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THE MAKING OF A MINISTER

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Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." (Matt. 4:19).

To my friend Paget Wilkes, of England, a man once remarked: "If God should give the command to angels to evangelize the world, heaven would be empty in five minutes." But we all know that God will give no such command. He has chosen rather, "By the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe," committing the redeeming evangel to those who have heard it and believed it to the saving of their own souls. A task withheld from angels has been entrusted to us before whom the Lord Jesus Christ has appeared to make us ministers and witnesses.

The first element in the making of the minister relates to the man himself. If we are concerned at all about getting first things first, we need to establish forever in our minds the fact that the preacher must be something. When St. Paul wrote to Timothy about the things that make or mar the ministry, he said, first, "Take heed to thyself," and, second, "to the doctrine." Manhood comes first. Character is prior. Moral fitness, personal spiritual quality is peculiarly elemental and vital.

Our country had a President a few years ago who as the administrative head of a great university before his election to the presidency, had wide opportunity for contacts with the representatives of all professions, as well as with thousands of collegiate candidates for those professions. Out of his wealthy experience he once spoke some words that might well be framed on the walls of every preacher's mind. "When I hear," he said, "some of the things which young men say to me by way of putting the arguments to themselves for going into the ministry, I think they are talking of another profession. Their motive is to do something, when it should be to be something. You do not have to be something in particular to be a lawyer. I have been a lawyer and I know. You do not have to be anything in particular, except a kind-hearted man perhaps, to be a physician. You do not have to be anything nor to undergo any strong spiritual change, in order to be a merchant. The only profession which consists in being something is the ministry of our Lord and Saviour—and it does not consist of anything else. That conception of the minister which rubs all the marks of it off and mixes him in the crowd so that you cannot pick him out, is a process of eliminating the ministry itself."

Admirable as that deliverance is, from a Chief Magistrate of our nation, it is but the echo of what I find a devout and eloquent bishop to have said a half century ago. "The minister," he declared, "is unlike other teachers. They simply teach art or science, without reference to moral character. The printer may be an excellent mechanic, may teach his art thoroughly, and yet be a very bad man. The college professor may teach clearly the highest problems in calculus, and yet be grossly immoral. But the minister is blended with the truth that he teaches. He may explain the doctrines of the Bible intellectually, but he cannot preach properly without a personal realization of the truth."

It is hardly possible to place too much emphasis upon this aspect of our study. We are

sent to preach repentance; let us be very sure that we personally know something of the deep meaning of a godly sorrow for sin. We are sent to proclaim the prime necessity of being "born again" and to minister the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord; let us make sure that we ourselves have passed from death unto life and are indeed the sons of God. We are sent to preach free salvation for all men and full salvation from all sin, let us give the right ring to that preaching by making certain that Christ, the "wisdom of God," is not only our "righteousness" but also our "sanctification," that his blood does in truth cleanse our hearts from all sin. We are sent to preach a full-orbed gospel, with ethical obligations of the highest type and social implications of the most extensive order; we dare not maim our ministry by missing the moralities whose absence spells a tragedy for any life, but for the life of a Christian worker, a tragedy too sad either for words or for tears. In the name of the Christ who commissions us let us never fail at the point of sincerity, honesty, sobriety and chastity.

Not long ago I learned of the case of a young minister who came to a friend of his who had lately received the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. The thing that he said strikes right at the root of this matter of personal fitness and religious experience. He declared: "I have been preaching things that are not operative in me. I refuse to perjure myself any longer. I am not going to preach again unless I can preach reality. I'll give God until Sunday to do something for me, and if he doesn't do anything for me before Sunday, someone else can preach; I won't."

Saturday was a day of waiting on God. The Holy Spirit came, and the next morning when the worshippers settled back in their pews they dreamed not of the surprise that was in store for them. Back of the discourse was a strange dynamic. The preacher's soul was different. Behind the expression and throbbing through it was an experience—the personal experience of a man who had taken heed to himself. The glow was on him because God was in him.

The second element in the making of the minister is this: He must not only be something, he must believe something.

Theological liberalism has set before this generation a sterile Christianity of denials. It has put the church world through a veritable nightmare of negations. One of the greatest and gravest needs of the hour is the recovery by the ministry of the lost note of authority. We lost that note when we revised the grammar of the pulpit. We scrapped the possessive case and concentrated on the objective. We threw away nearly all our periods and exclamation points and went in for interrogation marks. It sounded so fastidiously and comfortably modern to announce that the important thing was the quest for truth, not the knowing of the truth! In our glorification of the question mark, we gave it a place right over the person of Christ and the validity of the Bible. We forgot that the quest for truth is a fool's chase unless there are some things that are knowable and that must be laid down as being reliable. Without certain great fundamental bases of conviction we can get nowhere in our quest for truth. Even Descartes, determined to build up his philosophy from the very bottom, could not doubt himself, for the very

good reason he was the fellow who was doing the doubting. So he left us the deathless dictum, "I think, therefore I am."

By a similar token there are certain basic affirmations which every minister and worker must make, and unwaveringly maintain, if he is to rank among the worthies who preach "the unsearchable riches of Christ." The unique and authoritative inspiration of the Scriptures, the deity and lordship of Jesus, the native sinfulness and moral lostness of the race, the death of Christ as a full and sufficient sacrifice for sin, the possibility of redemption from all sin in this life and from all the consequences of sin in the life to be, the personality of the Holy Spirit and the reality of his Pentecostal manifestation in the cleansing and empowering of the believer, the certainty of the resurrection of the dead, some to everlasting glory and honor, some to everlasting shame and contempt—these, my brethren, are some of the elemental, fundamental affirmations around which an intelligent and insistent Christian conviction needs to bind itself with the tenacity of clinging tentacles. About many things you may be in doubt. Concerning minor matters you may not agree among yourselves. You may be in a state of suspended judgment. But concerning these major positions there should be in your minds nothing but positive persuasion.

THE CROSS WAS HIS OWN

They borrowed the bed to lay His head
When Christ the Lord came down;
They borrowed the ass in the mountain pass
For Him to ride to town;
But the crown that He wore and the cross
that He bore
Were His own—
The cross was His own.

He borrowed the bread when the crowd He
fed
On the grassy mountain side;
He borrowed the dish of broken fish
With which He satisfied;
But the crown that He wore and the cross
that He bore
Were His own—
The cross was His own.

He borrowed the ship in which to sit
And teach the multitude.
He borrowed the nest in which to rest,
He had never a home so rude;
But the crown that He wore and the cross
that He bore
Were His own—
The cross was His own.

He borrowed a room on His way to the tomb
The passover lamb to eat;
They borrowed a cave for Him a grave,
They borrowed a winding sheet;
But the crown that He wore and the cross
that He bore
Were His own—
The cross was His own.

The thorns on His head were worn in my
stead,
For me the Saviour died;
For the guilt of my sin the nails were driven,
When Him they crucified.
Though the crown that He wore and the cross
that He bore
Were His own—
They rightly were mine.

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