

Extracts from Charles P. McIlvaine on the Apostles Teaching and Preaching of Jesus Christ.

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William Carus

Whilst preparing a volume of Memorials of that eminently faithful servant of God, Charles Pettit McIlvaine, the late Bishop of Ohio, I have had the privilege to receive from his family some of his note-books, in which he recorded his thoughts from time to time on important subjects which were engaging his attention. The following remarks on preaching Christ, written at an early period of his ministry at St. Ann's, Brooklyn, will not be without interest or value to the readers of THE CHURCHMAN. The pattern of Apostolic preaching here described was ever present to his mind for imitation. I may add to his valuable remarks an extract from a letter which in after years he addressed to me on the character of the preaching in England, and the need of a higher tone and more attention to the *foundations*.

WILLIAM CARUS.

This morning, while walking my study in meditation and prayer, my mind was drawn to that verse (Acts v. 42)—“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”

From this we learn—(1) What constituted the whole burden of the ministry of the Apostles—*teach and preach Jesus*; (2) Where—*in the temple*; but not only there—*in every house*; (3) Their diligence and devotedness in the work—*daily they ceased not*.

Hence arise the following heads of reflection:—

I.—*The whole business of a minister is to teach and preach Jesus Christ*. Whatever will directly or indirectly further the knowledge and reception of Jesus on the part of sinners, is part of his work. Whatever will not, he has nothing to do with. On this his heart must be singly set; to this his talents and life devoted; for this he must study and pray. Whatever he may be—however learned, excellent, eloquent—if he does not teach and preach Jesus as his Alpha and Omega, he is nothing.

What is implied in this?

One may preach truth unmingled with error; and yet not preach Jesus.

One may preach very serious, solemn, impressive sermons; and yet not preach Jesus.

One may preach boldly and plainly the strictness of the law, the holiness required of the Christian, the necessity of renouncing the world, the awful misery of the lost, and the certainty of damnation to the impenitent; and yet not preach Jesus.

One may *sometimes* preach Jesus—he may occasionally exhibit Christ as He should be presented—every sermon may have some reference to Him; and yet his ministry may not be

of such a character, *habitually*, as that he may be said to be characterized as teaching and preaching Jesus.

What then is implied in this?

1. Preach *what Jesus is* to sinners.

Our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. That in Him alone is deliverance from the condemnation and power of sin.

2. *How* Jesus is made unto us these blessings.

Through His cross, by His spirit, in the use of the means of grace.

3. *Why* Jesus is made unto us these blessings.

Man's ruin and condemnation by sin, in his native depravity and actual transgression, his need of regeneration and justification, his helplessness to regenerate himself, the worthlessness of all his works of righteousness to justify himself.

4. The manner in which a sinner is to seek all in Jesus.

He is freely invited; he must *freely* come, without money and without price. He must be urged to come. All to come—all accepted when they come.

5. What Jesus will have a sinner thus coming to do.

Thus Jesus is a centre to which and from which everything in preaching must lead and issue; when we preach the state of man, we must follow it up till it leads to Jesus as the only remedy. When we preach the duty of man, we must follow it up till we find in Jesus the great motive to do it, the great encouragement to persevere in it, the only power by which to love and perform it. There is not a point in the whole circle of Gospel truth from which we may not and ought not to draw a straight line to the centre, Jesus. There is not a spot within the horizon of Christian doctrine and duty whence the eye cannot see that Sun, and whence the preacher ought not to direct the eye of his hearer to that great central light and power as the source of all his life and strength and guidance. . . . Thus will our preaching be the power and wisdom of God. This it is which the King delights to honour, the foolishness by which he confounds the wise, the weakness by which he subdues the mighty.

II.—*Where we are thus to preach.* Not merely in the temple, the pulpit, but everywhere—wherever we can, by all means. If we preach *officially* merely, we shall be satisfied with the pulpit. If we preach to please men, we shall do it in as many places as public opinion requires. If we preach under the influence of the love of Christ and of souls, we shall be glad of every opportunity in any place to teach or preach Jesus.

III.—*The diligence with which we should preach Jesus. Daily they ceased not.*

We should be active in this work, *Energetic, Undaunted, Unwearied.* How much should we aim at variety? We should vary *in* preaching Jesus, but never vary *from* preaching Him. We should go all round the circle of which He is the centre but never out of it. We must not always arrive at the centre or proceed from it by the same radii. We may have them innumerable—all different, but all equal; all taking different directions, but all uniting in one point; infinitely diversified, but all alike. He that desires more variety than can be found within the bounds of always preaching Jesus, desires what cannot profit, and ought not to please him. We must seek variety; but still *never cease, for a single discourse,* to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Application.

How shall we learn more and more the blessed art of teaching and preaching Jesus?

1. The lowest and least effectual means I mention first. *The study of Gospel truth* as a practical experimental system intended to affect the heart, the study of it in *its parts*, but especially in the connection of every part with Jesus. United with this, the study of the ministry, the preaching and the labours, the private history and public efforts of those who have been most blessed in the conversion of sinners.

2. The study of the Bible, with the Holy Spirit for our Commentator, especially noting the brief sketches of the discourses of the Apostles, the truths they most insisted upon, the manner of putting them, their spirit and faith.

3. *Much prayer*. There is much to learn in this matter which no book can give. It is only to be learned of Jesus himself and by prayer. The Bible will not profit without prayer. After we have learned the system of truth, the manner of presenting it, and have acquired the secret of varying our method and matter, but not our object, we may yet fail totally. We may have none or little *of the Spirit*, in and by which alone we can preach Jesus truly. This is a large department in the study of divinity—requires more attention than any other. We must study it on our knees. Jesus must be our subject and our teacher, we must learn Him and of Him. The mind we need is not the mind of a theologian or orator, but the mind that was in Jesus Christ. This was the attainment which Paul went into Arabia to study.

4. High attainment in personal piety.

No one can be an eminent preacher of Christ without being an eminently faithful disciple of Christ; nothing instructs the mind in this work so well as a devout zealous heart. “The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips” (Prov. xvi. 23). “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and He will shew them his covenant.” It is easy to preach what we live. If to us to live is Christ, we shall easily be able to say the same of our preaching. What doctrines, what duties to exhibit, how, when, in what spirit, our hearts and experience will easily find out. “Grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ”—this is the most important of all directions in the effort to preach more and more faithfully and successfully Jesus Christ.

The following is the extract from the letter referred to above [*see first paragraph of article*]—

CINCINNATI, Nov. 17, 1865.

. . . . You speak of an article on preaching. Certainly the aspect of the times should modify the preaching. But *how*? Of course not in the matter; that is, the pure, direct, simple Gospel. Christ and all pertaining to His person and work must not be less prominently, or less simply, or less constantly preached. Paul said, “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.” What then? “Preach the *word*, be instant in season, out of season.” But with what modifications? Of course the question must be answered with regard to evangelical men, who essentially preach the truth. Of all the rest the answer would be *legion*. But of the preaching of evangelical men: my impression has always been, in England, that, taking the *mass* of such men together, and not forgetting the *many great exceptions*, the preaching has too much of a *perfunctory* aspect. There is too little evidence of a *decided*, studious effort of *mind* in the preparation. The intelligence of the congregations (not

speaking now of the peasantry) is undervalued. Not enough effort is made by an animated and cultivated delivery to create and hold attention. It is too much taken for granted that the hearer believes the great matters, and has only need to be guided in the application of truth to himself, and aroused to diligence. I do not think it would improve the usefulness of preaching to inculcate on preachers *generally* the need of going out in their discourses into matters which Rationalists bring up, *except by teaching the opposing truth, without reference* to the controversy. Leading minds should do this, but rather in occasional courses of sermons or lectures, than as an usual or common thing. I believe a more thorough teaching of the *foundations*, instead of taking the knowledge and belief of them for granted, is much needed.

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