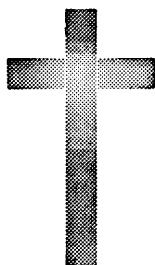


TO PREACHERS  
ON BEING  
“ALLOWED OF GOD TO BE PUT IN TRUST  
WITH THE GOSPEL”

BY  
DR. FREDERICK BROWN HARRIS

A Message Based on the Yale Lectures on Preaching  
by DR. PAUL SCHERER



PRESENTED BY MR. DONNELL

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## A MESSAGE DELIVERED BY DR. FREDERICK BROWN HARRIS TO GROUPS OF MINISTERS

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Such opulent reaches and ranges stretch between the covers of Paul Scherer's "For We Have This Treasure" that one despairs of doing more than standing on some Pisgah's height and viewing this Promised Land of the minister's calling. Surely, the vast vistas seen framed by the smiling landscape, by those who have not attained, suggest:

'Tis not a cause of small import  
The pastor's care demands,  
But what might fill an angel's heart  
And filled a Saviour's hands.

If out of that Promised Land one who has reveled along some of its alluring highways with a sinking sense of having missed the mark may come trudging back to the common task, the trivial round carrying a few samples of the grapes of Eschal that abound there—holding up their purple perfection before those who also are called to possess the land—then perhaps such an hour may send us forth again with something of the thrill captured in the lines with which Sylvester Horne, to die 3 days later, ended his notable contribution to the shelfful of Yale's Lectures on Preaching:

I see my call. It gleams ahead  
Like sunshine through a loophole shed.  
I know my task. These demons slain  
The sick earth shall grow sound again.  
Once let them to the grave be given  
The fever fumes of earth shall fly.  
Up, Soul! Array thee—sword from thigh,  
To battle for the heirs of heaven.

No wonder this dynamic and spiritually minded Lutheran minister of New York City, chosen to give the Yale lectures, felt as he gazed at 60 and more volumes of the series, all about the work of the minister, that each volume is an ample barn into which pulpit and parish grain has already been gathered and the fields raked and scraped. But facing his task he bravely, yet humbly, walks over old fields ever new, with the comforting conviction that what is valuable is not new, and that the new is but the old come true.

Each volume of the Beecher Foundation presents the facts about the Christian ministry as they have passed through the medium of yet another's mind and heart. For, as Phillips Brooks put it in his Yale lectures, "It is always truth through personality."

Because what Dr. Scherer has to say is a personal witness after three decades in the Christian ministry he frankly calls attention to the fact that all along the way he draws upon his own experience and, for the simple reason as he puts it, "I have nothing else which is really mine." He avows some half-hearted effort has indeed been made to reduce the

number of his personal appearances together with the pronouns that herald them, but, alas, he confesses, without appreciable result: "I know now that wrestle as I might the I's would still be too closely set." Well, we think of another good minister who shunned not the personal pronoun: "I know—I live—I am persuaded—I have fought—I have kept—I am ready." It is that minister, Paul the Apostle, who is to be the inspiring guide to the prophet's promised land we are to explore.

And so Paul Scherer links arms with Paul the Apostle through Dr. Moffatt's translation of the immortal Pauline Letters.

Now Dr. Scherer sat down in preparation for his Yale task and read straight through all the Epistles of Paul. He arose realizing as never before that God chose him to be his most valiant spokesman in a time strangely like our own.

No one could put his ear to Paul's epistles without realizing how much of what was said there sounds like the penetrating whisper of some ardent companion of the way who knows, even in the dark, each turn in the road. On almost every page he says:

What I had in mind to write turned out to have been written for me centuries gone. And I found myself not reading so much as listening with a certain amazement, intently, too, for your sake and for my own; as if here were one who was actually doing this thing that I am trying to do, growing more and more confident as I went on that he should be allowed to do it.

Each of us who have been dedicated to reveal the open secret of God in Christ will recognize the sure word and the strong grip of this good minister who is going along with us as guide. And if we keep Paul in sight there will be a certain relish, a taste and tang of life, with the immemorial figure of the great Galilean in the center of it, wagging his hungry, stubborn hopes. We will feel with this latest Beecher lecturer, as we, each of us, look back over the years we have been allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, that while there have been disappointments enough, and failures naturally, moods of bitterness and resentment, of bewilderment and frustration, that these enemies of ministerial efficiency have never been able to get much of a foothold and that there is always a kind of deep content which keeps pushing its way back. Paul, our guide, called it the peace of God and said it was like a garrison shoving that troublesome brood over the edge into the abyss where they belong.

"What is that in thine hand," we ask our guide as we set out. He holds it up proudly and says, "It is my divine commission as a priest of Christ in the service of God's gospel." It was this sense of high appointment that undergirded him all his way along. It sent him back to the stones at Lystra. It filled him with a passion that turned as at a signal now into some desperate entreaty, now into a hymn of gratitude. Here is some quick severity. Here is an eager tenderness.

Over and over again are sentences that pay no attention to grammar, with the words tripping on one another's heels; piling up into a kind of chaos with the light of God on it, the gallant sunshine of his soul.

"If I could only clear these windows of mine, to let it through!" Dr. Scherer exclaims as he listens to Paul say, "Wherever I go"—and this, mind you, after the trouble he had with the Church at Corinth: "Wherever I go, God makes my life a constant pageant." Think of it, a constant pageant! The whole procession of the days, peril, shipwreck, hunger, thirst, moves along some Via Sacre, brilliant and full of color, nothing drab about any of it.

Now there is a glorious calling. But how is one called to the Christian ministry? Much has been said and written about the call—much nonsense. There is a call, and when it comes it comes straight from God. I believe with all my heart that a man must hear it and feel its imperious constraint before he can ever give himself with any wholehearted devotion and abiding wonder to this stewardship of the gospel. But those facing the possibility of investing their lives in this holy cause ought to disabuse their minds promptly and forcefully of all pious verbiage about mysterious voices and occult influences as a proper ground for any deep choice of the apostolic succession.

The conversion of Paul, on the way to Damascus, is not to be taken as the type of God's dealing with those whom He summons into His service as ambassadors of His truth. Amos may not be forgotten, with his long brooding on the social injustice of his day; Isaiah may not be forgotten, with his sudden consciousness in the midst of national catastrophe that the great God wanted another man; Jeremiah may not be forgotten, with his reluctant answer to that pressure which kept growing within him until it seemed the culmination of an age-old purpose: "Before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and ordained thee, a prophet." And James and John may not be forgotten, or Matthew and Peter, with the Face they saw and the Presence that would not let them go, the Love that haunted them down the dreary roads and set them apart for the Gospel of God.

Don't copy the form of any commission. The voice of the Lord calling laborers into His harvest is as varied as human life itself, as manifold as the endless pattern of the fields and the clouds.

We must get clearly in our minds what fundamentally is the true nature of this call to the ministry of the Gospel. The preacher's chief function is to keep alive and cogent on this earth that awareness of Almighty God, which is the soul's own creaturely response to its creator. He is to open men's minds to the splendor that shines forever on the face of human life, to the beauty and the mystery of the common task and the trivial round, to the horses and chariots of fire that range themselves about this beleaguered place. He is to throw open the door of every narrow room and let in the mountain and the sea. He is to hold all hearts everywhere quiet, under the creative spell of the Infinite. Under the quiet hand of the Master of Life he is to interpret for all that will hear him what there is about living that is most firmly true and most deeply real.

The first thing is, our day, our age, our battle, our field, our world. Our world is both a heritage and the work of our hands. It is a defeated and bewildered world. It is a world much like Paul knew. That is why he is at home with us and we with him. His, too, was a strangely defeated and sobered world. He came, as we have come, at one of the greatest turning points in the story of human life. He seems suddenly to face about and to say to us, even as he says in his letter to the Romans: "You know what this crisis means. It is far on in the night. The day is almost here."

Paul saw across a day that had largely left God out and had attempted to manage their own affairs. In letters that run as deep as human need and stand as high as human destiny was written a strange new sense of the relevance of the Christian gospel. Paul faced the implications of humanism. When an order has become

thoroughly secularized, it has committed suicide. That means that the Kingdom of God is not a by-your-leave or an if-you-please; it is still a kingdom, and to rebel against it is to pay the price of treason. For God ranks this world's wisdom sheer folly. It is written, "He seizes the wise in their craftiness," and, again, "the Lord knows the reasoning of the wise is futile."

Now we cannot help our day by just despising it and berating it. But just as a physician can do little for an ailing body without diagnosis, so we must know the age we are to serve, its best and its worst.

For the last 400 years it has been investigating its world emptier and emptier not at all as a result of the amazing insights which have been achieved through scientific discovery but by reason of the arrogant conclusions which have been so gratuitously drawn from the facts. Think of how evolution left us with a crystal and a clod, but with God as an unnecessary hypothesis. Then through the telescope the planet which is our home lost caste and heaven disappeared in a table of logarithms. Psychology waved its wand, and the public was forthwith convinced that its soul had been transformed into a knee-jump; conscience was dug up out of God and replanted in society, where it did not do so well. On the surface of that brew, where men kept busily stirring their own baseless assumptions into a caldronful of metaphysical absurdities, there appeared like scum a kind of relativity of morals which immediately, like in Plato's Greece, began to spatter its sophistry over everything both public and private. So, step by step, people were driven to live on the rapidly diminishing ethical capital of their forebears. And step by step they became more thoroughly incapable of reproducing it.

We would almost think Paul had his hand on the modern pulse as we read his words to Timothy: "Their ignorant minds grew dark. The time will come when people will give up listening to the truth and turn to myths, and their doctrine spread like a gangrene." A universe emerged with no abiding reality. Ideas were the steam given off by experience when it boiled. The cry was "Down with absolutes!" This profane jargon poisoned the teaching profession. With religion squeezed out to the realm of individual opinion, the real world was assumed to be politics and economics; but here machines browbeat them. The central altar of business was the profit motive. Production was geared not to human need but with an eye on prices. The frantic thrusts and balances of the capitalistic system kept breaking down. Millions were thrown out of employment. Government itself became largely a device for giving people what they wanted. Totalitarianism was advanced as humanity's only defense against annihilation. Nietzsche's myth of the superman was lifted up as the only bulwark against the meaninglessness of life, and the world spiritually bankrupt was confronted with a monstrous collectivism bolstered by a spurious creed and adorned with a spurious ritual. That's where Paul's world was. It's exactly where we are, aggravated by the scientific discoveries of the last hundred or so years.

It was clear as a pike-staff to Paul that the world's resources were played out, and God's were not. It was the Gospel that needed no apology. Christianity had no rivals left. The powers that ruled the world were dethroned powers. It was God's mysterious wisdom decreed from all eternity that was on the verge of coming inevitably into its own. He says it, and shouts it, and sings it. There are times

when he seems to put a trumpet to his lips; after that there is organ music.

The sorry state of the world being what it is and as it is, with materialistic secularism exploded and with humanistic panaceas and expedients having utterly failed to redeem humanity even from hunger, let alone from hell, as ambassadors of Jesus Christ who has a right to confident trumpets but we? All other attempted answers to humanity's tangle and tragedy have failed because Christ is the answer. The acids of modernity have been eating their way not so much into the Christian religion, as Mr. Walter Lippmann thought, but into the substitutes for it by which humanity has been trying its best to live.

Democracy is not the answer. Our eyes have been open to so-called democracy divorced from Christianity since in the roaring twenties one author set down the "Kingdom of heaven" in the Index, and under it, "See democracy." Our attempt in this national and international catastrophe, to maintain, defend and translate the American way of life, has made it vividly evident that a workable democracy is bound up both with the theological and moral fabric of Christianity. That is why Dr. Patton said just before he died: "With God left out, I do not see what defense we have to offer against the blood and soil people."

The fairest flowers of democracy have sprung up in the good earth of the Christian faith. They have been unbelievably shaped by it and colored by it; and they cannot now be torn free to carry on their life alone without its benefit and without its sanction.

In science, the newer physics has cracked wide open hard and dogmatic pretenses which sought to put all things in heaven and earth in a test tube. Humanism has a canker worm at the heart of it. The ground on which it has been attempting to stand is sinking sand. The ground on which Christianity stands is rock.

Man's utter helplessness to save himself, his imperative need of resources beyond his own—there is something devilishly stubborn about the way automatic progress refuses to work and perfection declines to put in an appearance. Our life shows too many symptoms of another life that impinges on it, presses against it from every side, rattles the shutters it tries to close, knocks at its doors and turns the knob. We are impossible conundrums without it, answerless riddles. And so the promise of the future is not in human hands, but in that Other who holds in His scarred and steady hands the swinging movement of the years.

To this world, disillusioned, distraught, frightened, with hands everywhere held out, Paul cried out to his world, "I owe a duty, a duty to be God's man and Christ's apostle." The trained herald of that act which is the Christian gospel done from eternity in time, for us men and for our salvation. He will cry aloud in the silent reaches of his own soul, "Woe to me if I do not."

Here, before Paul's eyes and ours, is the panorama of a baffled generation, and we are the custodians of the good news. Cries Paul, "How are they to invoke one in whom they do not believe? How are they to believe one of whom they have never heard? How are they ever to hear without a preacher?"

The divine commission is primarily a commission to preach—not just sermons, but that event in history and in eternity by which God entered most fully and effectively into human life. Christianity lives by the foolishness of preaching.

The most creative and critical ages of Christian history, the ages of Paul, Ambrose, Augustine, Irvine, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Brooks, and Cadman, all these were great ages of Christian preaching. The first business of the preacher is to assign to preaching in his own thought and in his own practice the dignity that belongs to it.

We owe it to the disillusioned, melancholy temper of the age. Major in preaching. If something else has to be done indifferently, let it be something else. A man's best may not be very good. That is not his fault. But anything less than his best when he stands before his congregation is scarcely more than an impertinence. To him who under the growing pressure of life's swift currents holds his pulpit in some respect and his people with it, preaching comes first. And because preaching takes time he makes time, which is the only way I know to have time—makes it without scruple, deliberately and arbitrarily refusing to be caught among the wheels that turn the cranks, or by every crank that turns the wheels of our too often elaborate church machinery, thrusting aside any entrancing expedient so frequently adopted in order to lure passers-by into the fold; from church socials, with what Phillips Brooks called "the familiar but feeble odor of a cup of tea," to interdenominational programs and welfare work; from those multifarious and omnipresent guilds and organizations, fully half of which are as likely as not to be little more than incorporated death, to the seemingly harmless printing of bulletins—scrapping it all if it interferes with his doing his best to this task which of all tasks is foremost. Our determination must be to cut ruthlessly through the things clamoring for attention, to get at the heart of our ministry, which is the proclamation of the living, moving, thrilling word of God.

Beware lest we identify bustle with vitality and emotions as proof positive of zeal. In the phrase of Bishop Gore, "seeking refuge from the rigors of thought with opportunities for activity." One is not always doing the most business when one seems to be most busy. All this casts no discount on pastoral work. That is a part of the preparation for effective preaching.

It was a tonic to see Parkes Cadman arrive in Brooklyn, perhaps on Friday night after days on the train and frequent lectures, and then for hours bringing the elixir of His presence and of Christ's gospel to an incredible number of homes where were needy folks which he kept in his heart. A taxicab whirled him from place to place, for hours, every week. No substitute or staff assignments can ever make unnecessary for every one of us that contact with men and women which sometimes goes disrespectfully by the name of bell-pushing. There is no other road into the knowledge of human life and human need; and there is no other road down which you may travel half so effectively, if not toward the heart then toward the crown of your ministry, which is the pressing home of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the actual soul of your people. Paul's personal care for individuals breaks into his letters. Think of those long lists of names, every one of them firmly set in his heart.

The pulpit is not the only vantage point from which the preacher may truly and powerfully minister the Word. And no question is more pertinent than what content do you put into that phrase, "pastoral calling?" People you visit are frequently of far greater service to you than you are to them. A pastoral call is not a casual exchange of



pleasantries and then a check opposite a name in a book, but a highway into eternal life for that other, and for his own soul also. Jesus could have won tremendous popularity simply by rearranging His time so that there would be less opportunity for preaching and more room for the blind and the lame, the lepers, and the deaf. While He kept running out to needy folks with both hands wide open, He gave priority to the sacrament of speech in pleading syllables which He knew would not pass away though heaven and earth were gone. With great confidence He turned to those about Him and said: "As ye go"—this was His sober charge—"As ye go, preach." And Paul is but echoing his Master as he says, "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, in the light of His appearance and His reign, I adjure you to preach the Word." Keep at it, in season and out of season.

Back of all a preacher says in his pulpit and all a pastor does among his people, back of all his duties and his privileges is the one decisive fact of his own personality. That is central and conclusive. Whatever office of his ministry he exercises, always in the midst of it he stands himself a man. The quality and reach of his power depend on the manner of man he is. Whatever we have or are we are not our own, as Paul insists. What you have is not gained, but given. When that really sinks in and we pour contempt on all our pride we will quit acting like proprietors and start behaving like guests.

The treasure that we have, to be sure, in a very earthen vessel. But we are in honor bound to make the best of that earthy container, which is our body. We owe it to the efficiency of our total ministry to build up physical and cultural reserves. We are told that the Devil never takes a vacation. That's because he is a devil. And many a preacher has gone to the devil of physical break-down because he is not as careful of his own bodily equipment as he is with his own car.

Squanderers of health are quite as culpable as any other squanderers and profligates. In a very real sense health is a part of the Christian Gospel as it is often the definite measure of a minister's usefulness.

There are at least 10 commandments that the preacher might do well to tack up beside the Mosaic Decalog.

First. Thou shalt not pose as a spiritual giant, nor, being but a poor, benighted sinner like the rest, standing in the need of prayer, take too seriously the halos your adoring people fashion for your head. But thou shalt accept the canonizing and the cannonading as both being undeserved.

Second. Because thou art in a special sense called to deal in holy things, thou shalt not take to thyself any unction on that account, as if you alone had succeeded in putting a pinch of salt on the tails of the seven deadly virtues.

Third. Thou shalt not allow any display of showy virtues put in the display window of the public-gaze side of your life to hide from your own inner eyes acidity of disposition, spiritual pride, jealousy, or a cruel and sadistic temper; nor assume that by hyperorthodoxy you can escape from the ethical demands of the searching Christ, remembering always that the form of godliness may all too often be without its power.

Fourth. Thou shalt remember that the human heart is not new, the need is not new, the truth is not new, but that you are new and that what God means to accomplish by you He must accomplish through you. Therefore, before being anything else, thou shalt be thyself.

Fifth. Thou shall not assume the pose of another, great or near-great, or the pompous habits of false dignity; nor shalt thou cultivate a stilted or holy tone.

Sixth. Thou shalt as a minister be versed in prayer and supplication, remembering that nothing lies nearer the center than this, and that poverty here cannot long be concealed; that our private evasions become our public utilities, the secret barrenness of soul the open shame of all our ways.

Seventh. While not hypocritically claiming that approval by others is distasteful, thou shalt not strive for it; but thou shalt shun as a dread profanity, making the whole round of life unclean, overruling desire for ecclesiastical preferment, jealousy of those more fortunate issuing in cheap criticism and rivalries and resentments.

Eighth. In spite of all humanity's miserable little ways, thou shalt refuse to sit in the seat of the scornful. Thou shalt not hurl the cynic's ban, remembering Jesus Christ who was never cynical, whose peculiar glory was that, knowing what was in man, not once were His lips curled—not even on the cross they made for Him with the curses they shouted at Him and crude jests turned an unclouded face to the eternal, "Father, I trust my spirit in Thy hands."

Ninth. Thou shalt remember that as you hold this ministry by God's mercy to you, you are never to lose heart in it, as the dull glance and the anxious brow are not just the best advertisement the Christian faith should have, whether in the chancel or out of it.

Tenth. Thou shalt be unfailingly courteous and self-possessed. In dress, given to the cleanliness which is in close proximity to godliness; prompt in correspondence; rising at a reasonable hour, not a squanderer of time at baseball games and movies; thou shalt have a scrupulous care in business matters, praying unceasingly for both tact and common sense; giving no offense in anything, that the ministry be not blamed; in all things approving yourself as a minister of God.

And an extra commandment, for good measure, is:

Thou shalt agonize before you ascend the pulpit stairs, that you may be saved—and your people also—from presenting sermons upon the surpassing dignity of the human soul punctuated with contemptuous references to others from whom you differ; from sermons on the Freedom of Conscience interspersed with strange assertions of the infallibility of your own position; from sermons on good will with a forked lightning of queer outbursts of an evil temper against all opposite opinions.

All these ministerial commandments mean not just confining thou-shalt-nots, for we have the widest riches and ranges if only we walk humbly with our God. As James Reed, that dear preacher of Eastbourne, England, once said to a preacher friend, "It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all what becomes of us. How would it be if we here were really to understand that, and under the spell of this life which was lived in Galilee—and may be lived whenever we will, in us—make now our humble dedication."

We are to be contemporary in our thinking and speaking. But that

does not mean that we are to be pulpit news commentators. Whatever you take up to the high hill of the pulpit is to be measured by Paul's yardstick. "I take every project prisoner to make it obey Christ." That rule would rewrite thousands of announced sermon topics in the Saturday evening edition of American newspapers.

"Make the very most of your time," says Paul. for you go to speak of the "full sweep of the divine wisdom in terms of the eternal purpose." In a half hour in which to raise the dead, what possible excuse is there for throwing such opportunity as we have to the winds by sorting out in public the flotsam and jetsam of a restless, kaleidoscopic world. Everything in a sermon is an intruder and an impertinence which does not first speak to the understanding. A sermon if it is to reach its mark must "teach and inspire, prove and persuade, bend and compel."

Some so-called sermons are like some hymns which folks sing, where nothing is involved above the vocal cords, hymns chockful of moral and intellectual dishonesty, hugging words that have lost their content, constant invitations to commit spiritual perjury. But of course the sermon must speak no less to the heart. Sentimentality is one of the devil's best ways of sabotaging religion pure and undefiled. Nevertheless, to shun the emotions is stupid and impossible. However, we can never put our emotions, our minds, and our wills in separate containers, except for psychological classification. We are religious with the sum total of our lives or we are simply not religious. But understanding and emotion must issue in an act of the will or nothing is accomplished. That is what we mean by preaching for a verdict. If the salvation we seek is to be obtained then we must be saved to some purpose. And that purpose is not to argue or to feel, but to risk and to fashion.

Christianity is not primarily a code or a creed; it is a power offered to those who with enlightened minds and strangely warmed hearts say "I will." That sort of a verdict is to be based on the presentation of the Gospel not only to the whole man but of the whole truth. To lay unremitting stress on some one or two aspects of truth is likely to exhaust the given half hour in marching seven times around some Jericho long since evacuated, or by shooting up some trees where there has been no game for a generation.

There is only one thing more important than telling the truth. And that is telling the whole truth. But while we should strive for symmetry in our messages, don't try too hard to do that on any one Sunday. There are quite a few first days of the week yet on the calendar for most of us.

Now back of any abiding inspiration is a body of truth, doctrine, theology, if you want to call it that. Inspiration without theology is like the grin of the Cheshire cat. That disembodied grin is all right in Alice in Wonderland. But in real life it does not linger after the cat is gone.

Nothing could be more superficial than the statement that "All the creed the sad world needs is the creed of being kind." Any religion which boasts of being creedless is either misrepresenting the facts or writing its own obituary. It is upon the eternal nature of things that human destiny depends. Skimmed theology will nourish no great saints.

Now there are three chief heads and accents under which we have

to move as under banners if the sermon is to be whole, central, and true. First, we have to have a God bigger than the world—bigger than our world, bigger than the universe. Isaiah, in magnificent imagery, speaks of the jeweler's scales, in which God weighs the hills as dust and the seas as the moisture of His breath. Jesus said God was too big to be tied to any place or time. He made that great pronouncement to the woman by Samaria's wayside well. God has always broken through the definitions of the Church. What has happened to theology which insisted on certain ceilings indicates that there is no housing of God. In the ecclesiastical architecture of any period, there is no credal room big enough.

Four hundred years ago God broke through in the Reformation. Now we know time is longer than we thought and space is vaster and wider. The awesome sweep astronomers and mathematicians have chartered staggers us. We think of the teeming millions past and present and to come who have gazed, are gazing, and will gaze out into the grim void of a cosmic order where light itself grows old in its journey from star to star.

Surely the modern sermon to be significant and effective must give to men a greater God than any they have yet imagined or imaged for themselves.

In all the maze of cosmic things we must hold on to the belief in a personal God, never smothered or entangled in His universe. Whatever else God is over and above a person, He is at least that. He is a loving, intelligent will brooding over the universe, working out within history and beyond it His own inscrutable but sovereign and unchangeable purpose. All we can do, so far as the totality of God is concerned, is to throw our words out, as Matthew Arnold once said, "at a reality immeasurably beyond our power of expression."

We get panicky as we try to think in terms of light years and relativity. In Mr. Einstein or in Mr. John Dewey's mind a doubt explodes, and all the philosophers sit around a stove in the Christian Century watching the pieces fly and talking as if God had been assassinated.

"Here," cries some one, "push God away with this measurement; tie Him hand and foot with that law. Take the mystery of evil yonder, why did my son have to die? There isn't anything in prayer but autosuggestion. Ah, but above the dust of our little conceptions standeth God behind the shadows just greater than we thought." Jesus' kind of God was great enough to mark a sparrow's fall. He was too great to be pushed in space somewhere; great enough to have you for a friend and to listen while you whisper to Him, whatever it is that is on your heart.

The trouble is, as small as we are, we make our own personal experience the vindication of God's love and justice. God has to act pretty much as we would have Him act or we'll have nothing to do with Him—but deny Him. And the last absurdity is a man denying God because he, the man, cannot seem to make sense of a number of things.

What human being, Paul wants to know, can understand the thoughts of a man except the man's own inner spirit. So, too, he concludes "no one understands the thoughts of God except the spirit of God." The questions we raise about Him must all sound funny to God, if He can get any time off from being sad. We stub the toe of our faith over a stone in our path and wail out our doubts about God.

But there's Vega, that blue star, right over our head on a summer's night, it sits squarely up there in space, on nothing, and weighs God only knows how much—God and a few astronomers! That does not seem plausible either, but it doesn't bother us half as much as our own bruised toe. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! Sometimes, as John Bennet says, "There are situations when the very word to be uttered about God is not love, not personality, but mystery and transcendence." The trouble is that the world has got bigger than He is—that is, bigger than our own idea of Him.

In our sermons we've got to climb. But we had better start at personality, revealed, perhaps, in some friend by our side.

A man was talking to a preacher of that age-old problem of human suffering. "Why does God allow it?" he asks. "This much I know," he answered himself, "I have actually seen a captain send one of his men to certain death. And the man spent no time in asking why. He saluted and went. I do not know why, and I am not asking. I am just saluting, if that is my post." In God's name, can't we have the courage even of soldiers? He knows—so much I understand. "I will heartily lay me a hold of the greatness of God."

And the next thing to be linked in a sermon to the awesome realization of the greatness of God is the tragic estate of the human soul. Perhaps most paradoxical of all facts about humans of our day is a weird combination of self-esteem and self-contempt, of overweening pride coupled with a sense of cosmic insignificance. We thought we could build ourselves up with inventions and gadgets. But with the multiplication of things there has come a subtraction of cubits from our stature. From the human height suggested by Paul, we are all sons of God. But how can that be true if we and all the so-called lower levels of life beneath us constitute "a disease of matter on the epidermis of a pygmy planet." As our author remarks, "We might be able to get along all right with economic materialism if only we did not have to surrender to reflexes. Being born in a hospital as just one item of mass production, and with a tag around your neck, so Charles Merz puts it, "and then afterward buried from Parlor A with music B and flowers Class C. None of this by itself needs to worry anybody. But being psychoanalyzed on top of it into creatures of habit hardly 14 years old, that is embarrassing." But more than being embarrassing, positively humiliating, is the sorry story of how man has spoiled the splendor—how being created for grandeur he has staked out its glory in ridiculous little claims. The story that the Bible tells and, above all, the Man of Galilee revealed is the real thing that man really is. God's purpose is to woo man from putting his birthright down on the Devil's booth and offering it for sale with a cheap tag on it.

The Christian faith stands or falls on its passion to show man, only a little lower than the angels, that he is to be crowned with glory and honor and brought face to face with his Maker by the power of that One who declares that "To as many as receive Him, to them gives He the power to become sons of God." That is why always in the New Testament we see the best that glimmers through the worst; we see the flash of hopes that suddenly streak up out of the slums like the banners of the morning. For the New Testament shows both the

spires and the slums of humanity, shows man's groveling in the one and groping for the other, shows him crawling on the ground with the foul things that creep, and then standing on tiptoe for a beauty that is beyond him. It shows the best made flesh in the fairest human form earth has ever seen, cursed and nailed to a tree, but even in that hour saying to one with the shrunken stature of a thief on the next cross, "You are a son of God," and gallantly whispering to that broken wreck, "Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise."

But the reality of evil, the thing that drags man from his best, was never discounted by the One who hung on that central cross. He knew what was in man, and knew that deep in every human life there is that which defiles and defaces.

And so the glory of the New Testament story is that once upon a time there came a Master of Life; He spoke of life in terms of beauty, reverently; He lived out its immortal destiny with clear and lofty grandeur, carrying it undimmed through death. Men saw Him do it and wrote it down. Since then nobody has had to suppose or presume or hazard the guess that life after all may be a very great thing. It is, or you have to get rid somehow of this troublesome Galilean and His revelation. And that you cannot do. What He said and what He did will not let you go. It is just there, today and tomorrow, to keep every man's sneer from making sense.

In a world where the soul is, with all its possible splendor, and sin is, with all its possible havoc, and where the power of a redeeming God is through Christ, it follows that neither a political nor an economic, but a religious enterprise holds the key to the future. Therefore by every discipline at our command, by every truth that is in our keeping, man must be taught to reaffirm his stature as a child of God. From the contempt of himself, a sort of race inferiority complex, which makes him resort to differences, silly distinctions of class and color, the pulpit of the twentieth century must recall him, joint heir of Jesus Christ, meet to be an inheritor of the saints in light. We need no new faith but a larger faith, which builds itself around the incalculable and sovereign worth of human personality.

And to the greatness of God and the greatness of man, the third of those chief heads which keeps a sermon whole, central and true, has to do with the great securities of the faith, which, as Paul says to Timothy, are to be kept intact. These securities are what he calls the Gospel of God concerning his Son. There is no Christian doctrine of God the Father without it. Without it there is no Christian doctrine of man the child of God.

Not only is it essential to each, it is the inevitable link between them. To listen again to our Guide, "the foundation is laid, namely, Jesus Christ; and no one can lay another." To the Galatians he breaks through the bonds of restraint: "Even though it were myself or some angel from heaven, whoever preaches a gospel that contradicts the gospel I preached unto you, God's curse be on him. I have said it before, and I now repeat it: God's curse be on him."

In this invasion of time by eternity, which we call the Incarnation, the fact of facts, to quote Paul again, is "the likeness of the unseen God in whom the divine fullness willed to settle without limit, to reconcile in his own person all on earth and in heaven alike, in a peace made by the blood of his cross." We must assume steadfastly and unavoidably that all preaching worthy of the name is to have its

center and focus in Jesus himself. We are to know God and see God through Him. It is Christ who is the Way which men must walk. It is He who is the Word and Truth and Act of God. Preaching what Christ preached, as Principal Denny once pointed out, is not preaching Christianity. This never satisfied Paul. There is amazing little of that in his epistles. It has never satisfied anybody. Preaching Him is Christianity, Only Begotten, the Mediator whose deviation cost His death, manifest in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on throughout the world, taken up to glory. Never forget Jesus Christ—That is my gospel, that is the glad good news, shouts Paul.

"Who knows Christ knows all," is Luther's word inscribed in the pulpit of the Lutheran Church of the Reformation, in Washington, D. C. No wonder Spurgeon said to young preachers, "Wherever you take your text, make across country as fast as you can to Him." If as preachers we do not heed that advice we shall be giving men stones when what they need is bread.

Here is a striking sentence framed by Dr. Scherer: "The star of Bethlehem was like an asterisk in the text of history," and this was the footnote at the bottom of the page: "Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant."

But to say that Christ is central to Christian preaching is to fall so far short of the truth that to say no more would be unrelieved tragedy. The story of the Cross is central to the preaching of Christ. Never mind neat, judicial, mathematical theories of the atonement. We must preach the Cross not as a symbol but as an act. The cross was not anyone's failure—it is not the giving up of anything, not even of life; it is the achievement of something. The cross is not a faith heroically endured, but a mission deliberately undertaken, a task finished. The issue of it far from being tragic is a shout. Christ does not sink into death; He mounts into it and reaches out His hand for a scepter. The cross is God's "yes" to life's "no."

Even the words "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" were not the doleful dirge we've made them. Who can doubt that on the cross Jesus was simply quoting Psalm 22d, which is a paean of triumph and which contains the last thing He uttered: "Father, I trust my spirit to thy hands."

We have always got to start and stop with the mysterious note of triumph if we want to understand the cross or come within celestial hailing distance of its true meaning. The sun set on Calvary as it has set on all the days; but with the going of that day men did not get rid of Jesus. Death could not hold Him. That is the Easter fact. "If in this life we have nothing but a mere hope in Christ we are of all men to be pitied. But it is not so. Christ did rise." It was that that sent the Christian Church on its splendid march down the years, splendid in tragedy and triumph.

The resurrection, to that little company of men and women who scrambled to their feet and in the power of an endless life faced defiantly a totalitarian empire, the resurrection to them was His way of intimating that you could not finish off the Sermon on the Mount with hammers and nails and a sharp spear. A cross and a grave could not stop Him. God chose to stake the future on two beams of wood. That was His wisdom; that was His power; that and the Living Christ, whom death on that cross could not hold, is our gospel.

For we have this treasure—

There are just two more stations at which we have to stop before we arrive at the destination of "This Treasure". The name of the one is "A Sound Workman," and of the other, "How to Handle the Word of Truth."

In the beginning, with a hurried survey of the world around us, as one would glance around the room, we turned to "The Preacher's Task"; and then to the man inside it. Then came "The Content of Preaching" and with what authority the preaching man comes. But after all there remains the final business of actually preaching.

Paul of New York the modern preacher who wrote this Book on Preaching, speaks with personal knowledge of the unremitting toil that true preaching costs. He calls his own mind "a plodding one" that wants anywhere from 18 to 24 hours before it is willing to have him get up into the pulpit. But he warns others who have what used to be called "the gift of the gab" against the dangers of a facile flow of language which often is the doom of an undisciplined mind. The sermons a man keeps shaking out of his sleeve will soon begin to bring the lining with them. Says Paul Scherer, "I shall have to pay across the counter in still more vapid mouthings and platitudinous banalities the price of all laziness, however able it may be." "Able laziness"—That has been the epitaph of many a preacher.

Now it takes muscle and sweat to prepare a sermon. This other Paul, of Tarsus, our guide, is heard whispering to young preacher Timothy, "Shun any brother who is loafing; stick to your work."

There are two aspects of preparation for preaching. There is what James Black had in mind when he said, "Good preaching is the natural overflow of a ripe mind." And then there is that kind of preparation which begins when the threat or promise of next Sunday falls like a shadow or a song across the week. Generalities can go hang then. Something has got to happen.

This chapter deals with the solemn vows most ministers make to keep the precious morning hours for this sacred preparation for the public work. And it frankly confesses how so many of those mornings are ruthlessly torn out of our hands by some necessity as insistent as the needs that claimed the gems, one by one, of the Other Wise Man. But, nevertheless, this Beecher lecturer insists that where there's a will there is a way.

There is much here tremendously worth while on what to read, how to read, and how to make time for reading, and what reading to avoid, especially of newspapers. One feels here the inner thrill of excitement of a lover of good literature standing in the midst of book-lined shelves, piled with the treasures of the centuries; feeling something like a cat living in a room tapestried with catnip.

How to redeem the time, to get at what is stored behind the backs of some of those books. Even 1 hour out of the 24 will add to any one's familiars something more than a book a week. And here's something worth posting over the study door: "Keep one book going that is just a bit beyond you, so that you can get your intellectual teeth into something that is rough."

Methods of preparation are mentioned and hinted. But they must be your own. To aid the memory there must be some clear and quick recording of illustrations, quotations—some fleeting suggestive line of thought. There are sufficient enriching and studious suggestions



for storing truth in this chapter to take the sting out of a long succession of Sundays starting toward us out of the future, each with its own demand for two, or perhaps three, sermons. Where on earth could we find enough themes?

Well, here you will find pump-priming illustrations, but nothing that gets out of sight of the fact that nothing but spadework will make abundant and full harvests grow.

There are some helpful things said about the use you can make of other men's sermons. Of course, it goes without saying "Avoid outright plagiarism as you would the plague; but never be ashamed of the legitimate give and take which grows out of hearing and reading. Even Frederick Robertson said he could never "light his own fire."

Here there is much said about the body of the sermon, and especially its introduction and its conclusion and the points in between. We are to make sure that it really has a body and, though the bones need not show, make sure it has hands to point somewhere and feet that are surely going in a certain direction.

Among the helpful suggestions regarding subjects is that which has to do with the gains recorded by following in the pulpit the cycle of the church year. But after all has been said about hours of study and reading and notebooks, and all the rest of it, the reality of preaching is breathed in a sentence which Charles Kingsley used to often use as he looked with love upon his little flock at Eversley; leaning from the pulpit he was wont to say, "Here we are again, to talk about what is really going on in your soul and mine."

Now much that has been said has to do with the way you handle the word of truth, all the way from the first glimpse of some truth that glimmers in a text to the hour when you stand in the pulpit to deliver the message.

After all your reading, your noting this and that down, your emptying of your own mind on paper, and after the organization of your material, write. Paul of New York says: "I say with violence, I would not give a brass farthing as a rule for a preacher who does not write at least one sermon a week for the first 10 or 15 years of his ministry." But never try to be clever in anything you write. Remember Principal Denny's word: "No man can give at once the impression that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save."

You are not preaching to make clear what good preaching is or ought to be. You are preaching to lay hold desperately on life, broken life, hurt life, soiled life, staggering life, helpless life, hard, cynical, indifferent, willful life; to lay hold on it with both hands in the high name of the Lord Christ, and to lift it toward His dream. As you face this sublime task do keep away from filling the whole sky, from zenith to horizon, with autobiographical incidents about your own life. And avoid, too, the shameless use of confidential, pastoral confessions. Never use private affairs as illustrations. Of course, make use of the insights they provide, but keep the door of the Protestant confessional closed. Illustrations are vital, but they must illustrate and should be as natural to the context, as much in place, as unstudied and unobtrusive as the glint of the moon on water. Always remember that illustrations should never take the place of thought and standing forth alone in their own right presume to offer the sermon its shoulders for a pick-a-back ride.

Pictorial words are like windows through which the light streams. Such were the illustrations of Jesus, about pearls and lamps and streets and homes and children at play and birds and sowers and flowers. Of course, they are superb. And Paul's "vase" talking to a potter, and the dispute between the foot and the hand, the ear and the eye, are most effective.

Incidents, stories from Scripture, from fiction, and life, may all be grist for the sermonic mill. But there is not only the question of matter, but also of the manner of saying it. It does matter much whether you say it carelessly, cheaply, and awkwardly, or with distinction.

Keep away from complexity. Strive for simplicity.

Did you ever count over on your fingers the amazing number of God's one-syllable immensities?

Being simple does not mean talking down to anybody. That is a supercilious and insulting thing to do, whether you are talking to coal miners and children or just plain bankers. Make a habit of preaching up toward your subject and you will be safer.

Of course, in spite of all possible painstaking and often heart-breaking preparation on the part of the preacher whose ruling passion is to helpfully handle the Word of Truth, there will be some in your congregation on a given Sunday who are bound not to get much out of anything. Perhaps these folks have been up late the night before, or they may have had too many hot cakes for breakfast.

When you have done the best you can with the written sermon every once in a while, if you have a patient wife, read it to her. Mine saved me from a bad faux pas when I recently read to her a proposed Senate prayer. Out went two or three phrases.

Paul, of New York, says, "For your sake, I hope she is hard on you; and while every one else adores you she will cast down her quiet eyes whimsically, now and then, at your feet of clay." Always remember what that other Paul said, the Paul of long ago, that you are to "speak the mysterious wisdom of God." And that will always have height and depth which you can never measure.

Never, as another has put it, go to the brim of that great ocean which God is, dip your tumbler into it, and setting the tumbler down before your people say, "There, there is the ocean."

Well, now, shall we assume it's Sunday morning, and you are about to go into the pulpit with that sermon of yours. Every vestry might well have framed in a place where the preacher is going through that anticipatory restlessness and unease—and don't worry about that, if there is anything in you at all you will go on being nervous to the end. Luther's sacristy prayer, worthy of being before the eyes of any man about to go into a pulpit:

"Lord God, Father in heaven, I am altogether unworthy of the office and service wherein I am to publish Thy glory and nourish and tend this congregation. But since Thou hast appointed me to be a shepherd and to teach the Word, and since the people also are in need of the teaching and instruction, so be my helper and let Thy holy angel be with me. Let it please Thee through me to accomplish something to Thy glory and not to mine or to the praise of men. And so bestow upon me, of Thy manifest grace and mercy, a right understanding of Thy Word. And, far more, be pleased that I may also do it. Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, Shepherd and Bishop of

our souls, send Thy holy spirit to be with me in this work; yea, to work in me Thy will and purpose through Thy divine power. Amen."

That is still a moving prayer when you come to the moment when the week for you is at its summit.

Of course there is the question as to how you will deliver a message, whether with notes or without notes, or by reading. But whatever you do, whether you take with you into the pulpit what you have written or lay it aside, whether you cultivate the art of unobtrusive reading or the art of free delivery, memoriter or others, give yourself wholly in that 30 minutes. Learn to forget everything but your message and the God whose truth it is and the people who sit there needing it and the love you have for them. Remembering the words of Quintillian, "If you ever want to set anybody on fire you have to burn a little yourself."

And now may God bless you in all your ministry. You will never let it pall on you, will you? It is far too great a thing for that.

And, of course, as we come to the end, Paul of New York would want to stand aside and give Paul, the flaming apostle to the Gentiles, the last word as he says: "Faithful is He who called you to this fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

