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## Essays on Sermonizing

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## Essays on Sermonizing\*

By JOHN H. C. FRITZ

### THE PURPOSE OF THE SERMON

When Jesus had called unto Him His twelve Apostles, He said, "As ye go, *preach*, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand," Matt. 10:7. After having completed His work of the sinners' redemption and before He ascended to heaven, Jesus repeated His commission, saying, "Go ye into all the world, and *preach* the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," Mark 16:15-16; "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 Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth," Acts 1:8; "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; *teaching* them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," Matt. 28:18-20.

These last words, "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," indicate that Jesus had in mind that His commission to preach was not restricted to the Apostles, but that preaching should continue unto the end of days. Therefore Paul, writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells us that the ascended Lord "gave [to His Church] some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors

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and teachers," Eph. 4:11. In writing to Titus, Paul says that he left him in Crete to "set in order the things that are wanting," to wit, "to ordain elders [pastors, preachers] in every city," Titus 1:5.

We also learn that the men who are to be called to the office of the ministry or to the preaching office should be selected men having certain qualifications; among others, they should have the qualification of being "*apt to teach*," 1 Tim. 3:2. The Lord also told them what to teach: "Preach the Gospel," Mark 16:15. "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me," Acts 1:8. "Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," Matt. 28:20. Accordingly, Paul enjoined the young preacher Timothy to "preach the Word," 2 Tim. 4:2. Of his own preaching Paul said, "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," 1 Cor. 2:2. In his farewell address to the elders at Ephesus, Paul said, "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*. I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you *all the counsel of God*," Acts 20:20-21, 26-27. Of this office of the ministry, or the preaching office, Paul says that it is "a good work," 1 Tim. 3:1.

What is the purpose of preaching the Word, the Gospel, the whole counsel of God? Answer: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," Mark 16:16; "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," Eph. 4:12. And all this to the "glory of God," 2 Cor. 19:20; 1 Pet. 4:11. The sinner's salvation through Jesus Christ to the glory of God, that is to be the purpose of all preaching in the Christian Church.

However, when we speak of the purpose, not of preaching as such, but of the sermon — not *a, any* sermon, but *the* sermon — we have in mind the sermon as the pastor preaches it Sunday after Sunday within a limited time and to a specific audience, to wit, the Christian congregation, Christians entrusted to him by God to care for their spiritual welfare, the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made the pastor an "overseer to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood,"

**Acts 20:28.** Concerning this sermon (and, of course, a particular sermon at any time and upon any occasion) the preacher should ask himself: What definite purpose have I in mind with this sermon? What is it that I am trying to accomplish? This question the preacher must ask himself, for he cannot in one sermon teach all whatsoever the Lord hath commanded, or declare the whole counsel of God. What, then, of all this will he preach in this one particular sermon, and why? The preacher's purpose surely should not be, dare not be, merely to preach because he has been called to do so and because he knows that the congregation will assemble for public worship and expect to see him in the pulpit and to hear him speak. Any preacher with such an attitude towards preaching will be merely doing a job to make sure that at the end of the month he will be given his pay check. Such a preacher is a mere hireling and not a pastor, a shepherd of souls. He lacks one qualification which, irrespective of other qualifications, every pastor should have, to wit, faithfulness. "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful," 1 Cor. 4:1-2.

Let us look at some of the sermons recorded in the New Testament. The greatest preacher of all, and therefore the model preacher, is Jesus Himself. What Jesus preached we are told Mark 1:14-15, "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the Gospel." However, when Jesus preached to a specific audience, His sermon had a specific purpose. When He preached to His Apostles after having called them, His specific purpose was to give them instructions for their labors, Matt. 10:1-42. When Jesus spoke in the synagog at Nazareth, His specific purpose was to convince the Jews that He was the promised Messiah, Luke 4:16-29. When Jesus preached to great multitudes on the seashore, He spoke to them concerning the Kingdom of God, Matt. 13:1-52. After an encounter with the Sadducees and the Pharisees who sought to entangle Him in His talk, Jesus preached a powerful sermon "to the multitudes" (including the Sadducees and Pharisees) "and to His disciples," His special purpose being to warn the disciples against the false teaching of the Sadducees and Pharisees, to

denounce their hypocrisy and stubbornness, and to pronounce His woes upon them, telling them that if they remained impenitent, they would not "escape the damnation of hell," Matt. 23:1-39. When Jesus spoke to such people as Zacchaeus, he spoke words of great comfort; and in the house of Zacchaeus He added a parable to disabuse the minds of any that thought "the Kingdom of God should immediately appear," Luke 19:1-27. When Jesus preached His Sermon on the Mount, He spoke to His disciples of the Christian life with the motivation that God's love to them should induce them to love God and consecrate themselves unto Him, Matt. 5-7.

Turning to the preaching of the Apostles, we find that Peter's Pentecostal sermon had two parts: First, he told the large assembly of Jews at Jerusalem that the Man who had been approved by God among them by miracles and wonders and signs they had by wicked hands crucified and slain, but that God had raised Him from the dead and "made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Secondly, after hearing this, being pricked in their heart and stricken by a guilty conscience, the Jews asked, "What shall we do?" Then Peter said unto them, "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. For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord, our God, shall call," Acts 2:38-39. The entire Pentecostal sermon of Peter has not been recorded, for we read, "And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation," Acts 2:40. The result of Peter's Pentecostal sermon was that three thousand were added to the church at Jerusalem.

When Paul preached at Antioch, his purpose was to show that in Jesus the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled, and therefore he said unto them, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the Prophets, Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish, for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man

declare it unto you," Acts 13: 38-41. The result of Paul's sermon at Antioch was that "many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God," v. 43; also that the Gentiles present asked that His sermon be repeated on the next Sabbath, at which time almost the whole city came together "to hear the Word of God," vv. 43-44.

When Paul preached at Athens, his hearers there being Gentiles and not Jews, Paul's sermon had an altogether different purpose than when he was preaching to the Jews. Preaching to the Gentiles at Athens, Paul's purpose was to convince them that in spite of the fact that they were worshiping many gods, they did not know the one true God. "Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship," said Paul, "Him declare I unto you." At the same time Paul called their attention to Him whom God had raised from the dead and to the appointed day in which He by Him would judge the world in righteousness. While Paul's success in Athens was not very great, some mocking and others saying, "We will hear thee again of this matter," "howbeit certain men clave unto him and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them," Acts 17: 22-34.

When Paul preached a sermon to Felix and his wife, Drusilla, in their own home, "he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," calling attention to their sins but not failing also to preach Christ to them, for we read that Felix and Drusilla heard Paul "concerning the faith in Christ." Acts 24: 24-25.

When Paul spoke his farewell address to the elders at Ephesus, he preached to them a pastoral sermon, Acts 20: 17-35.

When we examine Paul's Letters, which may well be considered to have been sermons addressed to the Christian congregations to whom he was writing, we find that each Letter had its own specific purpose, supplying the spiritual needs of the readers or hearers, preaching both Law and Gospel and not failing to use the right motivation, Rom. 12: 1; 2 Cor. 8: 8-9, when Christians were encouraged to lead a godly life.

After having made this study of recorded sermons in the New Testament, we arrive at the following conclusions concerning the purpose of the sermon:

1) Since the one final purpose of Scripture is "to make sinners wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus," 2 Tim. 3: 15, and since Christ has expressly commanded that for this purpose the Gospel (and, of course, the Law, which enters into the service of the Gospel) should be preached, and since without this purpose the church and the ministry would have no real purpose of existence, and since the world, especially also in our day, is much in need of such preaching, the purpose of every sermon should be the sinner's salvation through Christ Jesus to the glory of God. *Therefore every sermon should be Christ-centered.*

That the sermon should be Christ-centered also holds good when on the basis of an ethical text Christians are admonished to lead a Christian life. In the final analysis, the sinner is brought to faith in Christ that he may consecrate his whole life to his Savior. Says Paul, "Christ died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again," 2 Cor. 5:15. And in his Epistle to Titus, Paul says, "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, *zealous of good works,*" Titus 2:11-14. The motivation of ethical sermons should always be the mercy of God and the love of Christ. Thereby the Christian should be moved to consecrate himself unto his Lord and Savior, Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 8:8-9; 1 John 4:7-11. An ethical sermon that has not the proper motivation cannot produce works that are good in the sight of God; in fact, such a sermon is not a Christian sermon at all.

In the days of Whitefield (1714—1770) moral conditions in England were most deplorable. At the same time England professed to be a Christian nation; there were ten thousand clergymen and millions of communicant members. What was wrong? Sir William Blackstone, the eminent jurist, visited all the leading churches in London and "heard not one discourse which had more Christianity in it than the writings of Cicero."

That was in the eighteenth century. What about the

twentieth century, conditions as we find them in our own country? The condition concerning morals we know is not good. What about the preaching of our day? A recent visitor to this country, Dr. Alec Vidler, editor of *Theology*, a British monthly magazine, attended the services in a number of American churches. He says: "So far as I can ascertain, the paradigm of American preaching is: 'Let me suggest that you try to be good.' Moralistic homilies are still the order of the day. . . . Who preaches sermons that are genuine expositions of the text and sense of Scripture, bringing to bear the great Biblical themes of God's judgment and mercy upon men who are dead in their complacency, self-confidence, or pride? Your preachers are still advocating justification by good works of one kind or another; they are not proclaiming the Gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ." Concerning the preaching of the Law in our American churches, he says: "You are still preaching the Law, and a pretty easy-going or romantic law at that." This is probably also what Mark Matthews meant when a number of years ago he said that in ninety percent of the churches of our country the fact of sin is not preached. Quoting Dr. Vidler in the *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, Dr. Wm. Arndt has this comment: "We are sure that Dr. Vidler does not have in mind Lutheran preachers, but on account of the latitudinarianism of our age one or the other of us may begin to lean to that type of pulpit work which Dr. Vidler describes. Constant vigilance is required."

The twenty-fifth and last thesis of Walther's *Law and Gospel* reads: "The Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching." Enlarging upon this thesis, Walther says: "Let us turn to the Holy Scriptures and become convinced that in a general way the Gospel must predominate in the preaching of a Christian minister. The first proof for this claim is furnished by the first preacher after Christ had been born into this world. He was an angel; he preached to the shepherds, who were terrified by his celestial splendor: 'Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.' Luke 2:10. In his address there is not the least trace of the Law, of injunctions, of demands that God makes upon men, but He preaches the very opposite — concerning the good will and mercy of God



to all men. He is joined by the heavenly host, who sing exultingly: 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.' Luke 2:14. Again we hear nothing but a sweet, pleasant message of joy. Our Father in heaven has had His honor restored to Him. He had created a race of men of whom He knew that they would fall, but He did everything possible to save men. The Infant born in the stable at Bethlehem has established peace between God and mankind. The only thing that God requires is that men be pleased with His arrangement for their salvation and take comfort and rejoice in this Infant. This heavenly preacher gave us an illustration of how we are to preach. True, we have to preach the Law, only, however, as a preparation for the Gospel. The ultimate aim in our preaching of the Law must be to preach the Gospel. Whoever does not adopt this aim is not a true minister of the Gospel.

"Mark 16:15-16 we read: 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.' When these words were spoken, the time had arrived for Christ to proclaim in clear and distinct terms the basic facts of His religion. For He was about to ascend to heaven and must now give His Apostles instruction how to continue His work. What does He say to them? He tells them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. The mere term *Gospel* serves notice on them that their message must be a message of joy. Lest they think that this word is so infinitely great that nobody will grasp its meaning, He adds these words immediately: 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,' to let them know that this is what He understands by the word *Gospel*. He proceeds: 'He that believeth not shall be damned.' This, too, is a sweet word; for He does not say: 'He that has sinned much for a long time shall be damned,' but states no other reason for man's damnation than his unbelief. Humanly speaking, one might say that these last words are the very sweetest and most comforting. Ponder the meaning of this statement: 'He that believeth not shall be damned.' No matter what a person's character is and how grievously he has sinned, nothing in his past record shall damn him. But, naturally, when a person refuses to believe the words, the message, of Jesus, he has to

go to perdition. The Lord never makes mention of hell except for the purpose of bringing men to heaven. So in this passage; the alarming reference to damnation is merely to prompt men to accept His gracious message and not to put it from them. These last words of the Lord should not be emphasized thus: 'He that believeth *not* shall be damned,' but thus: 'He that *believeth not* shall be damned.' He means to say: 'Your damnation has already been removed from you; your sin has been taken away; hell has already been overcome for you. I have rendered a sufficient atonement for everything. It is now for you to *believe* this, and you will be saved forevermore.' . . . True, if you meet with people who are merged in self-righteousness, in sins and vices, and in carnal security, you must first crush their stony hearts; but that is merely preparatory work. The waters of grace cannot penetrate a stony heart. But the Law is merely an auxiliary doctrine; it is not the real doctrine of Christ. 'The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.' John 1:17. By Christ came only grace, the Gospel, not a new Law, as the miserable papists claim in their blindness. He preached the Law merely to prepare men for the sweet comfort which He had to offer them, 2 Cor. 3:5-6; 1 Cor. 2:2; 15:3. . . .

"Let me offer you a quotation from Luther which you ought to commit to memory and of which you should make diligent use. It is found in his *Preface to the Epistle to the Galatians* (St. L. Ed., IX, 9) and reads: 'In my heart there reigns, and shall ever reign, this one article, namely, faith in my dear Lord Christ, which is the sole beginning, middle, and end of all spiritual and godly thoughts which I may have at any time, day or night.' Luther might as well have said 'in my sermons and writings,' instead of 'in my heart,' for his sermons and writings conform to the above rule. No one can preach the Gospel more sweetly and gloriously than our beloved Luther did. He does not only offer great comfort in his sermons, but he preaches so as to lay hold of any doubting hearer and drag him out of his doubts, compelling him to believe that he is a child of God and would die saved if he were to die that night. Would to God that this testimony could be offered concerning you when you have entered the ministry! Pray to God on your knees for His help in order that you may repeat Luther's confession. Would to God that this confession could

be repeated by all ministers, and I must add, alas! also by all ministers in the Missouri Synod! For they are not all alike; in some there is a legalistic trend, which does great injury to their own and to their hearers' souls. They do not administer their office with genuine cheerfulness and do not make their people cheerful Christians. But that is what you will have to do to achieve wonderful results. If you preach the Gospel abundantly, you need not fear that your people will leave your church when some spiritual mountebank comes along and starts an unseemly exhibition in his pulpit. Your people will say: 'Our minister has given us what we could not get anywhere else. He is a true Lutheran minister and pours out a great treasure for us every Sunday.' . . . On examining your sermon for both its Law and its Gospel contents, you may find that you have given the Gospel very little space. Now remember, if you come out of your pulpit without having preached enough Gospel to save some poor sinner who may have come to church for the first and the last time, his blood will be required of you. . . . Do not hold forth with the Law too long; let the Gospel follow promptly. When the Law has made the iron to glow, apply the Gospel immediately to shape it into a proper form; if the iron is allowed to cool, nothing can be done with it."

2) Since in one sermon a preacher cannot teach all that Christ has commanded, cannot declare the whole counsel of God, the preacher must decide what particular purpose he has in mind in preaching a particular sermon. His purpose should be determined by the needs of the people to whom he is preaching.

3) The first and foremost use of Scripture is to teach doctrine. That is basic. All other uses of Scripture are built on doctrine, 2 Tim. 3:16. Not only is doctrinal preaching much neglected, but some doctrines are not preached at all, or very seldom. Is it perhaps true that we hold people responsible for knowing certain doctrines and acting upon them in their daily life, when we have not taught them these doctrines? How many Christians, for instance, get daily comfort from the fact that they have been baptized? How often do we hear a sermon on the doctrine of the angels?

Also along doctrino-ethical lines some subjects are not given sufficient consideration, as, for example, brotherly ad-

monition, including church discipline; marriage, divorce, and the Christian home.

4) In order to preach to the needs of the people, a pastor must know what is agitating the minds of the members of his congregation, with what particular dangers they are confronted, what special comfort they need, etc. In order to know this, the preacher must have a knowledge of the world in which he lives, and by way of personal contact with his people (pastoral visits to the home) must learn to know their particular spiritual needs.

5) In order that the sermon may serve its purpose, the preacher must direct it to the intellect, the imagination, and the will of his hearers; the sermon must present its subject matter in a unified thought (mentioning theme and parts), with logical thought progression, in simple language, and with the necessary application to the hearer.

With such preaching, every sermon having a definite, well-defined purpose, as the needs of the hearers demand, a Christian congregation will by the grace of God advance in Christian knowledge and faith and in spiritual life to the glory of God through Christ Jesus.

### THE STUDY OF THE SERMON TEXT

Since the Christian sermon is to supply the spiritual needs of the Christian congregation (the preservation and strengthening of faith and an increased measure of consecration to the Savior in the Christian's daily life), the sermon text should be chosen with this purpose in view.

The word "text," taken from the Latin, signifies a texture or woven fabric, many threads woven together making up a piece of cloth. So the sermon text consists of thoughts woven together to make up one thought unit. When choosing a text, the preacher should keep this in mind; his text should present a unit thought. Such a text will present not merely a subject, but a certain phase of that subject. It will present a specific thought which becomes the theme of the sermon and its *fundamentum dividendi*. Therefore we arrive at this definition of the theme: *The theme is the specific thought of the text which distinguishes that text from other texts treating the same subject matter.* The text may be short or long. It is too short when it has not sufficient sermon material; it is too long if it presents too much sermon material.

There are more than twenty-five pericopic systems which present sermon texts, more or less well chosen in accordance with the church year. Under ordinary circumstances a preacher will perhaps not be able to make a better selection. The pericopic systems present the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion which should be preached again and again, and also such texts as express God's will concerning the Christian's daily life. While formerly we went to the extreme of using only the old pericopic system, we should not now go to the extreme of discarding it altogether or of having too much change in our selection of sermon texts. Let us remember that certain familiar texts a Christian congregation always gladly hears again and again. Christian people will never tire to hear the old Christian Gospel on Christmas Day, "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord," Luke 2:10-11. Some of the pericopic systems also provide a series of texts from the Old Testament for the entire church year. Since the Old Testament is a much-neglected book by our people (and even by preachers), a preacher may do well to give his serious consideration to the preaching of a series of texts from the Old Testament, especially if he is ministering to a congregation that has been in existence for many years. After all, however, series of pericopes may not supply all the needs of a congregation in the course of the church year. When a pastor is aware of the fact that instruction on a certain doctrine of Scripture or in reference to a certain moral issue or comfort and encouragement in affliction and trial is needed by his congregation, he should not hesitate to choose a text accordingly.

The text having been chosen, it should be carefully studied and its contents well understood. When the text has been *well understood*, a preacher will have little or no difficulty in making a good outline (theme, parts, and a few subdivisions). When the textual study and the outline have been completed, the preacher will have done eighty to ninety per cent of his sermon work, for then he will not only have all his material, but he will also have it well organized.

What does a thorough study of the text require? It requires, first of all, a prayerful approach; after that, a careful reading of the text in the vernacular and in the light of its

context or historical setting. In spite of the fact that some few words or phrases of the original have not been exactly reproduced or even wrongly in the translation, we must admit that both our German and English translations have been well done. However, the preacher should study the original text in order to get the finer shades of meaning of certain words. When, for example, we read, "When they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed," Acts 14:23, the word "ordained" has not the meaning which it commonly has today, but a better translation would be "having chosen them elders." Or, in 1 Cor. 1 the word translated "ministers" in the Greek means underrowers, giving us the beautiful picture of Christ as the Head of the ship of the Church with His ministers as underrowers or helpers.

In order to understand and correctly interpret Rom. 8:29, the preacher must learn what the word "foreknew" means as used here and in parallel passages. Of course, it is not good practice that a preacher refer to the Greek or even quote it in his sermon, but he should give the people the benefit of his study and thus give them a clearer concept of the translation. While the preacher is studying his text, he will not only write down the important thoughts of the text, but also parallel passages as these come to his mind or as he finds them in the concordance. The thoughts which he finds in the text will then have to be co-ordinated and expressed in a unified thought, which may be done either in the form of a statement or a question; that will be the theme of the sermon.

The tentative outline having been made, the preacher should consult good commentaries. Turning to commentaries and other sermon helps before the preacher has thoroughly thought through his text stunts his own original thinking and understanding of the text, keeps him from becoming fully saturated with the thoughts of the text and from becoming deeply interested in its subject matter; it also prevents him from keeping well in mind the needs of his hearers, makes it more difficult to commit his sermon to memory, and, finally, will also affect his delivery. Reading commentaries should give the preacher additional thoughts, correct what wrong understanding he may have had of the text, or part of it; supply him with illustrations, etc. What has been read should

be put through the crucible of the preacher's own thinking and be presented in his own language and style. The preacher should use commentaries, but not let commentaries use him.

At this juncture the preacher may be persuaded to decide upon a treatment of the text according to the synthetic sermon method. Since sermon methods refer to the treatment of the text, there can be only two methods: either say what the text expressly says (analytic) or what it implies (synthetic). It would be better to call these methods the direct and indirect methods. As a rule, the preacher will prepare his outline according to the analytic, or direct, method. In the course of the study, however, he may find that an inference or deduction made of the text is of such importance that he desires to impress it forcibly upon his hearers and therefore to feature it as the theme of his sermon. By way of example: John 11:47-53. Analytic outline: "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation perish not." Let us consider these words, first, as understood by Caiaphas, and, secondly, as a divine prophecy. As the preacher studies this text, he finds that God *uses even His enemies* to carry out His divine plans. Finding this to be an important truth, he makes this inference the theme of his sermon, dividing it as follows: *God Uses Even His Enemies for His Own Good Purposes*. I. To testify to the truth of the Christian religion, v. 47. II. To utter divine prophecy, vv. 51-52. III. To carry out His divine plan of the world's redemption, v. 53.

That it is permissible to make such inferences or deductions from the text the Lord Jesus Himself teaches us. Matt. 22:23-32 we read that to the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, the Lord said, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. *God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*," v. 32. The Lord quoted an Old Testament passage, and by way of inference from it proved the resurrection from the dead.

After having read commentaries, the preacher is ready to say whether or not his outline needs any correction or additions. He will add, if he has not already done so, some parallel passages, illustrations he desires to use, and applications.

The introduction is yet to be supplied. The introduction should arouse the attention and interest of the hearer and thus prepare him for the subject matter of the sermon. Therefore

the very first sentence of the introduction (the topic sentence of the introductory paragraph) should be a striking sentence.

The written sermon will be the result of a thorough study and understanding of the text and the making of a good outline. The writing of the sermon should be carefully and well done, presenting the subject matter in simple and understandable language and in logical progression of thought, not neglecting the transitions or bridges which lead from one thought to another. I am inclined to say that for every preacher who has not yet been in the ministry ten years or longer the writing of the sermon is a *conditio sine qua non*. Writing the sermon makes not only for good use of language, but especially for accurate presentation of thought; both are indispensable for the preacher. After ten or fifteen years, and after a preacher has much advanced in his Bible study and his theological thinking, as also in his ability correctly and precisely and readily to present theological thought, he may attempt the ideal way: delivery after very careful preparation without, however, having written every word of the sermon; an extended outline serving the purpose. This, however, is not the easy way.

### THE DELIVERY OF THE SERMON

The best sermon as to contents and construction will not fully serve its purpose without good delivery.

*The very first thing that a speaker must do is to make his audience think.* If his hearers do not think, they are not paying attention to what he says. And unless they think, the sermon will be preached to them in vain. The very manner of the preacher's presence in the pulpit, his tone of voice, his manner of reading the text, the first sentence of his introduction should get the hearer's attention and arouse him to think. Whatever the subject matter may be, the hearer should at once be impressed that it will be worth while to listen. Of course, after the preacher has aroused such expectations, he must not disappoint the listener but follow up with a worthwhile sermon.

Good delivery calls for free delivery, without manuscript and without notes taken into the pulpit. (Statistical data or a long quotation may be taken into the pulpit and read.) Free delivery is essential for good delivery. The preacher should be a speaker, not a reader. Reading the sermon prevents



proper audience and speaker contact. The interplay between speaker and hearer, that is, a mutual or reciprocal action, will be largely missing. A speaker should speak with his whole body: not only make gestures with his hands, but also speak with his eyes, his facial expression, his body movements. All this makes for animation on the part of the speaker and acts favorably upon the hearer. The speaker should not look at a piece of paper from which he reads, but at the people to whom he is speaking in order that he may see how they react. Are they paying attention? Do they understand? Do they approve or disapprove? Are they growing weary? Therefore, at an evening service the lights in the church should not be turned so low that speaker and hearer cannot clearly see each other; especially should the preacher be in a bright light, but not one that throws a glare into the eyes of the hearer, producing eyestrain and inattention. Semidarkness produces drowsiness in the hearer and therefore inattention.

For good delivery, it is necessary that the speaker speak loudly (by well sounding the vowels), distinctly (by clearly pronouncing the consonants), and with animation; and in order to avoid monotony, there should be a proper change in the volume and pitch of the voice, a change in the rate of speaking, etc. Much in addition to this (voice, breathing, gestures, etc.) may be learned in a course of public speaking; but all else will not serve its purpose if the preacher does not speak loudly, distinctly, with animation, and proper modulation of voice (avoiding monotony). The speaker should not only perform; he should be understood. The quickest way to kill interest in the hearer is when the hearer cannot hear what the speaker says.

But more than all this is necessary. Good delivery has certain prerequisites which must be given attention before the speaker begins to speak. Such a prerequisite is the preacher's presentation of his subject matter. The sermon should not be presented in an essay style, nor in the style of something that is written not for the hearer, but for the reader. This the preacher should keep in mind when he prepares his sermon: he is not writing for a reader, but is preparing that which he is going to speak to a hearer. The reader can read leisurely, can reread, can look up a word in the dictionary, can stop at will and rethink what he has read; not so the

hearer, he must get what is said and understand its meaning at the moment the words leave the lips of the speaker. Therefore the speaker must strive that this be done by using simple language, simple sentence construction, must repeat in order to emphasize or because he notices that he has not been understood, must make intelligent use of the pause, etc.

Since free delivery is essential for good delivery, the preacher must know his sermon well, be saturated with its subject matter. Some would put it this way: he must have memorized his sermon well. But putting it that way may convey an altogether wrong impression of wherein memorization consists. The memorization of a sermon should not begin when the Amen has been written, but as soon as the preacher first reads his text. It is the text which he must preach. Why not at once remember it? He writes his outline, theme, parts, subdivisions; why not at once remember all this? He adds parallel passages, illustrations, applications to his outline; why not at once remember them? He writes his sermon, develops the topical sentence of his paragraphs; he seeks for accuracy in language, at times looking long to find the exact word; why not at once remember all this? It is foolish, nonsensical, not to think of the delivery of the sermon until the Amen has been written, and then begin to memorize the sermon, perhaps in schoolboy fashion, word for word. Memory work should be the by-product of good thinking. As a rule, the sermon should have impressed itself upon the memory of the preacher when he has written his Amen. Practice in this respect also makes perfect. If the preacher will on a Saturday night once more without the manuscript review his sermon, introductory thought, theme, parts, topic sentences, paragraph development, illustrations; in short, recall what he has written, then he will be agreeably surprised how well all this will have become embedded in his memory by the time he awakes on Sunday morning when he can once more give it a brief mental review.

Since it should be the purpose of the speaker to make the hearers think and therefore to arouse and hold their attention, the opening sentence of the introduction to the sermon should not only be a striking sentence, but should be so spoken that at once the attention and interest of the hearers is aroused. Some preachers as soon as the congrega-

tion stops singing and the organ stops playing offer their salutation and read the sermon text, doing this very carelessly, speak their pulpit address (In Christ Jesus dear friends), and then proceed to speak the first sentence of their introduction *before the audience is prepared to listen*. Before the preacher utters his first words in the pulpit (the salutation), he should pause long enough to establish perfect quietness in the church auditorium. Pausing will itself bring about this effect. The hearer will then be prepared to hear. And then, of course, the speaker should, may it be said again, speak slowly, loudly, distinctly, and in the course of his delivery make intelligent use of the pause. A speaker speaks too rapidly when the hearer cannot follow him in his thinking; when the hearer in his thinking is ahead of the speaker, the speaker is speaking too slowly. The introduction should not be spoken with too much animation, but rather in a normal and deliberate manner of speaking. The introduction is not the sermon, but only the introduction to the sermon.

Since the speaker should arouse and hold the interest of the hearers, he should present his sermon material in the most interesting way, both in reference to his style of speaking and also in reference to his delivery. Good style calls for such things as euphony, simplicity, economy, congruity, repetition, and variety of expression. The delivery itself should be in a tone of voice and with such animation as the contents of the sermon demand and as is commensurate with the size of the audience and the auditorium. In any case, the preacher should always speak so loudly and distinctly that the man in the last pew can easily hear and understand. Many speakers have not sufficient mouth and lip action; in fact, they make no real effort to be understood. The preacher should keep in mind that his audience is not always from the outset in the frame of mind to listen attentively. He must put them into that frame of mind. The speaker should not *demand*, but rather *command* attention. Someone has said that there are three classes of preachers: some to whom you cannot listen, no matter how much you try; some to whom you can listen if you try; some to whom you must listen, whether you try or not. The advice given is: Preachers, get into this third class. While it is true that much poor preaching is due to poor sermon contents, it is also sadly true that much poor preaching is due

to poor delivery. It is sadly true that a sermon very good in contents and language but poorly delivered will accomplish very little, while a sermon rather poor in contents and language but very well delivered may in comparison be favorably received and accomplish much. It is also true that some people are impressed by the performance of the preacher but not by the subject matter presented; the sermon itself has been shallow. While we must readily admit that the content of the sermon is by far always the more important part, yet it is also a cold, stubborn fact that the best sermon, if not well delivered, will not fully accomplish its purpose, will not even enter the ears of the people, and much less get into their hearts and lives.

*"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression,"* Is. 58:1; *"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. . . . O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!"* Is. 40:1, 9.

