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William Booth
Collection

HOW TO PREACH

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HOW TO PREACH PART ONE

I want to have a quiet talk with my officers on the subject of preaching viewed from a Salvation Army standpoint. You will know that by preaching I mean that kind of talking which is calculated to make men understand and seek salvation - nay, which will help them to find it and spread it abroad.

I have always felt a difficulty in speaking about this subject, and when I have tried to do so in officers' meetings I have seldom succeeded to my satisfaction. In attempting the task now I need not say that nothing is further from my intention than to make any officers formal - than the setting forth of any plan likely to encourage anything like formal sermonizing. I desire just the opposite, and although very doubtful as to how I shall succeed, I will make an effort, trusting in the Spirit of God to guide me in what I am about to say.

1.¶ *One of the first things absolutely essential to effective preaching is the personal realization on the part of the speaker of the things preached about.* He must know in his own soul that the things he proclaims to others are what he declares them to be. There can be no effective preaching of salvation without the actual personal experience of the things spoken of in the heart and mind of the speaker. How can a man intelligently and effectively describe the evil of sin who has not had his eyes opened by the Holy Spirit to see something of it in his own soul? How can a man describe conversion who has not himself gone through the change? It is so all through the range of salvation experience.

The apostle John says: - "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us." That is, we apostles know from our own personal contact with Jesus Christ, and our own experience of His love, that His salvation is a good and blessed reality, and therefore with confidence proclaim Him to you, and press it upon your acceptance.



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Here is the secret of the great power of testimony - especially in the case of new converts who know nothing about theology and the forms and ceremonies of religion, who can do nothing more than tell the wonderful things He has actually done for them. Mere theorizing about religion has very little power - is all but useless, however clearly and cleverly it may be expressed without the combination with it of testimony. Audiences will go to sleep under the most eloquent disquisition about religion. Explanations of the simplest character and appeals all on fire with human energy will fall powerless, where the plain statements of deliverance from sin and fear and hell, and of the realization of love and peace and power in the soul, will create feeling and bring proud, stubborn men and women to the mercy-seat.

It follows, therefore, that for an officer to speak effectively of the things of God he must be soundly converted, and either have experienced the blessing of perfect love or be on full stretch to find it, and have been baptized after a Pentecostal fashion with an all-consuming love for God and souls. He should know these things, seeing that they must constitute the chief theme of his preaching, and that he will have to be always talking about them. But how can he do so unless he can illustrate his teaching by what has transpired in his own experience.

It follows also that officers should have in their own hearts, at the moment they are talking, the realization of the blessings they are pushing home upon others, and it also follows that officers should mix up their own testimony with their explanation and exhortations. Paul, as a preacher, was a remarkable example in this respect. He was always giving his own experience to illustrate and enforce his doctrine. I recommend you to imitate him. I feel often when I have had to face the crowd - and especially have I done so of late - as if the people were wondering whether the things we talk about are realities with us, or whether it is all a performance or little more, and nothing is calculated to so effectually meet this difficulty as for the speaker to tell, not only what he has realized in his own heart and life of the things he is telling them about, but occasionally to describe how they came about.

Of course this method may be overdone, and an officer may describe his conversion, as any other part of his past experience, so often that the people will be nauseated. He must not do this. A word or two will usually be enough - spreading his testimony over various phases of his past life, as applied to what he is saying. For example, if you are speaking of repentance you



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can say how bitterly you mourned over your own sins against God and man. If you are speaking of pardon, you can tell how you found it, and of the joy that followed. If you are dwelling on a clean heart, you can tell how you entered into the land of Canaan. If you are talking about deliverance from temptation, you can tell how God has helped you to overcome, and so on. But how can you effectively describe these things to your hearers without having experienced them in your own heart and life, and how otherwise can you compel their belief than by saying, "What I publish to you I have seen and felt and enjoy myself?"

"What we have felt and seen
With confidence we tell,
And publish to the sons of men
The signs infallible."

II. *To speak effectively, the aim of an officer must be right* - that is to say, he must be seeking with his talking to bring men and women to God, and to make them act in harmony with their own welfare and the Divine will. That must be the purpose which influences all his preparations and performances from beginning to end. This determines his choice of a subject and songs, his choice of other speakers, the way he delivers himself, and the whole conduct of the service. His purpose all the way through is to make those present think, feel, and act according to what he feels to be their present duty to God, themselves, and those around them.

You will all know that the aim of a man in any department of life determines the character of his performance. If an officer is trying to make people admire his ability, or language, or earnestness, or anything else there is about him, that which he says and does will be with a view to the gratification of this selfish aim; whereas if he wants God to be glorified in the salvation and sanctification and inspiration of those before him, all his doing and talking will be shaped to the accomplishment of that purpose. This, too, will also govern the character of his preparation. If he does not care about saving souls, he probably will not care to prepare at all. He will waste his time in some child's play or other, or dream it away in idleness, or go to the platform and offer some meaningless talk to the people - a mere clatter of words - or hash up some stale stuff, or some old anecdotes or ideas that he has retailed out to them again and



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again before; or, if he is seeking to make them think he is some clever person, he will show off accordingly, and the result will answer to his aim.

The aim of an officer also determines whether the Holy Spirit shall cooperate with him. If his aim is one thing, and that of the Holy Spirit is another, there cannot be any partnership, seeing that "two cannot walk together except they be agreed" - consequently the Holy Spirit will depart or never appear. There can be no question that the reason why many officers are left without feeling or power on the platform, and often without congregations in the seats, and consequently without money and without souls, is just because the main purposes of their lives and their talking is contrary to, or, anyway, is not in unison with, that of the Divine Spirit. We know that He is seeking to glorify Jesus Christ - to exalt Him, to make Him known, to make men come to His feet and receive the blessings purchased by His blood and devote their whole beings to the extension of His Kingdom on the earth, and He will only co-operate with officers where their purposes are the same.

Officers should be continually examining themselves on this subject, and say when they are pulling themselves together in the way of preparation for the platform, or when they open their Bibles in order to address the people, "What am I aiming at? What do I want to make these people do? Am I myself going to set forth Jesus Christ in this service? What am I seeking - the salvation of these people, or something else?" They can then determine with absolute certainty how far they have a right to claim and believe for the Holy Ghost, or how far the Holy Ghost is going to co-operate with them. And yet I am afraid that this self-seeking largely influences a great deal of public work in the Army. How contemptible it must appear in the sight of Jesus Christ and the angels! For example, what should we think of the conduct of the captain of a fire brigade if he acted in a similar manner? Here is a large five-storied building in flames: the fire has got firmly hold of the lower part of the building, the people are sleeping in the higher rooms - dreaming about happy days to come; and here the fire brigade comes rattling down the streets and sets to work opposite the burning mass. Now, what should we think of a captain whose main object was to show off his engine or the capacity of his men to the crowd who stand by - to obtain admiration for their uniform; their brass helmets; their agility in climbing about; their rapidity in pouring water upon the burning building; or other matters connected with their work? The whole population would execrate it and say, "We don't want you here to



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show off your cleverness; we care nothing for your uniform, or anything else about you, except so far as it helps to subdue these flames and get these poor wretches out of the top stories who otherwise would be burned;" and, in fact, any man who did not make it his great business to put out the fire, would not keep his situation a week. So, my brother officers, your work and mine is to put out the fires in the bosoms of those round about us - consuming their happiness, time, and very souls; and to stop short of this, and be content to seek admiration of those about us instead of seeking their salvation, must mean for us the contempt of Heaven and Hell, and drive from us the compassion of Him who sought not His own but allowed Himself to be nailed as a bloody sacrifice on the Cross.

III. *Then I am sure that there can be no really effective preaching without earnestness.* By earnestness I mean that the soul of the officer should be on fire, and his whole energy engrossed with the importance of his topic. It does not follow that there must necessarily be any particular manifestations of this. A man may shout and stamp and weep and rush about in a general way, and yet not be specially in earnest. These particular developments may be a matter of habit and nothing more; and alas! alas! they sometimes are; in which case they must be peculiarly disagreeable to those who know how cold and indifferent the officer is in the usual run of his life. At the same time I must not be understood to suppose that a man can have his nature powerfully stirred on any subject, especially on religion, without some manifestation of the same. If his heart is moved at all, there will be an expression of it.

There are three things amongst many others that are essential to true earnestness. If they are there you will have an earnest speaker; if they are absent you will not:

i. The eyes of the soul will be open to discuss spiritual things. In his hearers the speaker will see men and women destined to life for ever, who are rebels against God and despisers of His mercy - living and dancing, buying and selling, and generally amusing themselves on the brink of hell - in danger any moment of being hurried to judgment to be condemned and damned for ever. He will see it all while he is talking. All this and a great deal more will be as real to him as the material things around him.



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ii. Another element in real earnestness is feeling. No man can see all these things without corresponding emotion. A blind man who skirts the precipice, or whose wife and children are doing so, will have no agony; but open his eyes, let him see the fathomless abyss at his feet, or which is threatening to swallow up his dear ones, and he will possibly die with despair; and so here for the preacher - to see is to feel, to have all his energy stirred, his compassion drawn out, his intensest desires awakened, to have all stirred together at the revelation.

iii. The third thing essential to earnestness is the determination to gain the end he has in view, and that at the earliest possible moment. A preacher sees the peril or the possibilities of salvation and usefulness which lie before his hearers - for example, he sees the backslider away from home, dying of hunger, ready to perish. He sees the welcome and abundance of his Father's house, and as he sees he resolves to make that prodigal return, if such a thing be within the range of possibility, and to do it there and then.

I suppose that it was this pledge of earnestness that Jesus Christ enjoined on His disciples, and through them on their successors down the ages, in that wonderful parable in which He makes the rich man give orders to his servants to compel the occupants of the highways and hedges to come into his house and partake in the feast.

These three things taken together, cannot fail to make a man in earnest, and this earnestness will help to make him an effective preacher.

(To be continued in our next.)