

# THE PREACHER AND THE BIBLE

Ignorance of the Bible is so common among the people of our churches that it may be fairly said to be the rule rather than the exception. This is bad, but there is something even worse, and that is the degree of complacency with which, in practice, the ministers of the churches accept this condition of things. For since we believe that the Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary for our salvation, it follows that to accept neglect of the Bible by our people is nothing short of an unconditional surrender of hope for an intelligent laity. It means that the ministers themselves are not keenly alive to the value and power of the Bible, that they are not possessed of any very strong conviction that it has a vital connection with salvation.

Yet, the history of the Christian movement from the beginning shows that it is most fresh and vigorous when the Scriptures are most vividly and clearly known, while on the other hand, neglect of them is both the cause and the effect of spiritual dullness. One aspect of the work of our Lord himself was a reassertion of the power of the Scriptures, a brushing aside of the scholastic pedantry that had obscured them. St. Paul and his fellow missionaries found new light coming from the ancient writings. Throughout the history of the church the brightest pages are those which deal with the work of men who had discovered the Bible for themselves, while the darkest and dreariest pages deal with times in which the Bible was thrust aside, and the emphasis was centered on ritual and priesthood, massive institutions, and systems of dogma.\*\*\* These can not be a substitute for the perpetual challenge of the Scriptures.

This means that the spectacle of a church more and more ignorant of the Bible is a terrifying sight—or it should be. But it means also that the recovery of a fresh and intelligent knowledge of the Bible by our people would bring with it a revival of spiritual power. We are called to action, and the call is not the call of danger only, but also the call of a great opportunity. The trouble is that we do not seem to be either alarmed by the danger, or allured by the hope. A revival of Bible study must be the work of the ministers, and the ministers seem all too willing to leave the task to the teachers in their church schools.

But the church schools cannot meet all the needs of the situation. The minister has a great responsibility for the careful and skilful supervision of his school. But many of his people do not attend it, and it does its work under the great and numerous handicaps which call for caution in expecting too much from it. Besides doing his best to make his church school effective, there is something else which the minister can do to make the Bible a living force in the lives of his people: he can use it in his preaching, not as a source of texts to fit his sermon, but as subject of his discourse.

Seldom do we hear a sermon that aims at making clear the message of a book of the Bible, or of some great passage in it. In fact, it is more common to see notices of sermons on books outside the Biblical literature than on those which are a part of it.

To be sure, there are some kinds of expository preaching to which no one wants to listen; but the right kind is as attractive, to put it mildly, as preaching on current topics, about the best sellers, or "from" striking texts lifted bodily out of their context. Once the people have a chance to

judge for themselves, they will show due appreciation of sermons in which the Bible's message to them is set forth by workmen who rightly divide the word of truth. After all, crowd or no crowd, if the comparison between various methods of preaching be made, we may expect with some confidence that preaching to excel which weaves the spiritual teaching of the Bible into the thinking of men and women. The poverty of the inner lives of many church people is pitiable—a little more of the sincere milk of the word would help their undernourished souls. Certainly, if half we profess to believe about the power of the Bible is true, we have only to loose it and let it go, to secure an enriched spirituality among our people. Faith in the Bible needs to be matched with works, and with faith in the capacity of the men and women of our churches.

It may be said that what is needed today is a message which deals with present situations. This is true enough, but the task of the minister of religion is to lead his people to survey their present situations by the light of eternal truth. Religion is the power which lifts men above the confusion and terror of the moment, and makes them see their lives sub specie aeternitatis. Right here is the justification for making the sermon an exposition of the Scriptures which are the matchless expression of the timeless in time, the revelation of the ways of the Eternal Father to His children living in the flux of time. The Bible is a contemporary book, telling us of our Great Contemporary.

Now that the world is collapsing about us, what greater task can there be than that of showing perplexed, bewildered men and women that here, in what has been a sealed book, is a guide to a life which lifts those who have made it their own above the world in which they live, and makes them more than conquerors? To this we of the ministry are called by the needs of our people, and the high commission of the living God.

## A GREAT PREACHER ON PREACHING

We must throw all our strength of judgment, memory, imagination and eloquence, into the delivery of the gospel, and not give to the preaching of the Cross our random thoughts while wayside topics engross our deeper meditations. Depend upon it, if we brought the intellect of a Locke or a Newton and the eloquence of a Cicero to bear upon the simple doctrine of "believe and live," we should find no surplus strength.

Brethren, first and above all things, keep to plain evangelical doctrines, whatever else you do or do not preach, be sure incessantly to bring forth the soul-saving truth of Christ and him crucified.

I know a minister whose shoe-latchet I am unworthy to unloose, whose preaching is often little better than sacred miniature painting—I might also say on holy trifling. He is great upon the ten toes of the beast, the four faces of the cherubim, the mystical bearings of the staves of the ark, and the windows of Solomon's Temple; but the sins of business men, the temptations of the times, and the needs of the age he scarcely ever touches upon.

Such preaching reminds me of a lion engaged in mouse-hunting, or a man-of-war cruising

after a water beetle. Topics scarcely in importance equal to what Peter calls "old wives' fables" are made great matters of by those microscopic divines to whom the nicety of a point is more attractive than the saving of souls.

You may have heard that Harcatius, King of Persia, was a notable mole-catcher; and Briantes, King of Lydia, was equally au fait at filing needles; but these trivialities by no means prove them to have been great kings. It is much the same in the ministry; there is such a thing as meanness of mental occupation unbecoming the rank of an ambassador of heaven.

The world needs still to be told of its Saviour, and the way to reach him. If with the zeal of Methodists we can preach the doctrine of Puritans, a great future is before us. The fire of Wesley and the fuel of Whitefield will cause a burning which shall set the forests of error on fire, and warm the very soul of this cold earth.

Man's fall, his need of a new birth, forgiveness through an atonement, and salvation as the result of faith—these are our battle-axe, and weapons of war. Blessed is that ministry of which Christ is all.—Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

## SUPPORT THE ADVANCE

Vitally essential in military operations is the supply of materials to the advancing armies. If the people on the home front fail to produce and supply food, clothing, ammunition, weapons, etc., the most skilful and courageous armies must "turn back in the day of battle."

So in the work of God, to carry pioneer and evangelistic enterprise to a victorious conclusion, there must needs be zealous and faithful support from the "home front." The churches established and functioning must, by their prayers and financial contributions, see that those who take their place in the heat of the battle, lack in no necessary equipment. Otherwise, the attack may become a retreat.

The Home Mission Board has requested that Sunday, Oct. 10th, be designated as Home Mission Sunday in our churches. Pastors are requested to preach messages on the need of enlarging our borders, people are urged to give a generous offering toward the support of our extension efforts; pastors and people asked to unite in earnest, fervent prayer, for the blessing of God upon the efforts being made.

God has given us our marching orders. It is time to go forward. The success or failure of our undertakings depend very largely on the degree of support and co-operation given to this appeal. We're depending on you. So are our workers. And so is the Lord!

J. R. Miller says: "The closets of God's people are where the roots of the Church grow. If the roots be not nourished there can be no tree with branches and fruit. In many senses the root is the most important part. Men do not see it. Yet, in the dark it works away and in its secret laboratory it prepares the life which goes up into the tree bringing forth flowers and fruit of many colors, shape and flowers. All this is woven down in this lowly earth factory."—Selected.