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Ein Prediger muss nicht allein weiden, also dass er die Schafe unterweise, wie sie rechte Christen sollen sein, sondern auch daneben den Woelfen wehren, dass sie die Schafe nicht angreifen und mit falscher Lehre verfuerehen und Irrtum einfuehren.

Luther

Es ist kein Ding, das die Leute mehr bei der Kirche behaelt denn die gute Predigt. — *Apologie, Art. 24*

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? — *1 Cor. 14:8*

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the millennium. He says that the sacrificial offerings will be a memorial looking back to the Cross, as the offerings of the Old Covenant were anticipatory (247). Dispensationalists ought to study the Letter to the Galatians. Even the work of the Holy Spirit will be suspended entirely during the kingdom age or, as Gaebelein holds, will take on a different character (322). Dispensationalism says in effect: "A more acceptable time, a far greater day of salvation is at hand, and may be ushered in at any moment" (262). F. E. MAYER



The Limitations of Christian Preaching

By JOHN H. C. FRITZ

The objective which one seeks to accomplish and his means for that purpose determine the limitations of his doing. The practice of medicine is limited to a correct diagnosis of the case under consideration and the drugs or other remedial agents that will, if possible, effect a cure. A physician may relate some interesting news events to his patient, speak of his own experience in the recent war, and crack a few good jokes that will produce a hearty laugh, but that will not cure the patient of his tuberculosis or pneumonia or tonsilitis. For the production of a good painting an artist is limited to his colors, brushes, and canvass. The lawyer pleading a case before a jury is limited to the facts in the case and the laws covering it. The mason is limited in his work to stone, brick, trowel, mortar, and plumb line. The cook is limited to food-stuff, cooking utensils, and fire.

I

Even so Christian preaching has its limitations. That is in the very nature of the case. The limitations of Christian preaching are that it be *Christian* preaching and therefore take its material from the Word of God and use exposition, example, illustration, and, of course, language itself, to impress the Bible message upon the hearer. Only such preaching will serve the purpose of Christian preaching, to wit, "to make man wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3: 15). The important thing in a sermon is the

Biblical message; if that has not been impressed upon the hearers, preaching has failed to serve its purpose. The Biblical message and its application constitute the limitations of Christian preaching.

Jesus summed up His preaching by saying, "Repent ye, and believe the Gospel" (Mark 1:15). The sinner needs to be told that he is a sinner, under the curse of the Law; but when he has learned to despair of his own righteousness, then he should be comforted by the Gospel of salvation, for "God so loved the world that He gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16-17).

Paul gave a summary of his preaching when he said to the elders, or pastors, at Ephesus, "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you and have taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20, 21); or, when writing to the Corinthians, he said, "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

Peter spoke of the content of his preaching when in his pentecostal sermon at Jerusalem he said, "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ. . . . Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost," (Acts 2:36, 38); or when he said before the Jewish Council, "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

In other words, all true preaching must be Christocentric preaching. But does this demand not put too great a limitation upon preaching, excluding much subject matter of the Bible which God would have us teach? How can I preach a Christocentric sermon if I preach on such Biblical subjects as creation, the angels, marriage, stewardship, etc.? It is right here where some preachers make a big mistake; they leave Christ out of such sermons, and by doing so their preaching falls short of the purpose of the Christian sermon. Let them

learn of Paul how to preach a Christocentric sermon on Christian stewardship (2 Cor. 8:1-9). Paul makes Christ and His redemptive work the motivating power for the exercise of Christian stewardship. Let them learn of Paul how to preach a Christocentric sermon on marriage (Eph. 5:22-33). Let them learn of Paul how to fit the subject of creation into a Christocentric sermon (Acts 17:22-31). Let them learn from the writer to the Hebrews which part the angels play in God's economy of man's salvation (Heb. 1:6-7). I can pray that God should send His angels to guard me and my home during the night, because God has given that promise to me as a Christian, a believer in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Such Christocentric preaching produces not only saving faith, but also the fruits of that faith, the Christian life; and that the Christian might know what fruits faith must bring forth, Jesus and the Apostles included such directives for the Christian life in their preaching (Matt. 5—7; Rom. 12 ff.; Gal. 5:13 f.).

Christocentric preaching also gives to the believer the necessary comfort in all tribulations and trials and vicissitudes of life, for it assures him that, since he is a child of the heavenly Father, God is always mindful of him and is willing, ready, and able to help, so that the child of God knows that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28); and the believer therefore can joyfully say with Paul, "If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:31-32).

The summary of such Christian preaching is the summary of what the Bible teaches, as Paul says, "From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which 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" (2 Tim. 3:15-16); and, again, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). After all has been said, Christ's summary of His own preaching, "Repent ye and believe the Gospel," is the summary of Christian preaching.

II

Because preaching has such definite limitations, some preachers seek elsewhere for greater variety of subject matter and introduce into their "sermon" what has no place in Christian preaching. Some are tempted to think that they need something more interesting and exciting wherewith to regale and hold their audiences. What unfaithfulness to the Lord! How detrimental to the Christian congregation! What foolishness on the part of the preacher!

There is nothing more interesting and more beneficial and even more exciting than the Christian message, for that supplies the greatest need of man. That message is always timely, never grows old.

When sermon work grows stale to the preacher — and, of course, then his preaching also to his congregation — the difficulty lies not in a lack of material nor in a lack of variety of presentation, but in the preacher himself. Such a preacher does not study his Bible, nor does he know the needs of his people. His sermon work is a mere matter of routine. He talks for half an hour, more or less, because he is expected to do so. His lack of inspiration is due to a lack of perspiration. Great things cannot be accomplished without great effort. The preacher who diligently studies the Bible, not only the New, but also the Old Testament, knows human nature, is alive to the conditions of the time in which he and his people live, is aware of the particular needs of his congregation, such a preacher will never lack an abundance and variety of sermon material, nor a variety of presentation, and his sermons will always be fresh and interesting to his people — and to himself. The limitations of Christian preaching cannot be blamed for the proverbial expression that something is "dull as a sermon." The violinist has only four strings on his violin, but what marvelous music he can produce on these four strings by a variety of tones and a variety of combinations. How does he accomplish this? By daily practice, by advancing from easier to more difficult compositions, and from one position to the next on his violin, until he has mastered all seven. But, after all, he has only four strings on which to play; that is his limitation and at the same time the challenge to his skill. For the more substantial part of a meal a cook must stay with meat and potatoes and vegetables and breadstuffs,

and yet a good cook can prepare these in a variety of ways, so that her meals will always be relished and create an appetite for more. Even so the preacher need not deplore that his preaching has definite limitations, for these limitations do not cramp, but rather enlarge his usefulness.

Read the discourses of Jesus. What a variety of presentation in simple language: similes, metaphors (the sermon on the Mount has fifty-six of them), parables. Jesus spoke to the Sadducees and Pharisees, to the unbelieving Jews, to His disciples, but how differently! He spoke to Nicodemus, to the Samaritan woman, to the woman taken in the very act of adultery, but how differently! He spoke to Martha and Mary on different occasions: rebuke, comfort, commendation; yet always does He speak of the one thing needful. He meets little children and has a word for them. Midst His greatest agony He had a kind word for His mother, an assuring promise for the penitent thief, and a prayer for His crucifiers. He spoke with authority, and the people heard Him gladly.

The sayings and pronouncements of the Prophets of the Old Testament contain not only a wealth and depth of thought, but also a variety of presentation, so that their writings compose some of the choicest specimens of literature. Of the book of the Prophet Nahum, *e. g.*, De Wette says, "It is a classic in all respects." Brice calls it "the most vivid and passionate fragment of declamation in all literature." The same can be said of the writings of the Apostles.

Of course, if the preacher does not study all this and does not keep ever at it, we can well understand that he passes up not only a rich source of sermon material, but also that source from which he can well learn to present the old truths in a new and interesting and profitable way.

All this, of course, does not mean that a preacher should not read and study ancient and modern literature and the sermons of great preachers, also current newspapers and magazines, in order that he may learn what men are thinking and how they live, and that he may enlarge his vocabulary, find new illustrations, etc. When Jesus spoke to the people of His day, He referred to things with which they were acquainted: a yoke of oxen, a vineyard, a laborer's penny a day, etc. We may take examples and illustrations from things with which the people of our day are acquainted: the radio, the airplane, the atomic bomb, etc.

III

Finally, a Christian preacher's faithfulness to his God must determine the limitations of his preaching. God has given to the preacher very definite, explicit instructions. When Jesus sent out His twelve disciples, He said unto them, "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light; and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops" (Matt. 10:27). Before ascending into heaven Jesus said to His disciples, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Again He said, "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Through the Apostle Paul, the Lord has given such explicit directions as these to the preacher: "I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:1-2); "hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13). Preaching "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" serves the purpose of Christian preaching and has the promise of not being done in vain.

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The Development of Home Missions in North America

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(Written at the Request of Synod's Centennial Committee)

As we look back upon the century of Synod's history that will soon be completed and think of the developments both in the history of our country and of our Church, we stand in wonderment. We marvel at the tremendous changes in every phase of activity, be it in the social, in the economic, in the political, or in the scientific field. It was a century that saw at its beginning the westward trek of the pioneer by oxcart