

## TO MY SON

An Expositional Study of II Timothy

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### CHAPTER FOURTEEN -

### PICTURE OF A PREACHER

II Timothy 4:1-5

**1 I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall Judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom:**

**2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.**

**3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine: but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;**

**4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.**

**5 But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.**

I EXPECT you know your *Pilgrim's Progress*, and will recall that after Pilgrim has passed through the Wicket Gate, and has thus really become a Christian, the very first thing that happens to him is a visit to Interpreter's House. There is so much for him to learn if he is successfully to pursue his journey. And, again, what is the very first thing that is there shown him? He is taken into a room to look upon a picture that hangs on the wall - it is a picture of a preacher. As if John Bunyan would impress upon the new convert that, while he is to become many things, his first responsibility is to be, in some sense, a preacher.

Call the presentment up to mind - "eyes lifted to Heaven; the best of books in his hand; the law of truth written upon his lips; the world was behind his back; it stood as if it pleaded with men; and a crown of gold did hang over his head."

What a picture, what a guide, what an inspiration, to any preacher. He is not to be confined to any special class of people - any Christian, every Christian, is to be a preacher. Bunyan lived in an age which did not hold that. Indeed, it was because, though a layman, he would not quit preaching that he was thrown into prison.

What a pity it is that preaching is held nowadays to be of such slight importance, how sad that there is so widespread a decay in preaching. Of course it is so if sermons are to be clipped to the miserable pittance of time that is allotted to them. Only the other day, a visiting preacher in my own pulpit apologised to me after the Service because he had been so long: he had been exactly

fifteen minutes. So long!

No wonder the life of Christians tends to be so weak and flabby, no wonder the preaching is so largely innocuous - when the things of the soul, the things of eternity, the things of GOD, are treated with such flippant disrespect. Fortunately, there is one kind of preaching to which we may give plenty of time, namely, the preaching of the Lite.

The famous preacher, Dr. Campbell Morgan, has four sons, all preachers. The story is told that, on one occasion, the whole of the family was at home when a friend called. They made room for him in the circle round the fireside. There at one end was the Doctor himself; at the other, Mrs. Morgan; in between, the four sons, and the friend. Presently, in the course of the conversation, the visitor turned to one of the sons and said, "Howard, who is the best preacher in your family?" All eyes turned in the Doctor's direction, for it would certainly be he that would get the crown! But Howard surprised them all by looking to the opposite corner, and saying, as if there could be no second opinion, "Why, Mother, of course!"

She was the one member of the family that wasn't a preacher, and she was the best preacher of them all!

It reminds one of the advice - the inspired advice - given in I Peter 3:1 to Christian wives who want to gain their husbands for CHRIST, advice which I will venture to paraphrase, "That, if any remain quite unmoved by preaching-lips, they may, altogether independently of all such preaching, be won by the preaching-lives of their wives."

For good or ill, we are all preaching that way - some lives, alas, such poor sermons; some, thank GOD, such moving sermons.

Pause with me one moment, my reader: what sort of preachers are we - you and I? However, it is lip-preaching that our apostle is dealing with in our present passage; and he is, as it were, taking his son Timothy into Mr. Interpreter's House, and showing him a Picture of a Preacher.

First to be considered is:

### **THE MANUAL OF HIS TEACHING**

**"Preach the Word"** - not his own ideas, not the sermons of other preachers, not the topical snippets of the daily newspapers, not the ill-digested scraps of knowledge, a little of which is such a dangerous thing: none of these things, but the Word, is to be his source of truth and instruction.

In our last Study, Timothy was exhorted to be a thorough-going Bible man; here, his work is to be a thorough-going Bible ministry - "the Best of Books in his hand."

Note

(a) Its diligent use - "**be instant, in season, out of season.**" There is a time to preach - at the appointed place in the service or meeting. Outside of such opportunities there are times when it

seems suitable, appropriate, convenient, to speak the word.

Few problems of Christian service are so difficult of solution as the decision about when to speak: we don't want to antagonise people by speaking at the wrong moment, but neither do we want to become so exquisitely tactful that we never speak at all. Sometimes, in waiting for the "**convenient season**" (Acts 24:25), we may miss the chance altogether - the soul may pass on, or, at least, pass out of our reach. Do you not think it immensely important that we should every morning make it our very serious and earnest prayer that the Master would show us during that day if there is someone crossing our path whom we should speak to for Him, and that, whether it seem "**in season, out of season**" to us, we may be on the alert, "**be instant**", to do it.

Then see

(b) Its diverse uses - "**reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.**" We spoke a good deal about these things in a previous Lecture, so it will be necessary here only to say a word or two. "**Reprove**" is, as in John 16:8, "**convict**" - show them they have done wrong; then "**rebuke**" - show them how wrong they were to do wrong; after that, "**exhort**" show them that they must put the wrong right, and not do the wrong again.

It is with the giving of the Word to them that they are to see these things - not all at once maybe, not without some rebelliousness and opposition; the preacher will have need of "**longsuffering**" patience in his teaching work.

By the way, the word "**preach**" here does not mean to preach the gospel.

That word occurs later in our section; but in this verse it is a more general term. This particular phrase is used in I Peter 3:19, where it says that the Saviour "**went and preached unto the spirits in prison**", on which we must not base the suggestion that people have another chance of salvation after death. It is not the word for preaching the gospel; the implication is that the Master went to make a pronouncement to those particular "**spirits**" who died in Noah's time.

There is no suggestion of a second chance, either in that passage, or anywhere else that I can see: by the time men reach the beyond, "**there is a gulf fixed . . . neither can they pass to us that would come from thence**", Luke 16:26. Well, there are many diverse uses of the Word, which they who preach it, or who in any way seek to pass it on, will diligently employ. This Word is his manual of teaching.

Now see

### **THE RESPONSE OF HIS CONGREGATION**

I am afraid that, like many another preacher, this Timothy is going to have many a disappointment, many a heartache, for, it seems

(a) They will refuse what they need -

(i) "**They will not endure sound doctrine**"; but that is the very thing they need so badly.

Nothing is so calculated to produce a flabby Christian life and character as the absence of spiritual Vitamins, the lack of good, solid, sound teaching in the things of GOD; but they just won't have it, they are bored with it, they will not "**endure**" it.

(ii) "**They shall turn away their ears from the truth**" - again a sheer necessity of their spiritual welfare; but the truth may be very unpalatable, very awkward, and so quite unwelcome. There is not much to be expected from a congregation that deals thus with doctrine and with truth - all you can expect is the very lowest level of behaviour.

On the other hand,

(b) They will receive what they like - not the truth of things, but their own prejudices and preferences will dictate what preaching, and what preachers, are acceptable.

(i) "**After their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers**" - teachers "to suit themselves," is Moffatt's rendering; never mind whether their message is Truth or not.

(ii) "**Having itching ears**" - anything to tickle their own fancies, anything novel and exciting.

(iii) "**Shall be turned unto fables**" - myths, as the word is. It is amazing what unbelievers will believe; how many prefer myth to truth. Thank GOD, in the words of II Peter 1:16, "**we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses . . .**" Ah yes, "the law of truth written upon his lips."

It seems a poor look-out for preachers; but let them remember that it is

(i) *Not yet like this* - "**the time will come**"; but things aren't as bad yet. Let Timothy, let every preacher, let every Christian, employ himself faithfully and busily while opportunity remains for getting the Word home.

Moreover, it is

(ii) *Not all like this*. The Master's parable of the soils - that is, the response of the congregation, still remains true. There is much disappointment; but it is not all disappointment. In one part of the congregation the Word sown gets no further than the surface. It might have sunk in, if left alone; but, as soon as the service was over, people started talking about the weather, or the news, or the hats-such "birds of the air" whisked away the seed. Another section seemed to promise better results; but the sight of a bit of difficulty or opposition quickly showed that there was no real work done. A third company among the hearers were so worldly-minded that, even when there did seem some hope, the good was soon choked. All very disappointing I But, wait a moment, we haven't finished yet. There was still a fourth class in the congregation, which happily proved itself to be good ground: the preacher's work was not all in vain - let him be faithful, and he will be sure to be fruitful, somewhere, somewhen, somehow. The response will not be all bad.

Look next at

## THE DEMANDS OF HIS WORK

In Christian service it is what costs most that counts most; and Paul's preacher must give due weight and consideration to that truth. Note in this passage that word

(i) "**Longsuffering**" he will meet with much that will try his patience, he will have a lot to put up with. And

(ii) "**Watch**" - the word means "**sober**"; there is to be an ever constant alertness, rather than the slumberous inertness of the drunken; he must ever be on the look-out, with all the strain involved. And

(iii) "**Endure**" - he will run up against prejudice, and ridicule, and opposition, and, what is hardest to bear of all, blank indifference. No, it's not going to be easy.

Of course there is a type of Christian worker who finds that his accepted task makes little demand upon him. Perhaps he has consented to take up a Sunday-school class, but his preparation of the Lesson is, week by week, very scanty; he doesn't take the work really seriously; his scholars are not on his heart; he never spends himself in prayer for them; it all costs him practically nothing; he never gets tired through it, though he may perhaps quickly grow tired of it, and give it up. That is the best thing he could do, in the circumstances. The teacher who is to be encouraged to stick to the task is the one who throws his whole self into it, who gets worn out, to whom it means real self-sacrifice.

Such a teacher, such a preacher, such a worker, will accomplish something for GOD.

The really earnest preacher's life is never an easy one

(i) *He has his own particular temptations* - some specifically arising out of success; others, quite different, coming from failure. Either way, if he is accomplishing anything for GOD, the devil will be at him.

(ii) *He is the cynosure of many eyes* - some who may watch him with love and gratitude, to whom his every word and action are of weight, and whom he must not "let down"; others, highly critical, on the look-out for any inconsistency.

(iii) *He has an exacting work to do* - it will call out all that is in him, if it is to be effective. Timothy is urged, "**make full proof of thy ministry**" - full proof, yes; for it isn't fool-proof.

(iv) *He carries a heavy responsibility* - "**they watch for your souls, as they that must give account,**" as Hebrews 13:17 says.

Don't forget to pray much for your own minister; and, even if he is not perfect, at least remind yourself that "**the Lord is with them that uphold my soul**" (Psalm 54:4), and pray that he may ever have a blessed sense of that Presence. Indeed it is true that if we are to "**preach the Word,**" we must be prepared to face up to the demands of the work, and deliberately to turn away from

everything that would hinder the freest and fullest exercise of that ministry - yes, "the world was behind his back"; and his "eyes lifted to Heaven."

But now observe

### THE JOY OF HIS MESSAGE

It is not all joy. He has stern things to say, sad things, challenging things, accusing things, severe things - yes, but the balance lies on the other side; he has such glad things to say.

His main business is to preach the Gospel - he is to "**do the work of an evangelist.**" What joy is in that message; what joy he will have in proclaiming it; what joy he will get in seeing its great results. What is the message, the evangel that he is to proclaim? There are few places where it is so succinctly put as in John 3:16, which we were touching on a little while back; look: at it again, "**For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.**" There is, as has been said, "the Gospel in a nutshell."

We must begin by saying that

(a) It is bad news - it implies that, apart from it, we are on the way to "**perish.**" It is no part of the Gospel to leave a man under the fond delusion that he is a very good sort, and in fine fettle, and that he has only got to go on doing his best and he'll fairly romp home to Heaven. It will not do to go to our unconverted friends and confine our message to the delightful truth that it's such a jolly thing to be a Christian, and so on. Some of us have tried that message, and so far as it goes, it is true; but it doesn't go deep enough; it is the kind of thing that to GOD's displeasure, will "**heal the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly . . .**", as Jeremiah 6:14 and 8:11 record.

Rather must the preacher of the Word tell the soul his real condition, as in the sight of GOD, and his real peril, as in the light of Eternity. If he would awaken a desire for salvation, he must, almost always, first arouse a consciousness of the need of it. I say "almost always" because there are cases which have come to real salvation without any sense of sin: in such, that realisation has come afterwards. But even these must *acknowledge* their sinnership, although they do not *feel* it. "**Perish**": yes, it is a dread word, an unpopular word, almost a banished word - but we must begin there.

So quickly, however, we shall discover that

(b) It is good news - the Gospel lets us know that

(i) *GOD loves* - "**God so loved**"; that

(ii) *GOD gives* - "**that He gave His only begotten Son**", gave Him up to the death of the Cross; that

(iii) *GOD invites*, "**that whosoever believeth on Him,**" an invitation issued so widespread that anybody, everybody, who wishes may come and rest the whole weight of their trust on Him; that

(iv) *GOD saves* - "**have everlasting life.**"

This sinful man who naturally, normally, inevitably, eternally, must "**perish**" may be gloriously rescued from any such fate. The whole aspect of his eternal future is transfigured, and the whole course of his life here is altered - that, while he remains here, being now "**saved**" himself, he may henceforth give himself, and spend himself, in passing on the Good News, to the "**saving**" of others. He is at once, and at all costs, to follow Timothy, and "**do the work of an evangelist**".

For it may further be said about this glorious Gospel, this wonderful evangel, that

(c) It is front-page news - not to be set down in some quiet, obscure corner of the News of the World. The Gospel is the outcome of the death and resurrection of the Lord JESUS, and concerning this, Paul says, in Acts 26:26, "**This thing was not done in a corner**": then let not the news of it be hidden in a corner, give it front-page prominence.

Our verse says "the world": then let the world have it, blazen it forth!

When Paul, in Galatians 3:1, says, "**before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you**", he uses a word, translated "**evidently set forth**", whose significance is, openly placarded.

The crucified and risen Lord concerns the "**world**" - then, tell the World!

So we have the picture of the preacher again "as if it pleaded with men." And now let us turn to a contemplation of

### **THE BACKGROUND OF HIS LIFE**

All this while we have been talking about verses 2-5 of our passage, and we haven't said a word about verse 1.

Well, look at it now: it is like the back-cloth on the stage, in front of which all the action takes place, in the light of which all the story is to be conceived. See here

(a) A searching scrutiny - "**before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ.**" The exhortation is given, the undertaking is to be discharged, as in His sight. Timothy's ministry is to be exercised; as ours is, not in the light of men's praise or blame, but His. What would the Master do, what will the Master think? That is the touchstone.

There is also here the thought of

(b) A serious examination - "**Who shall judge.**" We Christians should ever remember that, on a certain day in GOD's Diary, we are all to come forward for examination, when, for merit or demerit, our service is to be judged. The serious event is partially described for us in I Corinthians 3:11-15 - one of the passages which all believers should learn off by heart.

Suffice It here only to notice that upon the sole Foundation which is laid, which is CHRIST JESUS, there are three kinds of builders.

One of the things which the examination will reveal will be which class we belong to

(i) *Idle builders* - "**If any man build upon this foundation**" the "if" leaving open the possibility of some people not building at all. They are Christians, because the Foundation has been laid, nothing can ever alter that; but they have never done any service for Him, never said a word for Him.

(ii) *Jerry builders* - "**build . . . wood, hay, stubble.**" No one can say that they have done nothing; but it has been pretty poor stuff. Since the Foundation was laid, they have put in work for Him, but it has been shoddy work: the test of the fire will quickly reveal its true nature, and will burn it up. He himself will be saved, because the Foundation has been laid; but there remains no result of his life. As we saw earlier in this Lecture, it cost him nothing, so now, of course, it avails him nothing.

(iii) *Successful builders* - "**build . . . gold, silver, precious stones.**" Their work was costly, as these; it was, in GOD's eyes, valuable, as these. The fire of testing will not harm this quality of service: gold, silver, precious stones, are all refined, and improved, by fire. And note that "**the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is**" - not size, but sort; it is not the quantity, but the quality, that matters. Let Timothy, let all of us, have the remembrance of this examination always in mind.

Meanwhile, we approach ever nearer

(c) A solemn moment - "**His appearing.**" The word is used in 2:10 of this Epistle in connection with His first Advent; here it relates to the Second Coming. The word is "epiphany."

In Titus 2:11-13 we find it in both meanings - "**appeared . . . appearing**": the Epiphany of Grace, and the Epiphany of Glory. Dr. Plummer calls them "the two great limits of the Christian dispensation."

For the faithful servant, what a grand and glorious event and experience this will be. The preacher of the word, the proclaimer of the evangel, is advised to have this as the background of his life - that He is patiently watching, that He is presently judging, that He is personally coming: what a background for our service, what an incentive for our service.

As with John Bunyan's preacher, "a crown of gold did hang over his head." We shall have much to say about that crown in the next Lecture.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

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