

best among a spate of small commentaries on that epistle in recent times.

There is much more on the bookseller's shelves which merits attention. These notes are written that others may browse and find even better bargains. At least it may help some to turn their tokens into books and their tallies into pamphlets before the fateful day of their expiry.

The Preacher and the Bible

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TWO things impress many of us in our work to-day in the parish. In the first place, there seems on every side a hunger for spiritual things, though often the desire for it is inarticulate. And many of those who in some way are seeking God, instinctively assume that the Bible is the book from which they will gain information. There is, therefore, an increasing interest in the Bible and a desire to read it, but because its pages often seem hard to understand, that desire is often never satisfied and the book is left neglected.

In the second place, when men and women turn towards the things of God, they naturally look to the clergy for help, and because they feel that what they want is to be found through the pages of the Bible, they expect the clergy to know their Bible and to be able to explain it. Men and women everywhere, in all walks of life, are more and more feeling that the message of the Bible is vital for the welfare of both the individual and the nation. But alas, not only does the general public not read the Bible, but even Christian people, who claim that the Book reveals their Saviour, do not know its pages and often do not regularly read them. And what is more tragic still is that the clergy themselves frequently are ignorant of its teaching, have not memorized many of its promises and precepts, and do not build their preaching upon its authority. More and more, therefore, we need to get back to a Bible ministry; for we shall only satisfy the hearts of men in proportion as we ourselves know the Bible in our minds, believe it in our hearts, experience it in our lives, and unfold it with our lips. Let us never forget those words given us through St. Paul, which apply alike to the Old and to the New Testament—"the holy scriptures . . . are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished (i.e. completely fitted out) unto all good works" (2 Tim. iii. 15-17).

If we would fulfil this our true calling—to preach the Word—there are five aspects about the Bible that appear to require emphasis:

- i. Present the Charm.
- ii. Know the Contents.
- iii. Yield to the Character.
- iv. Experience the Calling.
- v. Preach the Challenge.

I

1. *Present the Charm.* The Bible is a wonderful book. It is a book that stands alone: unapproachable in grandeur; solitary in splendour; alive with tender pathos; stimulating with encouragement; full of inspiration in all circumstances. Its figures move with reality; their needs and experiences are the same as those of to-day. There is adventure, homeliness, sinfulness, restoration to God; it deals with man, woman and child. It is a living book. And it is all presented in a charm of expression and with a music of language. It is this charm that we need to get into our own soul and across to the minds and hearts of our people. The opportunity for doing this is especially in the reading of the Lessons in church or in the reading of some passage in a week-day meeting. It is important that the Word of God should be read whenever possible; it is a more important thing *how* that book should be read. It is possible to read the Bible publicly in such a way that its phrases are unintelligible and its message mutilated. It is possible on the other hand to read it so that its pages come alive and its inner voice speaks. "I love to hear him read the Lessons," remarked a lady once, "because he seems to put himself into the story and to make it live. I can always understand the Bible better when he reads it".

To this end it is good that we should pray much over the passages we are going to read aloud. The Bible is such a majestic book that we dare not neglect to 'practise' our reading. If we read and re-read our Lessons to ourselves first (often reading them aloud in the quiet of our room); if we pray over them, and enter into them, placing ourselves in the position of those in the record, then we shall be able to read them in public with meaning, understanding and sympathy. And let us read them in a voice that can be well heard in every part of the building.

Thus the reading of the Bible aloud can be as much a sermon as the matter we present from the pulpit.

2. *Know the Contents.* Let no one think that this can be done in a moment. It will take a life-time. Knowing the contents of the Bible is a progressive experience, and in a way the more we know the more we come to realize how much we do not know! To 'know' the Bible includes, among other things, knowing its stories and where to find them; knowing its outstanding verses of spiritual power, which can be used for conversion, comfort and encouragement; knowing the purpose, content and meaning of each book; knowing its types, prophecies and doctrines; knowing where to turn for what we quote, and memorizing much of it.

According as we get to 'know' the Bible in this sense ourselves, so shall we seek to lead others along the same path. This we can do in three ways—by preaching, by study circle, and by Bible school.

(a) *By Preaching.* There are two main styles in preaching, the hortatory and the expository, though really they should be slightly combined and each should contain something of the other. In the hortatory our aim is to exhort; to make the Lord Jesus to shine forth in His attractiveness and to exhort people to draw near to Him; to encourage people to persevere in the Christian life and to show them how to gain victory in the assaults of the devil. This can be done by

expounding a Bible story ; e.g. an Old Testament one which reveals why failure occurred (Achan), or how sin marred a life (David and Bathseba), or how God can use a trusting soul (Gideon). Or from the New Testament the stories about the Lord Jesus or the incidents in the Acts can be used to show the love of God and the power available for the battle of life. Or sermons can be preached from particular verses and their meaning applied, illustrating the subject from other passages of the Bible.

In the expository our aim is to explain ; to help our listeners to know the doctrines of the Bible, to understand the special Bible words and phrases, and to summarize the ideas of individual chapters or of books. This can be done by taking, for example, some of the Minor Prophets, or aspects of our Lord's Second Coming ; or such Bible words as sin, salvation, justification, sanctification, grace, humility, prayer, faith, and so on, explaining what the Bible means by these words. By both these methods men and women will get to know their Bible and to grasp its contents.

(b) *By Study Circle.* A tremendous influence can be exerted when a small group of people gather round God's Word for study. Often more lasting work is done in a small circle of people than can be done by preaching to a large crowd. On one occasion in the writer's experience there was found to be complete ignorance of the Old Testament among the young people. About fifteen to twenty gathered together to learn to know their Bible, and especially the Old Testament. We read round the circle verse by verse, stopping to explain difficult verses, to look up similar passages in other books, and to draw out spiritual and moral lessons. We read St. Mark, and looked up every reference to anything in the Old Testament. Then followed Joshua, Judges, and the two books of Samuel. Then Amos and Jonah. Whenever mention was made of these records in the New Testament we looked up the appropriate passages. It was an amazing experience to see how these young people slowly extended their knowledge of the Bible and thoroughly enjoyed doing so. And verses which were likely to be helpful in daily life or for daily contact with others were duly noted and frequently learnt off by heart. The same method can equally profitably be used with older people.

(c) *By Bible School.* In three different parishes recently it has been found that the more the Bible is preached from the pulpit and its charm conveyed through the reading of it, the more has there been a growing desire to spend an hour in the study of it during the week. In each parish a Bible School was started. In one, the average attendance was about 90 ; in another 45 ; and in the third 25. Some of the subjects taken were the Gospel of St. Mark ; the Epistle to the Hebrews ; some of the Minor Prophets ; the journeyings of the Children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan, and the spiritual lessons revealed ; the Epistle to the Philippians ; the Tabernacle and its furniture and what it was meant to teach about our Lord Jesus. Many testified that they had received a new idea of the contents of the Bible ; and in one case it was very noticeable how many brought pencil and paper, and the teaching given was recorded for fuller study at home.

II

3. *Yield to the Character.* We always need to remember that the Bible is the picture of a Person—the glorious Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ—and that right through its pages from the very beginning to the end runs the red line of redeeming love which leads us to Him. The Old Testament foretells and envisages the Person Who is coming from heaven ; the Gospels reveal the Person as He lives and acts before men's eyes ; the Acts and Epistles unfold His eternal power and teaching imparted to men through His Holy Spirit ; the Revelation prophesies the triumph of the reigning Saviour. We clergy need to find this Saviour in every page, to yield to Him whenever we hear and understand His claims upon us, and then to preach Him and His claims in every sermon from every subject.

The whole purpose of the Bible records is that men may see what God in Christ is like, how He hates sin and loves righteousness, and how He yearns to lift trusting souls into the peace of divine fellowship. We need to see the Bible in this light and to pass on what we see.

To this end we can take, among other lines of thought, character studies such as Joseph, Joshua, David, or Jonah as types of the Lord Jesus in certain aspects. Or we can trace the Person of our Saviour in passages like the 23rd Psalm or Isaiah liii. Or we can draw the analogy of the crimson cord bound in the window by Rahab. The great aim must be that through our preaching of its pages men and women may see Jesus.

In proportion as through the book the Saviour lives to our own life, so shall we make Him live through our preaching in the lives of others.

4. *Experience the Calling.* The calling that comes to each of us through the pages of the Bible is that we should be holy. We are, as the writer to the Hebrews puts it, " partakers of the heavenly calling ". We need always to remember that the Bible is a holy book. It speaks of a Holy God, Who demands holiness as His standard, holy people as His channels and Who has holy fellowship as His plan. The characteristics and calling of the Bible are the graces of holiness. This, then, becomes the purpose of our reading of the Bible—to reveal the meaning of Holiness. This establishes the duty resulting from our reading—to appropriate Holiness. This reveals the aim of our preaching—to help men and women to become holy. For to be holy is to be like Jesus, and this is both the intention of God and the secret longing of every heart. This fact, therefore, influences the whole presentation of our subject in preaching. We dare not preach just anything. We are called to preach the Word of God in such a way as will produce holiness. The written Word must so be given to men, and its meaning made so clear to men, that it will find corroboration in human lives by producing, through the power of the Spirit of God, similar characteristics of holiness as shine out from its sacred pages. But let us always remember that we must first attain ourselves to these standards of holiness before we can hope to lift others to them by our preaching.

In leading others to experience this calling of holiness, it is often a help to preach on character studies of men and women in the Bible,

showing how God in Christ moulded them, and emphasizing always the things which made them powerful for God in the world. But more particularly this line of thought should lead us to preach about the Holy Spirit of God. This kind of teaching is sadly lacking in much of our ministry to-day; yet such teaching is more fruitful than any other in producing conversions and in leading men and women to full surrender to Jesus as their Lord and Master. Such subjects can be taken as: "What does the Bible teach about the Person of the Holy Spirit?"; "The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament"; "Our Lord's teaching about the Holy Spirit"; "The Holy Spirit and the inspiration of Scripture"; "The work of the Holy Spirit"; "What is meant by such terms as the 'fulness', 'sealing', 'firstfruits', 'baptism' of the Holy Spirit?"; "How do we receive the Holy Spirit into our lives?" Such subjects, and others like them, will help men and women to know and love their Bibles and to experience the Calling to Holiness which will make all the difference to their lives.

III

5. *Preach the Challenge.* All preaching and all teaching of the Bible must be for a verdict. "If any man is willing to do His will he shall know of the doctrine" is one of the great and fundamental laws of our Lord Jesus Christ. A willingness to obey the Saviour precedes a knowledge of Him. Thus all our preaching must be with the aim of persuading men and women to yield their wills to the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible must be so presented as to lead the hearers to make a decision. Thus every message, whether a sermon in church or at a week-day meeting should contain a personal challenge.

Sometimes we are apt to think that 'preaching for a verdict' is what we call 'evangelism' as distinct from a 'teaching ministry', in which the emphasis should be on exposition and should not include the evangelistic note. We are thus apt to speak of these two methods of presenting the Word as being separate and distinct. But this is a false differentiation. All preaching should be teaching in some form; and all such teaching should be evangelistic. Whatever we speak should lead to a verdict in the realm of holiness and personal conduct. We need to-day more direct and applied teaching; but this must not be the application of our personal religious opinions, but the challenge of the written Word of God as seen by us through personal experience under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is not the now dead record of things that happened long ago in the past; it is rather the vivid record illustrating in the lives of past generations the things which are happening and ought to be happening in the lives of men and women to-day.

When the Bible is thus presented to the lives of men and women to-day it is made to live before them, and many have testified that they have found a new attractiveness and a living power in it. And to produce this result it has been found best to preach the Bible in the words and phraseology of the Bible itself. It has been said by many that the Bible is written in outworn phraseology with non-understandable words, and that if we would extend its influence we must modernize its words. Those who hold this view feel that to preach Bible terms to

a godless generation that is ignorant of all spiritual values is to meet with no response. But we need to remember that the world of the spiritual is a sphere of its own, and as such has its own atmosphere, its own standards, and its own words and expressions. And these are recorded by the Holy Spirit in His own book. We must not change this essential nature of spiritual expression. It is not for us to change the language in order to meet the standards and intellect of the minds of to-day. Rather we are called to lift the minds of our people to understand and use that phraseology which peculiarly belongs to the religious and spiritual sphere. Thus alone shall we be able to mould public opinion, and change the lives of men.

It has therefore been found best to preach Bible doctrines and truths in Bible words. Men and women over and over again have expressed appreciation when they heard teaching on such Bible words as justification, sanctification, reconciliation, being born again, repentance, and such like. And when they have been led to grasp the meaning they have testified how much it has illuminated passages of the Bible which hitherto had been obscure. If we master the book ourselves we shall be the means of helping others to master it also.

Let us then preach the Word. For the Bible is a wonderful book. "It is an eternal message," once wrote Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman. "Let us therefore wait until eternity dawns for the solution of its mysteries. Let us remember that irreverent criticism will close its doors, while the touch of love will throw them open wide. Live its principles, and you will know its teachings to be true. Love it, and you will be transformed by its power. Memorize it, and you will be strengthened. Mark it, and you will be amazed at its beauty. Master it, and you will make all with whom you come in contact know that you have taken hold of God, and that He has taken hold of you. I have tested its promises, and proved its power; in all lands I have seen its uplifting influence. To me it is truer, better, dearer than ever before, and is received as the authoritative message of God Himself."