AFTER-MEETING



COMPILED BY THE EVANGELISTIC COMMITTEE
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE U. S. A.

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**A MODEL PREACHER AND A
GREAT SERMON**

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V

A MODEL PREACHER AND A GREAT SERMON

"And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come Felix trembled."—ACTS xxiv. 25.

WE have seen St. Paul under very many different conditions as we have carefully studied the story of his life. We have found him as the persecutor consenting to the death of St. Stephen, and later we have seen him, with flashing eye and determined spirit, setting his face toward Damascus, that he might persecute the Christians, men, women and children, even unto strange cities. Then, suddenly, all is changed, and he is himself a Christian, and, as such, we have seen him beaten with stripes; stoned with stones; left by the wayside for dead; tossed upon the sea in a storm; cast upon an island as a result of shipwreck, and, at the end of his great career, we see him walking to his death like a conqueror. Rome never knew a more heroic soul than St. Paul, the Apostle. We have listened to him preaching on different occasions, and, with the exception of his Master, there never was such a preacher.

We studied him upon Mars Hill, as he was delivering his mighty message, and when he had gathered a great crowd around him, we were thrilled, as he said: "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by and beheld

your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, *To the Unknown God*. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." (Acts xvii, 22-23.)

But here in this text is an illustration of another sort. This is a picture of a private ministry, with an audience of two. It is a testing service, for it is vastly easier to speak upon Mars Hill, when he faces a crowd, than to stand in the presence of two important people, and rebuke them because of their sin. It is easy to be brave when surrounded by a multitude; not so easy under circumstance like these; but he never flinched. "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." (Acts xxiv. 25.) This is the illustrious trio which faces us in this story. It is light and darkness, righteousness and sin facing each other.

The preacher is great. He had well-nigh graduated at the school of suffering. He had grown old before his time. His back was bent; his body was worn, and he said himself that in his body he bore about the very marks of the Lord Jesus. His had been a life of extreme loneliness. Even Jesus had His Bethany, but Paul, denied his Bethany, seemed even more lonely than his Master.

"Yet without cheer of sister or of daughter,
Yet without stay of Father or of Son;
Lone on the land and homeless on the water,
Pass I in patience till the work is done."

Here stands St. Paul, a prisoner, well-nigh a slave;

“a word and he will be thrown to the lions, a nod and the fire will consume him. He is face to face with evil, and he smites it with both hands.” Yet, as Joseph Parker said, he feels the breath upon him of more than twelve legions of angels, and therefore is well-nigh perfect in his display of courage.

The Audience.—The audience is interesting. St. Paul had fought with the beasts at Ephesus, but that struggle was nothing to this. There was Felix, a Roman Procurator, originally a slave, but now free; he had risen to almost unlimited power. A more contemptible person never combined the power of a king and the meanness of a slave. He was a cruel, licentious and unrighteous man. He was steeped in blood, rich by oppression, and profligate in conduct.

Then there was Drusilla. She was said to be one of the beauties of the day. She was the daughter of one king and the wife of another. According to Josephus, she was the daughter of Herod Agrippa the First, and she was at one time the wife of the king of Emesa. Felix had enticed her away from her rightful husband by the power of a magician. As a result of this unholy marriage there was born a son, Agrippa, and it is said that he and his miserable mother perished in one of the eruptions of Mount Vesuvius.

The Preacher.—Here is his description of himself. Speaking of others, he said: “Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool.) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times

received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and day I have been in the deep; in journeying often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." And he pathetically adds: "Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." (2 Corinthians xi. 23-28.)

I see him stand in the presence of his audience of two. There is power in his attitude. His eyes are flashing; his lips are trembling; his body quivering with excitement. There is a solemn and death-like hush comes over his auditors, "and as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come, Felix trembled."

His Manner.—His manner of preaching is worthy of notice. *He reasoned.* It was perfectly natural for him to do so, for he understood the art perfectly. He was a born logician, but his natural powers are set on fire of God. Let it always be remembered that our religion has ever stood the test of reason. The world's greatest men have been Christians. The greatest philosophers have bowed the knee to Jesus. Men like Bacon, Locke, Johnson, Edwards, Hopkins and McCosh; and it was Locke who said: "If I had my life to

live over I would spend it studying the Epistles of St. Paul and the Psalms." The greatest astronomers have been Christians. Men like Kepler and Newton and a host of others; and it was Newton who said: "I am thinking the thoughts of God, and God is passing before me in all the grandeur of His ways." The greatest scientists, historians, discoverers and statesmen have been devout Christians. So Paul was moving in the right line as he reasoned. The field before him was positively boundless.

His Message.—He reasoned of righteousness. That is the divine ideal of a human life. It is what we ought to be to God and man according to God's teaching. What a rebuke it was to Felix. The woman by his side was an evidence of his sin; as they both leaned forward he could feel her hot breath upon his cheek. He had, in his sin against society, struck a blow at home life in all ages. No wonder he trembled. His position was not much like that of General Wardwell, the hero of two wars, whose story has recently appeared in the public press. His aged wife was discovered to be a leper, and was about to be deported to the lepers' island, when the old General said: "But I, too, am a leper and I must go with her." And they told him, after examination, that he was not a leper and could not go. Then, although her body was wasted by disease, her hands were bent and crippled, her face was marred as a result of her suffering, and her reason dethroned, he took her in his arms and stroked her hair, as he did when she was a bride, cov-

ered her face with his kisses, as when she was his sweetheart, and he said: "You may take her away, but I will if necessary go upon my hands and knees to find her." St. Paul may have presented an ideal like this, and, if he did, I know why Felix trembled.

He was not alone rebuked. Drusilla must have trembled, too. And are we doing our best? Are we not guilty of sins against society, sins against the Church, and sins against the minister, and sins against God? Have we not been guilty of sinning against our fellow-men, of hurting the poor, neglecting the oppressed, forgetting the sorrowing and neglecting the sick? Have not some of us sinned against our households? I heard William A. Sunday recently tell the story of a father who took his little boy into one of the parks in the South. Interested in his newspaper, he dozed, and fell asleep after awhile; his little boy wandered too near the river that ran through the park, when suddenly the father was startled by the cry of his boy, shouting, "Hurry, papa." The father was instantly aroused, only, to his horror, to see that a great crocodile had caught his little fellow as he waded to the river. "Hurry, papa," he shouted; "Hurry." But the father sprang to the river's edge only in time to see his child sink beneath the waves. Vice is on every hand. Sin faces our children everywhere. Pitfalls are at their feet. Hell yawns before them, and I think I hear them shouting, hurry, hurry. If we have failed here we ought to tremble.

St. Paul also reasoned of temperance. That has to

do with one's personal responsibility, for one's own body and the shaping of human relationships. It is the control of the appetites and passions. If there is a distinction between righteousness and temperance, the one is a warning concerning sins against ourselves. Righteousness rebuked Felix for his sin against Drusilla. Temperance rebuked him because of his sin against himself. I can see his face flush and grow pale and his eyes flash with anger. He knew he was wrong and yet he is not alone in that conclusion. Is your life right in the sight of God? You must answer the question to God and not to men; and yet who of us can control himself? Our effort would be an utter failure if we tried. I heard Prof. C. M. Coburn say this summer that Julian Hawthorne in his travels abroad journeyed through Wales. He was accompanied by a Harvard student, who had a periodical passion for drink. One day they were standing together watching the women of Wales with their little children gathering the herbs at the foot of a great cliff. They filled the baskets with these herbs, and the fathers, away up at the top of the cliff, by means of a rope, would draw the baskets up. Suddenly, as they watched, the Harvard student said: "Mr. Hawthorne, the passion for drink is on me again"; when his friend, noting a narrow pathway running almost up the face of the cliff, said: "Run up that quickly, and you will forget it." When he had gotten fairly started, a little girl, noting him, started after him, when she stumbled and fell, and,

fortunately, fell into one of the baskets. The father, feeling the tug upon the rope, thought it filled and started to draw the basket up. The child became frightened, and as the basket was drawn up rapidly, attempted to climb out. It would have been sure death. Julian Hawthorne, with his hands to his mouth, shouted to his friend: "Spring out and catch the rope. Let yourself down. Save the child." The trained athlete balanced himself a moment and sprang out, let himself down, hand by hand, and saved the child. And Julian Hawthorne said the passion for drink never returned to him. Prof. Coburn said it was because of the great principle of sacrifice getting into his life. I can quite understand it, but I can understand this, too, that if one should admit into his life Jesus Christ as a personal Savior, and an abiding strength and hope and comfort, then passion could be controlled, weakness be overcome and deliverance be sure.

He also Reasoned of Judgment to Come.—The judgment is a solemn day. It is a place where men meet their past, where books are opened, where conscience and remorse smite the sinner. I was recently in New York, and from the pen of Dorothy Dix in one of the daily papers, I read the following: "Last week a woman in Newark killed herself and her eleven-days-old twins because of remorse. She had sinned the unpardonable sin against her husband and home, and she offered up a triple sacrifice of herself and her babies in expiation of her wrong-doing." No one had

suspected her of being unfaithful to her marriage vows. She was perfectly safe in the trust of her husband, who welcomed the children as his own; but conscience tortured the guilty woman until it drove her insane. She had come to believe, with brooding over the subject, that God would set some seal upon her unborn babe to proclaim her sin to the world, and her first question to the nurse after the twins were born was to know if they were marked in any way. When informed that they were normal, she asked if they would live, and when told that they were healthy and strong, she burst into tears and wept that they should live. Surely, one can imagine no sadder spectacle than that—a mother weeping because her babes would not die. Eleven days later she drowned the helpless innocents in a tub of water, and then slew herself, leaving a piteous letter in which she told how she had committed this mad deed because of remorse that would not let her rest, day or night. Perhaps there was never a more vivid illustration presented of the effects of the dual code of morals for men and women than is given by this tragedy. The wife, who had secretly been disloyal to her husband, was so crushed by the knowledge of her transgression that she took her own life, but no one had ever heard of a man taking his life under the same circumstances. Man's conscience hurts him not. On the contrary, he takes a drink to celebrate what an irresistible charmer he is among women, and only hopes his wife wont find it out for fear of the scene she will make. He isn't crushed to

the earth by any overpowering sense of shame and wrong-doing; and, today, if all the husbands who are unfaithful to their wives should commit suicide, as this unfortunate woman did, there wouldn't be cemeteries enough to hold them or men enough left to bury them. It is a sorrowful fact that if the still, small voice of conscience ever reproaches the average man for his infidelities to his wife, it does so in such a whisper he scarcely hears it. Remorse doesn't shout to him through a megaphone as it does to women. If you have rejected Christ and sinned against God, it will be an awful thing to have remorse overpower you there.

Who will be there? Have you read Bickersteith's description of the Judgment, in which he says:

"Yes, there was Cain, the Fratricide, the Brand
Of Murder still upon his Brow."

And a little further on in the poem, he says:

"Time's river, in that awful retrospect
Was flowing swiftly by, when lo! I heard
The traitor's name, and from among the dead
He staggered, shuddering to the Judgment Bar."

Felix will be there and Judas will be there. Will you be there? I know that Jesus will be there, either for us or against us. Which shall it be?

A distinguished minister in New York dreamed a dream in which he thought he stood at the Judgment Bar of God, and he heard Him say: Have you always been kind, and just, and patient, and true? And when he had exhausted all the virtues, the minister, renowned for his goodness upon earth, was obliged to

say that he had in his own thought failed in the light of the Judgment; when, just as he felt that all hope was gone, he saw a light above the brightness of the sun, and beheld one whose hands had been pierced by the nails, and whose side had been scarred, and He said: "Father, this man confessed me down in the world. I will confess him here." Is your trust in Jesus Christ? Then fear not.

And as he thus reasoned, Felix trembled; trembled, as sin faced him; as conscience struck him; as remorse overwhelmed him; as judgment broke in upon him; as the veil was drawn aside; and he saw the Judge and saw himself. And yet, in spite of it all, he resisted. How near one may come to salvation and miss it all!

On July 24, 1908, there was a remarkable event took place. It was the running of the Marathon race from Windsor Castle to the Stadium, twenty-six and one-third miles; with 100,000 people waiting to welcome the runners; among whom stood the Queen and King of England. Not since the ancient Greek fell dead at the feet of hundreds of thousands, after carrying a message of war a distance of twenty-six miles from the battlefield of Marathon to the public square at Sparta, was ever such a thrilling climax to a long distance run.

"Make way for the Marathon runners!" finally came the announcement as from the throat of a giant the approach of the runners was heralded through a megaphone. Everything else was forgotten, and the

crowd, on its feet, turned its face to the entrance of the Stadium. The silence was breathless. For ten minutes in perfect silence the crowd of 100,000 stood, with all eyes focused on the gate directly opposite the royal stand, where the runners were to enter. Then the great voice rang out again: "The runners are in sight. Italy is in the lead!"

Finally a figure, looking almost as small as that of a pigmy, appeared at the gate and staggered down the incline leading to the track. He was clothed in a white shirt and red running pants. This uniform confirmed the announcement that Italy was the leader in the race. The runner stood for a moment, as though dazed, and turned to the left, although a red cord had been drawn about the track in the opposite direction for the runners to follow. It was evident at once that the runner was practically delirious from his efforts. A squad of officials ran out and expostulated with the runner, pointing to him the right track, but he waved them away as though they were trying to put him upon the wrong path and cheat him out of a victory so dearly run. In a great roar the crowd shouted directions to the befuddled runner. At length Dorando, for he had been generally identified, started on the right path along the track. Then followed an exhibition never to be forgotten by those who witnessed it, and perhaps never to be witnessed again in this generation. Dorando staggered on toward the turn in the track and dropped to the ground. It was but human that those who had witnessed his struggles

should gather around him and lift him to his feet. But to all it was evident that he had run himself to the limit of his endurance. None of the spectators had expected to see him rise when he fell like a soldier crumpled up by a bullet, his face haggard and drawn. The runner was quickly lifted to his feet. Clearly he was unconscious. His limbs would not support him. One man took him by the arm, another stood at his back, and he was pushed and dragged across the tape and then allowed to drop to the track and lie there until a stretcher was brought to carry him away.

But he lost the race. He was near; he was within sight of the goal, but he lost the race. So you may have been almost persuaded, but, remember, "*almost is but to fail.*" It was against the rules for the officials to help Dorando; but it is not against the rules of God or Heaven for our Savior to step forth, when we have faith in Him, and we have done our best, to help us over the goal, and he will do this—as we fail he will help.