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PREACHING TO THE MASSES.

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THERE are two facts which give special importance to the consideration of this theme. The first is, that preaching is the chief instrumentality chosen by Christ for the extension of His kingdom. The great commission given to the Church, under circumstances of peculiar solemnity by her Redeemer and Lord, reads, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." God has established the ministry of the Word, and it has pleased Him, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe. So far as the edification of believers and the extension of the Church are concerned, it outranks in importance the holy sacraments. Paul evidently so rated it, for he says, in writing to the Corinthians, "I thank God that I baptized none of you, save Crispus and Gaius; for Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel." Whenever the Church begins to attribute greater importance to the administration of the sacraments, or to ritual of any kind, than it does to the preaching of the Gospel, it is manifestly departing from the apostolic rule. The Gospel may, indeed, be helpfully presented to the eye. Association quickens memory, and rites and ceremonies are suggestive; but they are all inferior in power to the voice of the living, redeemed soul. Speech is the chief human agency chosen by God for the proclamation of His grace. Robes and ritual, lights and crucifixes, processions and the laying on of hands, water, bread and wine are more than useless if they make the Church forget or underrate the great command, *Go preach.*

2. The second fact giving importance to my theme is, that the masses, the great multitudes, not only in heathen countries, but also in our own land, are not directly under the influence of Gospel preaching. We, as believers, have a right to be optimistic in our faith, not only because of the sure promises of our Lord with reference to the success of the Gospel, but also in view of what has already been accomplished. But it would be an act of folly to persuade ourselves that the

buildings in which the Gospel is stately preached, hold, or are frequented by the masses of the people. We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the non-church-goers are still largely in the majority. Reliable statistics show that in the country one-half of the population does not attend church, and in the larger towns and cities the disproportion is even greater. We well know that the church-goers are in the minority, and also that the great body of those who compose what are called the working-classes, are absent from the house of God; and this class is much the larger one in any community.

Here, then, are two facts: Preaching is the great and divinely-appointed instrumentality for the evangelization of the world, and around us are the masses who will not come to hear it. The church bells ring, the doors are opened, the invitation has been sent abroad through the daily press; but, for every one that enters the church door, two pass by. What is to be done? The shortest reply is, "Go preach." Perhaps it is the best. Certainly, it is the divine and imperative command. But still the question reverts, "How is it to be done?" This is the great practical question for us as a Church and as ministers of the Word. Perhaps we fail because we are the slaves of system. We have been brought up to do our work in certain channels and insist on keeping within them. In the beautiful lakes of the Adirondacks there are two methods of fishing. One is called "buoy fishing." The plan is to select what is called a good location and anchor there a float, or buoy. Then choice bait is thrown out around the buoy, the object being to attract the fish and get them in the habit of coming to that locality to feed. Once, or perhaps twice, a day, at a stated time, the fisher comes in his boat, casts down his line and hook and waits for a bite. Sometimes, after patient waiting, he catches a few fish, and sometimes none. But each day through the season, morning and evening, he comes there, expecting the fish to come also. The other method is to take rod and line and bait and go out to find the fish in the pools or spring-holes, or feeding grounds, where they are wont to congregate, and then, with caution and skill, the fisherman makes his cast and with excitement and joy gathers in his spoil, if so be he is successful in finding it. The first of these is the method which we, as fishers of men, have generally adopted. We select a good location and "bait it well;" that is to say, we make it as attractive as possible, so as to induce men to come there. Then we do our preaching, and by patience and watchfulness manage to secure some for Christ. In this method we expect men to find us. The other plan would lead us to go out and find men. It would send us into their homes and places of business in order to fish for souls. It

would set us to preaching in the streets, in halls and theatres—in short, wherever we could find men. The genius of one method cries, "Come to church and hear the Gospel;" the genius of the other says, "Go out and preach the Gospel to every creature and compel them to come in." Which is the better method? An Adirondack fisherman would say, "We catch heavier weight and larger fish at the buoy, but more fish by going where they naturally congregate. We use both methods." But souls do not count by weight or size. The soul of a "tramp" is just as precious in God's sight as the soul of a millionaire. The divine purpose in the preaching of the cross is not to secure what society calls its best, but to bring to every creature, high and low, rich and poor, the offer of eternal life through Jesus Christ. It is to tell the poor, the lost, the men whom the world despises, how great they may become through our Lord Jesus Christ. But, unhappily, we do not always "fish" in accordance with this principle. We, as fishers of men, like to catch "big fish." There is more joy in the ordinary church over one millionaire converted than over ninety-and-nine persons who are of no special account in the world. One thing is certain, there must be a higher appreciation of the value of the individuals who compose the masses before there can be the highest degree of success in preaching to them. I do not wish to be understood as decrying or undervaluing the present method of preaching in buildings set apart for religious uses. I can imagine no greater calamity to a community than the closing of these places for public and stated worship. A deserted, unoccupied church building has something indescribably pathetic about it. It seems to stand like a weeping Jeremiah, uttering day and night its lamentations over the unbelief, indifference and carnality of the people who live around it. The material building is itself a preacher to the masses, whether men will hear or forbear to hear its constant though silent testimony. Instead of fewer church buildings we should have more, until they stand in every quarter, the visible monuments of the claims of God upon the worship of men, and offering to all free instruction in the Gospel of Christ.

But have we not, as teachers and preachers of the Gospel, confined our efforts too exclusively to one method? May we not in some cases have vexed our souls too long over a little company of self-indulgent saints whose real, though not openly avowed desire, was to build up a religious society of a certain social rank, instead of seeking men who were as ignorant of the Gospel as the Athenians to whom Paul preached on Mars' Hill. The anxiety of church officers as to what would become of their little local church if it should be closed occa-

sionally on Sunday evening, has hindered the pastor from engaging in missionary labors that might have resulted largely in the conversion of souls, through the preaching of the Word to those, who as yet will not come to the sanctuary, but who can be gathered together in other places. But whatever be the reasons, it is certain that our present method has resulted in securing the attendance of a class, instead of the masses, in our Protestant Churches. We find there a large number of what is known as the well-to-do class, but a correspondingly small portion of the humble and laboring class, and these constitute the masses of the people. This condition of affairs has been used by some as furnishing the evidence that the Church is lacking in power and aggressiveness, and as demonstrating that Protestants cannot be successful with the common people. Others triumphantly point to it, as a proof that Christianity itself is in its decay, and that it must be supplanted by a new rational religion. But neither of these inferences is true. Deplorable as the present condition is, it is not strictly correct to speak of it as the estrangement of the masses from the Church. Estrangement implies a previous relation of harmony and friendship. There is undoubtedly among non-church-goers a large number of persons who have forsaken the ordinances of God's house. But those who wait regularly upon the ministrations of the Word, have never been in the majority. In certain localities the contrary may be true, but it is not so with reference to the country at large. This relation of the masses to the Church is no new one, nor is it to be taken as an evidence that nothing has been done to reach them. The fact is, whether associated directly with the Church or not, they have been in certain directions most powerfully affected by the Gospel, and never more so than to-day. They are not as the masses of men in countries where it is not preached. That Gospel has uplifted them and set them to thinking. They are in possession of some of its great and quickening truths. They see, it may be as the half-cured blind man, who saw men as trees walking, but still they see, "Upon them that sat in darkness a light has shined." The divine leaven which Jesus brought and placed upon men is working. The Gospel ideas of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man are affecting the world's labor as well as its wealth. The masses are no longer inert or slavishly submissive. They show a genius for organization, and organization is the first manifestation of life. These are the days, not for the few, but for the people. Their hour has come.

But all this makes the duty of preaching to the masses more urgent and important. Half truths in possession of the multitudes, awakening and exciting them, will make them all the

more dangerous and destructive in their movements. They produce fanaticism, strife, alienation and unrest. Those who see their fellows as "trees walking" are sure to act unwisely and disorderly. It is well for us to reflect that many of the so-called perils that threaten not only our civilization, but the Church, come from the aroused and half-Christianized masses. The Gospel has brought them political freedom. It has made them conscious of their rights and power. We have awakened the sleeping giant, and what shall we do? Teach him, or let him in his fury and blindness destroy us? In the political world we have committed ourselves to universal suffrage, and it is too late to retrace our steps. We must go through with what we have undertaken, or perish. So also in spiritual matters; by means of education, which we have demanded for all, we have cut the fetters of ignorance which held the masses in bondage to ecclesiastical despotism. In the name of Christ we have let in the light, and the world is astir as never before. What noise and tumult! What ferment and unrest! It is too late to undo our work; we must go on. But there is no use in standing panic-stricken at the result. We have a power at hand which can bring order out of confusion. The remedy for what the Gospel has done is just this, *more Gospel*. The critical character of the hour demands that it should be preached with renewed earnestness and faithfulness in all its fullness. If this is done, in some way we shall yet reach the millennium; if not, our darkest days are before us.

The work then is urgent, but how shall it be done? What is the true ideal of preaching to the masses? Our ideals shape our conduct and striving, and perhaps we are trammelled or misled by some false ones. Is not the common conception of this work that which has its realization in some popular preacher who gathers round him an immense audience in his huge tabernacle? Spurgeon, Talmage and Moody preach to the masses, and we must try to do as they do, or the ideal will not be realized. The minister who crowds his church is preaching to the masses, but the one who has the pews only half full does not! That is to say, the man who preaches to three hundred souls has just reason to condemn himself as a class preacher, but when his audience reaches a thousand, he can pat himself on the head and say, "Now I am preaching to the masses." If God had made all ministers Whitfields and Spurgeons, and intended that they should be exactly like them in the exercise of their gifts, it would be well to keep this ideal in mind. But somehow the Luthers, the Whitfields and Spurgeons are not very plentiful. One or two in a century are all that appear. And it does seem as if the world's greatest need was not a few illustrious preachers attracting

crowds by the splendor of their gifts, but rather a multitude of common ones doing their work, according to their several ability, in all faithfulness and earnestness. All honor to the gifted men who preach the Gospel of the grace of God to the thousands who gather to hear them. I would not be understood as in any way depreciating the greatness of their work. But there is danger of limiting our ideals of preaching to the masses to this method. Have we not a more complete pattern in one, Paul, who preached in Ephesus with no small degree of success to the masses. He writes concerning his method of labor, "Ye know after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, and have taught you publicly and from house to house." The minister who rates the importance of preaching the Gospel simply by the size of his audience is using a false standard of valuation. Vast audiences may minister to a preacher's vanity, and numbers lead us to discredit the no less important work that is done in a humble and unobtrusive way. The pastor who faithfully and patiently instructs a comparatively small church, so that its members abound in good works, may be doing more efficient work in preaching to the masses than the popular preacher whose ministrations attract the crowd. Paul wrote concerning the little church of the Thessalonians, "From you sounded out the Word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything." That was effective preaching to the masses, and it seems to me it is the kind we specially need in these days, for they are to be reached, not so much directly through the ministry as through the whole Church. The notion widely prevalent is that we need popular preachers and monster meetings to move the masses. Yet men are not converted as masses, but as individuals, and God does not mean to give all the glory of establishing His kingdom to a few individuals more gifted than their brethren. We like heroes and leaders and great men; they have their uses. But if this is not a world for the average man, a great many of us have no reason to remain in it or to continue our work. Instead of trying to multiply the audience for one preacher, we had better try to multiply the preachers. Set more men to work to reach the masses with the Gospel. Many little nets will catch more fish than one or two great ones. The recorded ministry of Jesus and his apostles gives us full instruction on this point. They had the masses to reach, and we know how they did it. When the opportunity presented itself, Jesus preached to the multitude and the common people heard him gladly! But some of his most successful preaching, and far-reaching in its results, was done to an audience of

one. Andrew did good work for the masses when he found Peter and told him about Jesus. The Holy Spirit records how Philip stirred the city of Samaria by his preaching. But side by side with that account he records at greater length how Philip preached Jesus to one man, the Ethiopian eunuch. Let us remember that the Gospel comes as a personal message. It is addressed not to great masses, but to "every creature." It individualizes men, and that method which most clearly recognizes this fact will be the one best adapted to preaching the Gospel to the masses: Until the minister knows how to appeal to one man in behalf of the Gospel he will not know how to preach to the crowd. Indeed, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as preaching His Gospel to the masses. It must mean masses or collections of individuals, or the work is vain.

1. In considering the various means by which this preaching is to be accomplished, we must place, first and foremost, the ordained ministry. This is of God's appointment, His adaptation of means to an end, and it must not be set aside or supplanted by other instrumentalities. The power of consecrated men, specially called and trained to preach the Gospel, is abundantly illustrated in the past. Christ used it, and the triumphs of the Church proclaim its efficiency. We need for this grand ministry, not weaklings, but men of power; not ignorant men, but men of brain and culture, and at the same time, men of true genuine manhood in thorough sympathy with their fellows. Above all, we must have preachers who know the Gospel thoroughly, through their own experience; who believe in it because it has saved them, and who for this reason can preach it with the accent of conviction. A cultivated and intelligent ministry is the one that the Church needs to-day for the best and most efficient prosecution of its evangelism. There is such a thing as the ministry for the times, and it must respect the demands of the hour, not in the base sense of catering to the pleasures of men, and conforming to the craze of the day, but in the noble sense of speaking through the advancing thought and growing culture of men, to their deepest needs. The average of intelligence among the people is higher now than it was a century ago. Our system of common schools and the omnipresent press have educated the masses to think for themselves. No parrot-like utterances of traditionalism, or decrees of Church authority, or frothy exhortations will meet their needs. In one view the ministry must be the same through all ages. It has the same changeless Gospel to preach, the same deep and changeless needs of lost and guilty men to keep in view, the same results to effect, and the same instrumentalities by which to accom-

plish them. The minister of to-day must preach as Paul and Chrysostom and Augustine and Luther and Knox and Wesley did. And yet not the same. He must preach in view of the present condition of the masses, and the changes which free inquiry and enlarged knowledge have brought. Certain it is, that in view of the ever-rising standard of culture among the people, our American Church has far more reason to be anxious about the increase of educated and properly trained men for the ministry, than for the relaxation of her standard of education in order to ordain men of inferior culture. True, there is an urgent demand for more men, but the efficient remedy is not in hastily sending out unskilled, half educated laborers, but in united prayer on the part of the Church to the Lord of the harvest for more laborers, and in consecrating to the work of the ministry, the best talent in the Church. Mr. Gladstone has well said, "That no Church can stand whose priests and ministers do not possess the highest respect of the people." And it seems to me that American Presbyterianism, having steadily and at no small sacrifice, maintained its position in demanding an educated ministry, and made ample provision for securing it, is now at the opening of a new century in its history, specially prepared to take an advanced position in the work of evangelism. But it needs, as the word of command for its advance, the baptism of the Spirit by which all it has of culture and wealth shall be consecrated to this great work.

2. We need also to enlarge the recognized and official working force of the Church. More men and women must be engaged in this work of preaching to the masses in various ways, if they are to be efficiently reached during the present generation. One who has carefully studied this question, says, "The greatest of our troubles is, that there is far too little whole-hearted, thorough-going, thoughtful endeavor put forth for the salvation of the poorer classes." We must have a more complete and systematic organization of the working power of the Church, if we would meet the demands of the hour. The truth is that, in this respect, we are using the methods of a century ago. The pastor, with, perhaps, a salaried assistant, and such voluntary services as he can command, constitute the organized aggressive force with which the conquest of the masses is to be attempted. At the best, only a small minority of the Church is at work in this direction. In addition to what is being done by voluntary agencies, we need Bible readers, teachers, visitors, and missionaries, who shall be officially employed and recognized by the Church. There ought to be a more discriminating recognition of the diversity of gifts which the Holy Spirit has bestowed

upon the Church, so that all might have their appropriate exercise and proper growth.

3. We must aim to get into closer sympathy with the poor and the working classes. As a Church we stand too remote from them. The natural tendency of culture and wealth is to isolation and exclusiveness, and a Church abounding in them will be sure to drift away from the masses, unless it is mightily filled with the Spirit of Christ. Right or wrong, the belief is widely prevalent that the Church as now organized is more in sympathy with the rich than with the poor. We certainly cannot afford to have this impression prevail, for it is not only a most serious hindrance to our work, but it is dishonoring to us as the followers of Christ. The impression made by His ministry was that He was the special friend and benefactor of the poor. "The common people heard Him gladly." It is only by a spirit of love, sympathy, self-sacrifice and self-denial kindred to His that we can ever reach the people. Perhaps some of the preaching needed in these days in order to influence the masses in the end would be that directed against the spirit of pride, worldliness and exclusiveness which can be found in not a few churches. At any rate, in solving this great problem, it becomes us who belong to the Church to have our own hands clean and to see that nothing remains in our midst which would justify the alienation of the masses.

4. Finally, besides all well-chosen instrumentalities, and vastly more important than they, we need for this work a revival of faith. By this I mean such an increase in the faith of the Church as will bring to it a clear, positive and all-mastering conviction of the supreme importance and the saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A profounder faith must lie at the foundation of increased activity and aggressiveness. We need to feel that we can and ought to reach the masses with the Gospel. We ought to do it for Christ's sake, we must do it for their safety and our own. We read concerning the early disciples that when scattered abroad by persecution "they went everywhere preaching the Word." With a like spirit pervading the Church the problem of reaching the masses would soon be solved. All this implies the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, His working mightily on the Church. It is a most significant fact, full of instruction for the present hour, that all the great movements by which the Gospel has been effectively preached to the masses have originated in fresh effusions of the Holy Spirit. More, then, than anything else do we need this ministry of the Divine Spirit in increasing power. Without it, ministers, teachers, school-books and tracts are all useless. We do well

to use books and tracts, to employ teachers and missionaries and to send forth faithful ministers, but above all we must be able to say, with the Church repeating its testimony through the ages, "I believe in the Holy Spirit."

We can never see a subject like this in its true light, unless we see it as it appears to Jesus Christ. Listen, then, to these words, so simple, and yet so clear and comprehensive in their instruction: "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith He unto His disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers into His harvest." These golden words contain the solution of the problem, "How are we to reach the masses with the Gospel?"