



The *Pulpit Exchange*

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1 Corinthians 1:21).

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading (Nehemiah 8:8). Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend (Proverbs 27:17).

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The Harvest Message

In the past history of the Mennonite church we had times that we had a harvest meeting. Many of you older ones remember that. A few congregations are doing that today. It was considered a very important time, and they would set a day, or part of a day, aside to think about the blessings of the Lord. We want to think about the harvest message.

One of the problems that

God had with the children of Israel was that they were apt to forget the blessings of the Lord. We are human enough that this may be our case too. We are living in a very affluent society. I would venture to say that has some effects on the very best of us. Perhaps you would not agree with that, but America is a very affluent society.

It is well for us to remember that things were not always this

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way. If you read and study history you find that the forefathers and the grandfathers had a hard time to provide enough food for their families. Some of these things are not too far in the distant past. I spoke to a brother recently who said that when they were married and had two children they would work for \$10 a week. That is not \$10 an hour but \$10 a week. I can see that it was a struggle. Many of our older people remember some of

those things. I do not believe that God wants us to be apologetic about the time that He has placed us into this world, into this stream of time, but He wants us to remember the things that He has done for us.

A number of times the Bible calls for God's people to remember — simply stop and remember. In Deuteronomy 8:2, we see this, "And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years."

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It is good for us to stop and consider and review some of the things that God has done for us because we are so apt to forget. Oh, we are so apt to forget. What has the Lord done for us? It would take all of time and much of eternity to understand fully what God has done for us.

The children of Israel were warned “When thou hast eaten and art full, then. . . Beware.” (Deuteronomy 8:10, 11a). Our present economy and the age in which we live has an effect upon us and our children. I trust that we take special care and attention to teach our children a good lesson in stewardship. It is so easy. Someone said, “We live in a throwaway society.” That may not be all that bad. However, is it not true that we almost may spoil our children in teaching them to throw away things, things that could be used. It may be a means of making them very unsatisfied.

The Hebrew writer says that we should “be content with such things as ye have” (Hebrews 13:5). Again, there is a lesson for us today. Contentment is something that many of the American people do not have. They are discontent and covetous. Many want what the other person has.

The children of Israel, one of the problems that God had with them, was that they would cry,

they would murmur and complain. One of the things that God cannot accept is when His people murmur and complain. After He took them out of the land of Egypt, remember they were there sighing and crying. God had delivered them in a miraculous way. He led them through the Red Sea. He divided the water and they went through on dry land. That was true with the Jordan River later too, and so soon they forgot. They allowed their interests to be such that they forgot what the Lord had done for them.

The Roman letter says that there is a society or a group of people that fail to honour and glorify the Lord for what He is. I want to read a little bit from that in Romans 1:21, “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.” Now, let us inject that into our thinking. Neither were they thankful . . . It is very important that we remember that we need to be a thankful people.

We will look at Psalm 65 for a message. Carefully ponder it and you will find that God has a very definite part in the spiritual blessings that come to us. He also has a very definite part in bringing the natural blessings to us. I want to read Psalm 65:1–4. “Praise waiteth for thee, O God,

in Zion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed. (2) O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come. (3) Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away. (4) Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causet to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.”

It is thought that David was the writer of this psalm. Some would dispute that. I am not sure. I suppose that is not of the greatest importance. At least, someone was mindful of God and what God had done for them. Notice that it says, “Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion.” What is so important about Zion? Zion was the place where God met His people. When the Temple and the tabernacle were built, God gave specific directions in order to have the mercy seat arranged and built. God said, “And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: even of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof” (Exodus 25:19).

The Bible says, “And there I will meet with thee” (Exodus 25:22). Can you imagine the great God of heaven, One that

has “a name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9), He is ready to meet, and to share, and to commune with His people. The Scripture says, “Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion.” When they congregated and met in the Temple, and also in the tabernacle, they brought a lot of praise and thanksgiving to God. David said, “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD” (Psalm 122:1). That must be our experience. We must come to worship in the anticipation of being blessed and meeting God.

Remember, God said, “And there I will meet with thee.” That does away with all the disturbances, all the pride, and all the arrogance because God is meeting with us here. The Scripture says “Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion.” It looks to me like they were anxious to bring praise to God. “Praise is waiting” — waiting for God in Zion. I would like to say here that true praise to God comes only from His people, no one else. People who do not know the Lord cannot truly praise and thank Him. I trust that our experience is such that we can bring praise to Him. “Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion.” The world cannot praise the Lord in the way that God intended them.

1) *Let us notice a number of spiritual benefits or blessings that we reap from the Lord.* 1) One of the blessings that we reap is because of the obedience, consecration and the service that the former generations gave to the Lord. Not everyone can say that God has been their dwelling place in all generations. We can be children of God nonetheless, whether we have a Christian heritage or not. I am afraid sometimes that we do not appreciate some of the struggles in some of their experience that the fathers have gone through in order to preserve the faith. We need to be very careful that we will be throwing out and discrediting some things that God has meant to be a blessing to us.

2) God hears our prayer. The Scripture says, “O thou that hearest prayer” (Psalm 65:2). That is one of the blessings of coming to the Lord. We do not need to necessarily meet in the house of God to meet with God. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). I am glad that we can be out in the garden, in the field, in the kitchen, wherever it is, and we can there commune with God. It can there be on the highway, whatever the case might be. I am glad that God is able to speak to us and to

bless wherever we are.

It says, “O thou that hearest prayer.” Again, can you imagine the great God of heaven, the One who created the heaven and the earth before we were ever born, the One who planned the program of redemption. God worked that and fixed that in past eternity. Can you imagine the great God bending down from high heaven listening to our prayers? Can you imagine that? That must be a very humbling experience nevertheless.

3) It is God’s desire that all people come to Him to know Him. The Scripture says, “unto thee shall all flesh come.” Jesus gave a great call, and a clarion call. He said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (Matthew 11:28, 29). That is really what people need today, is it not? Rest to the souls. A lot of people are trying sports. They are trying entertainment. They are trying education. Some of those things may be all right but really though, the blessing and real peace and joy comes from being in Jesus Christ and knowing Him.

4) As we think about meeting

God, it says here, “Iniquities prevail against me” (Psalm 65:3). When we go into the presence of God in a very personal and real way, we will think about iniquities. I do not believe that it can be otherwise. While sins are forgiven, there are times that we will remember that we have not always been faithful to God. Nevertheless, the Scripture says, “Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.” We can be glad for that promise that even though the Old Testament says, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).

I am glad that God has made a way that we can have our sins forgiven. God is able to cleanse the vilest of sinners. It does not matter what our experience has been, God is able, and the Lord is able, and the blood is able to meet that need. God says that He will pardon iniquity.

Where else could we find soul rest and forgiveness. There is no other way. People have tried in many ways. The apostle Paul says, “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned . . . it profiteth me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3). God has made a plan, and God has made preparations, and God has

given the blood of His Son and there is no other way that we can find peace and rest and the satisfaction that we need.

I like this idea here that it says, “unto thee shall all flesh come” (Psalm 65:2). It does not matter what our past experiences are. It does not matter what our family trait or our family name is. It does not matter what our background is. Jesus says, “whosoever will,” may “come” (Revelation 22:17). It does not matter whether a black skin or a white skin, “whosoever will” may “come.” The Bible says, “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34). That is a humbling thought to think that the very vilest of sinners can attain and experience the same degree of salvation that we are experiencing if we allow them to be washed in the blood.

The prophet says, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1). Really, salvation is free. It has been provided for, and there is nothing we can add to this provision that will make it any more valuable. It is free. However, there are conditions to be met and need to be made and that is that we need to

come God's way.

5) As we come to the throne we find in Psalm 65:4 that, "we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple." I would like to raise a question. Have we found the degree of satisfaction that God has meant us to experience? Are we satisfied with what God has provided? It says here that they will be satisfied with the things of the Temple, with the things of God.

In Psalm 16 we have the psalmist's experience and his testimony. Verse 11 says, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." The Lord can give us a satisfaction and a peace and the pleasures that we need and that God has meant us to have. There is no way of obtaining it from the world. In the presence of God, "there are pleasures for evermore."

In Psalm 17:15 we have another one. "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." It seems that in light of the psalmist's satisfaction in the presence of God that he was still looking for something better, something more complete, and something more full. We have the promise that

when Jesus comes to redeem the body "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4). That is likely what the psalmist was looking for there.

II) *Let us look at the benefits in the natural sense.* God has a very special part in the function of this universe. First of all, the air that we breath is a gift from God. We inhale. We exhale. We do it constantly, momentarily, day in and day out. There are some the things that we fail to consider that it are a gift from God. The psalmist mentions a number of things here, and I want to look at some of these benefits. We need to remember that God is the God of nature as well as the God of heaven.

We are told in Psalm 65:6, "Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains; being girded with power." That is speaking about God. He "setteth fast the mountains." So often we go through a day's experience and we fail to consider and to remember that God has a definite part in the functions of the universe. The Scripture says here that He sets the mountains. It is possible for us to spend time on the mountain, look it over with amazement and awe and forget that behind

that mountain is a great hand of Creation and the hand of God.

David has quite a bit to say about the work of God in Creation. I want to read Psalm 119:89–91, “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven. (90) Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. (91) They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.” It is speaking about the elements of nature. They are the servants of God. God has fixed and placed them. Isaiah 40:12 tells us that God has “weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance.” That is coming down quite fine, is it not?

That is how great God is. He is able to weigh the mountains and tell the weight and the degree. I am saying these things because I want to encourage you in the great God that you serve. Why is God not able to take care of our small finite needs if He is able to set the mountains in order and He is able to weigh the hills in the balance. That is the kind of God we have.

Psalm 65:7 says God “stilleth the noise of the seas.” Remember when Jesus was in this world and His disciples were in the midst of a storm and Jesus called a great calm [see Mark

4:39; Luke 8:24]. God is able to do that. God has control of the universe and nature. It is well worth our effort to remember that. Is it not true that when God performs His power in nature that so often people become fearful and fail to see behind the scenes that there is a great God at work. When the lightning and the thunder roll and roar, we should remember. While we do not necessarily need to enjoy the experience, we need to instill confidence and faith in our children and have them understand that God is in control. God is in control and we need not have anything to fear about it.

Psalm 65:8 says, “They also that dwell in the uttermost parts are afraid at thy tokens: thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice.” We see God is working. Did it simply happen that at a certain time in the morning the sun comes above the horizon and is there for maybe ten, twelve, fifteen hours and then hides away on the other horizon again? Does that simply happen? Did you stop to think that behind that great miracle (if you want to call it that) God is at work? It says that He sets the morning and He sets the evening.

Again, we do not need to go away from home to see God’s

works. Sometime people think they must go on a long trip, weeks or months. I am not saying that it is always wrong, but we can see it at home. Near our home we can appreciate the workings of God. We can see the sun rise. We can see the sun set. We can see the starry canopy in heaven. The question is not so much, "Can we see it?" The question is, Do we see it?

We are too often hurried in this life that we fail to see the workings of God. There are so many lessons that we could teach our children right from nature itself. We do not want to get to the point where we worship nature, but God is at work. The rainbow for instance, does that simply happen each occasion that you see a beautiful rainbow in the sky? We know that does not simply happen. That is one of the promises of God coming into natural effect. Already God promised to Noah "I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth" (Genesis 9:11). I am impressed so many times when I think of that experience that God says, "And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it" (Genesis 9:16). When we look

upon it on this side, God is looking upon it on the other side. The promise is again renewed and reinforced and reinstated.

I want to make two more comments. In Psalm 65:9 you have another miracle of God. It says, "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it." In the summer we have artificial watering. It takes a lot of time to take a little sprinkling can, a little hose, and it does not amount to much anyhow. However, when God waters the earth, He does a good job. All the little hills and all the little furrows are benefited by it. You will notice what it says there. It says that "thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God." Remember that God is at work. We have some plans made and scheduled and when the time comes it may be that it is a rainy day and we almost frown at that idea because we are disappointed. Nevertheless, God is at work. The Bible says that He "sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Who sends the rain? God sends the rain, and we must remember that. One of the things that God hates is when we complain about the weather. I really believe that. When God gives rain, He means it to be a blessing. He means it to be helpful to the human race. When we "bellyache" and complain I

believe that infuriates God.

Again, I want to encourage you to take time and instill in your children the blessings that God has given to us. We do not need to be an expert teacher. We do not need to have a lot of class material and all of that. That is all right sometimes but we can simply stop and behold what God is doing and allow the children to benefit and drink it in.

God is a giver of “Every good gift and every perfect gift” (James 1:17). The Bible says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variable-ness, neither shadow of turning.” We are living in a pre-cooked and in a pre-packaged age. It may be that our children really lose sight of the fact where the food really comes from. We can give them a

lot of lessons in the garden. You may even be able to buy it cheaper at the food stands than what you can raise it. Nevertheless, I would say there are a lot of lessons you can teach your children.

Simply be with them, help them, and show them what God is doing. It is a miracle to me how we can take a little plant, a little grain for instance, how it looks to be dead and dormant. I read recently that seed can be saved and stored for hundreds of years, and it still germinates if it is stored right. Can you explain that to me? From this little grain grows a beautiful stalk of corn. I cannot explain it, but God is at work. Let us go forth brethren and sisters with this renewed appreciation for what God has done for us both in the spiritual and in the physical and the natural.

The Place of Preaching

The main activity of revival meetings and of our regular services is preaching. I would like to say about that preaching that the main activity is really listening to preaching. We usually think of the preacher as the one who is the most active and we say that is the activity that is happening. A preacher is preaching, but that is one side of it. The preacher is

certainly active when he is preaching. However, we tend to think of listeners too often as inactive. You are not inactive. Brethren and sisters if you will listen to a message you are doing something. You have something to do in the worship service. You will have something to do in the coming evenings as the Lord tarries.

The main activity of the revival meeting is listening to preaching. Again, you might say, "Is not the preacher preaching itself the main activity?" No, there will only be one preacher, but there will be more than one hundred listeners every night as our particular congregation gathers. Therefore, there will be a whole lot more listening time spent than what is preaching time.

We like revival meetings because it affords an opportunity to hear a visiting preacher preach what the Lord has laid on his heart. I am often impressed how preachers come from far or they come from other places and do not really know our congregation, yet they bring many things that we stand in need of. One reason is because of the needs of men are so universally the same. The other thing is the Holy Spirit works in the hearts and lives of those who are called to preach as they lay the burden before the Lord as to what they ought to preach. As we pray for them the Holy Spirit brings those things to remembrance [see John 14:26].

The Bible is so full of many things to preach about. How does a preacher know how to spend eight or nine messages, what to preach on, and to give a right balance? It is the work of

the Holy Spirit that does that. We like to see that. We are impressed with it. As we watch the week progress and hear this and that preached, we say, "Is it not wonderful how the Lord is blessing us with these messages?"

In anticipation of this week of preaching and of listening to preaching every night, I have chosen to bring a message on the place of preaching. I want to do this to again stir up our pure minds in perhaps a refreshed outlook on what preaching is all about. Our brother after the devotions prayed already concerning preaching and that through the foolishness of preaching people are saved. We want to think some more about that as we go through this message.

I want to give as a little bit of an interesting calculation about how many messages you might have heard. I will take the median age of about forty years old and say that if you have gone to church from your infancy and you are now in the forties, you now have heard approximately 2,700 sermons in your life already, in your local congregation that is. This is true if you were in church every Sunday morning and took in the monthly Sunday evening services and an

all day meeting annually. Of course, if you add to that sermons that you have heard visiting in other congregations, at times when there was not a meeting at your home congregation then the number might get up to somewhere over 3,000. That is for a person who is forty years old. Now, those who are sixty, or seventy, or seventy-five you probably could easily double that number. Nevertheless — 2,700 sermons. That represents quite a bit of time spent listening to preaching.

If you think of it like this, your sermons are an average of forty-five minutes each then it represents a span of approximately 2,200 hours spent listening to preaching, and that is the equivalent of three months time. Therefore, you have spent (if you are forty and you have been in church all your life) at least three months of listening to continuous preaching.

These numbers illustrate that so far as time is spent, preaching fills a rather significant place. If you take that amount of time, multiplied by one hundred people, the time the people spent and the time that preachers take of people's time and preaching the Word, it would be quite a number.

1) *Let us think first of all*

about the place of preaching in the Bible. What place does the Bible give to preaching? 1) *I would like to first of all notice that there are mainly two Greek words that are used, which are translated preach in the English.* Those words are *evangelizo* [Strong's # 2097] which means "to proclaim good news" [or, "proclaim God's Word]. This word is translated by our phrase "preach the Gospel" [see Luke 4:18; Acts 16:10; Romans 1:15 and others]. It is the word from which we derive the word "evangelist." We have revival meetings and we say "an evangelist will be here." That is one meaning of the word "preach." It is to "preach the Gospel.

The second word is "to be a herald" [Strong's # 2784]. It is the idea that a messenger is delivering a message on behalf of a ruler, of someone else over him. Putting these words together suggests that the Christian preacher is authorized by God, as a herald, to bring a good message, a message of good news, to be duty bound to bring God's good news (not his own) but God's good news to needy men. Therefore, course, it follows that if God has what men need then upon hearing God's message they become responsible for obeying it. It is one of the reasons why over and

over again someone will say we go away more responsible than what we came. When that comes to us, it often strikes more responsible. “You mean now I am more accountable, more responsible than I was before? I thought I was really responsible the way it was, but now even more of a weight is laid on me.” Well, in a sense it is so. Jesus, in one place, speaks of the person who receives much, and certainly we who have been listening to preaching for so many years have received much. “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48). He who receives much will need to answer for much. He that receives only little has to give an account for that little. Nevertheless, by way of definition the Bible holds that preaching is a message of good news and that it is coming from someone else. I do not have a message of good news for you in my own self, but the preacher is called to bring a message of good news from a ruler over him.

2) *Secondly, as to the place of preaching in the Bible, I would like to think about the problems of preaching in the Bible.* The word “preach,” “preached,” or “preaching” and whatever other things we may add to that, is used some one hundred and fifty times

in the Bible. One hundred forty of those one hundred fifty times are in the New Testament. To me that indicates that the New Testament era is pre-eminently the era of preaching. It is the time when preaching gained prominence, and rightly so because it is the dispensation of the Gospel of salvation. It is the time in which the Gospel message has come to its fullness. It is the “last days [when God has] spoken unto us by his Son” (Hebrews 1:2).

From John the Baptist and Jesus, and on to John the Beloved, the New Testament is packed with preachers and preaching.

In the Old Testament Noah was called a “preacher of righteousness,” and on to Malachi we can see one prophet after another preaching often in very difficult situations — much more difficult than what we preachers today have ever faced. In fact, many of the Old Testament preached to people who did not want to hear them. Jeremiah, when he was called said, “I cannot speak: for I am a child” (Jeremiah 1:6). God among other things, told him “Be not afraid of their faces” (Jeremiah 1:8), which indicated that they would not always look good when he preached.

Now, as a rule, I do not see

sorry faces when I preach. About the only thing that gets distracting is when they are sleeping in church, which is a face that I do not like to see. Nevertheless, “Be not afraid of their faces” is what God told Jeremiah. Jeremiah apparently needed to preach to people who would not look nice, and we know what happened. He did preach to such a kind of people. However, they did more than simply look bad. They tried to hurt him and destroy the message. Thus, we see that kind of preaching that was happening in the Old Testament. They had a message to preach. Sometimes they did it reluctantly, but they preached what God told them to and God honoured them for it.

3) *I want to think next about the place of preaching in the Bible as to its importance.* First Corinthians 1:18–25 says, “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. (19) For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. (20) Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? (21) For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased

God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (22) For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: (23) But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; (24) But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. (25) Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

This passage presents preaching not as one among many things, or many ways in which people are saved. Rather, it presents preaching as the only way, or the way which God has chosen, the primary way in which people are brought to salvation — preaching. That is interesting to know. There are a lot of ways to do many things. You can take a job and approach it from various angles, and do it different ways. However, Paul says it is by “the foolishness of preaching” that He has chosen to save those who believe. Therefore, it is, I say, the primary way that God has chosen to declare His salvation and His will to man.

This is not to discredit sound literature. That is literature that is based on the Scriptures that is

written, that our church publishes, or others that maybe come from the Christian publishing houses. This is not to discredit that literature. It is not to discredit the Gospel in song because they too are forms of preaching. Yet, the Gospel presented in a personal way through preaching is often the most effective way to win people to a sense of their need. There is something about the tone of voice and the expression that goes into preaching that carries a weight with it that reading a tract does not necessarily do.

Someone has said that more people are sung into the kingdom than what are preached in. I do not know. I tend to disbelieve it. I do not know that it can be proven. We know that the Bible admonishes us to be “teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Colossians 3:16). Therefore, we see singing as a valid part of our church life. However, preaching according to the Scripture, is the more primary and considered by God to be the way in which people are saved I suppose, above singing. However, as I said, even singing and Gospel literature are ways through which the message can be preached.

This phrase, “the foolishness

of preaching,” does Paul mean that preaching as an activity is illogical, that it is stupid, or senseless? Is that what he means? Often when we use the word “foolish,” we think of it as something that is kind of senseless to do. Does Paul mean when he uses that phrase “the foolishness of preaching” that God chose a method that is senseless in order to attract people’s attention to it? Because it is so absurd? People sit up and take notice, “Well, what do you mean? Someone preaching? What is that?” No, I do not think that is the meaning of this word “foolishness of preaching.” I do not understand it. If it is that, it is only so in the eyes of those who are “wise in [their] own conceit” (Proverbs 26:5, 12). Those are the people who think of preaching as foolish (if it is that at all).

Rather, this word means that preaching is a plain and simple method by which people are saved. We live in an age of technology. Many things need to be studied by scientists and engineers before they are approved. For example, in our recent project of building we needed to have scientists in to study the rocks. We needed engineers to do this and that. We do not need scientists and engineers to get to the bottom of man’s need. All we

need is the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a plain and simple method, and it is wonderful that God has chosen that people can become under conviction by the Holy Spirit because men declare the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I say it is wonderful, is it not, that we are saved in such a way that we do not need to go to school for so many years.

Now, we like to go to school so we understand English and so that we understand how to read, certainly. However, we do not need to have degrees in this science or that in order to be saved. Praise God for that! That is what Paul is saying. Here, there are people who say we need the education. God has chosen “the foolishness of preaching” to save those who believe. He has decided that is how people can be saved. Therefore, the importance of preaching is wonderful, and it is clearly brought out here.

It is a wiser method of presenting truth than all the wisdom of the men of this world could reason. They would study a long time before they would figure out that people would be saved if you would simply preach to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

4) *The importance of preaching is further illustrated or illuminated by a series of questions in Romans 10.* In Romans 10:14

we have this: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?” How will people who are not Christians come to call on God. “And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” Is that not simple? Paul is saying that preaching is the way people know who to call on. It is the way they will know how to call on God. How shall they believe on Him? How shall they hear without a preacher? “And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (verse 15).

The answer is obvious: how shall these things be done? It takes a preacher, not necessarily an ordained man always but someone who has a burden, who has a call, someone who is ready to open the Scriptures to seeking souls. He does not always need to have a big audience — sometimes only one. Nevertheless, he is called upon, and he has the burden to share the message — the good news of salvation.

In summary, the Bible is full. I would like to say the Bible is full with preachers and their sermons. We could say next to Holy Spirit conviction and illumina-

tion, the Bible presents preaching as the most effective, the most powerful method available for presenting God's remedy to man. I am glad for that. May we never minimize and step aside from the value of preaching.

II) *Let us think next about the place of preaching in the congregation, or in the church.* Again, I am speaking of the place of preaching in the congregation as to its value. Let us think about that. 1) *Preaching should be of primary importance.* Having established the importance of preaching, I suppose that it goes without saying that any and all other forms of inspiration and instruction must be secondary to preaching. They must have a secondary place. It does not matter what it is. It does not matter if it is song services, Sunday school, or whatever it might be, they should always fall in line under the activity of preaching and listening to preaching. It is important that we keep that in mind, both in the value that we place on them, on these other activities as well as in the frequency that we might have them in the worship service.

In other words, it should be this way; no responsible person in our church should need to think the second time to know what is the most important and

the most often used activity in our church services. They ought to know right off that preaching is the thing that we do. They do not have to ask, "Well, let me see, will there be a song service or a slide show. Well, I am not sure which we have most often." It should not be a question. We want to keep it that way. We want to keep it that way such that everyone knows that the most prominent activity of our worship services is the preaching activity, and that we rate it as the number one activity of the service.

This is expressed in a practical way. For one, we do not interchange song services every other Sunday with preaching services, or every other Sunday night. Sometimes it is said that we ought to have more song services, and certainly "Speaking to [ourselves] in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Ephesians 5:19) does fill a definite place in the church. Nevertheless, we do not think of song service as something we should have every other month. Rather, maybe a couple of times a year is enough of those. The rest of the time we use it in preaching. There are reasons for that. We have a high regard for preaching.

2) Another thing is that we will omit Sunday school at com-

munion time to give preaching and the communion service more place. We would not want to turn it the other way around to say, "Since we are having communion, let us omit the preaching and only have the Sunday school." Not by any means.

3) *Another thing that I would say which shows how we value preaching is that we have the preaching service after the Sunday school, not before.* We might ask, "If the preaching is more important than the Sunday school why not have it before?" The logic is this: preaching is supposed to be a climax to the service that the Sunday school could not give. (Maybe it does not always do that because the preachers fail some way or another). We should always look at it this way, according to the grace of God, according to the true nature of God's grace, I would say, the Bible concept of God's grace is that He saves the best for last. The best is still coming. Therefore, the order is right that we continue to have Sunday school first and preaching secondly and the last part of our service.

4) *It can be observed that one of the earmarks or products of apostasy is the devaluation of preaching.* Those of us who have been around for as long as I have

been talking about, for forty years or more, have seen where folks who have departed from the plain church outlook and conservative lifestyle have also departed or devalued the place of preaching. Preaching is replaced more and more with other forms, or supposed forms, of worship, whether it is special singing, drama, slides, or whatever it might be, other reports, this that or the other thing.

Interestingly, it could also be noted that apostatizing Christians are often very tolerant to sound preaching. They do not mind hearing good preaching. They like to hear preachers come across strong so long as the preaching is not accompanied with discipline. That is the other unfortunate thing. I have often heard that where someone has departed quite far they may talk about the good sermons that they hear, or this or that sermon and how, "He really gave it to us," and all of that. However, it did not make a difference in their lives. The things he might have said did not sink into him. They are tolerant I would say. We need to guard against that. How tolerant are you to good preaching? Will you listen to it a long time as long as we do not tap you on the shoulder and say "Now, this preaching means that this, and

this, and this is what we would like to see taken care of?" Is that not how we are inclined to be? Sure it is.

I would like to emphasize the place of preaching and the connection that preaching has with discipline in the church. Sometimes the thought is expressed to us preachers in ministers' meetings that if a preacher is a good enough pastor, if he is a good enough personal worker, he does not need to do a real good job in preaching because his personal work will somehow carry over for him in the preaching. It will compensate for his weakness in the pulpit. Or, on the other side it is sometimes suggested that if a preacher really feeds his people in preaching then he does not need to do so much personal disciplinary work. I suppose both of those statements contain an element of truth.

However, perhaps more than anything else, they often excuse the preacher in the area that he is a little weak. I think that the fact of the matter is that (I would say to me it looks like this) sound feeding, sound preaching that feeds people's souls, and sound, effective discipline must be coupled together, must go hand-in-hand if a church will prosper. (While I am not preaching to preachers) the goal of every

preacher needs to be good in both of those areas so that they complement each other. Usually it is this way, the better we do one, the better we can do the other. That is the goal of preachers. We need your prayer in that behalf.

Nevertheless, this much we know that when churches no longer exercises discipline, they also eventually quit preaching the Bible too. We will leave that now to think about a few other things that relate more to you. If I was preaching to preachers, I would have more to say about presentation. However, I will not weary you with that.

III) *Let us think about various responses to preaching that the Bible holds forth.* Perhaps you can think of some responses that the Scripture holds forth, some examples of people who responded this way or that to preaching? What are some responses in Scripture that you can think about? There is the day of Pentecost when Peter preached they were pricked in their heart. Their response was, "Men and brethren, what shall we do" (Acts 2:37)? That was a response and that was a right response. That was a good response to the preaching. Really, preaching ought to be that way. It ought to be that way.

Sometimes preachers have

said that they have preached a long time to people about their needs and then they say, "I do not think it applies to you," talking to the congregation, or they may say, "I am not sure . . . I am persuaded of better things of you than this." Rather, preachers ought to have it constantly on their hearts to preach to the people. Therefore, they preach the things that come across that burns and pricks their hearts, if they would ask "What shall we do to be saved," and "What must I set right?" This is in opposition to the comfortable feeling of not needing any help.

We can also think of the Bereans. That was a good response to preaching. The Bereans went home and searched diligently what the Bible had to say to them. Paul and Silas had come to Berea in Acts 17:11 where it says, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." I would like to challenge you as listeners that not only do you receive the Word with readiness of mind, but do read the Scriptures. Search them daily. Test whether the things your preachers say to you are so by the Scripture.

We believe it is right that listeners and members of the church believe in their preachers and do not need to question everything that is said. However, it is good for preachers (and we appreciate it when people are alert) when they say, "Now, that statement that you have made I am not sure. That was new to me and I thought it does not maybe quite ring right with this Scripture over here." That is a good challenge for preachers. Or to say, "That is new to me and I am glad for it and I think it is right and I want to go home and look into that a little bit more. I need a little time to think about it." That was the Bereans. They searched the Scriptures to see whether those things were so. They were not suspicious. They received the Word "with all readiness of mind," but they were ready to apply themselves. They were not passive hearers or indifferent.

The Scripture says that they were more noble than the Thessalonians. Interestingly though about the Thessalonians we have this. Turn over to 1 Thessalonians 1 and see what it says about these people. Now, I think maybe it means when it says they were "noble" that the Thessalonians did not receive the Word quite as readily as what the

Bereans did. Nevertheless, when the Thessalonians did receive the Word they were “on target” and they received it as it was — the Word of God. That is what comes out in 1 Thessalonians 2:13. “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” That was the Thessalonians. They were not indifferent to the Word of God. If it means the Thessalonian Christians back in the book of Acts then we would need to say that the Bereans were even more intent than the Thessalonians. How could you be if you receive the word “effectually?” I mean without any question you received it, and as it was in the truth, the Word of God. That was a good response too.

Can you think of some more? In Acts 19:19 in Ephesus the people responded by burning “their books.” “Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.” My Bible has a reference in today’s money (a few year’s

ago) how much that was — \$6,400,000. It was not merely a little amount. Over \$6,000,000 worth of merchandise up in smoke because they knew it was wrong to have it. They were a people who put the preaching to activity. I do not say that revival meetings will do that for us but hopefully we will be attentive enough to the preaching that we will apply ourselves also.

We know that not everything that a preacher said can be remembered. You could go home and do everything like he said but too often the reason of our laxness spiritually is because we do not take the preaching seriously enough. We may say that. The reason we do not get rid of some things we should is because we probably like those things better than we like the Word of God. Sometimes it would be that way. However, in Ephesus they burned their books and responded to the preaching of the Gospel.

I am thinking now about hearers of whom it says, “heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3). I do not know for sure who are the ones with the itching ears, but itching ears can affect both the hearers and the preachers. Perhaps the teachers are in focus there but it talks about people whose response is that they will

get people to preach to them who will tell them the things they want to hear which satisfy the flesh. That was the idea, and that is no good. That is a bad response to the Word.

James talks about this fact that we should not be passive hearers. Do not be a “hearer of the word” only but “a doer” also (James 1:23, 25). That is a good response to a preaching.

There is another response to preaching on the negative side that I want to call your attention to, and that is the sleeping response. Do not be sleepy hearers. I do not know why it is that we have the thought that sleeping is an acceptable behaviour when preaching is occurring. I am not sure why it is, but maybe it is because we have tolerated it for so many years that we have come to think that it is now an acceptable behaviour. We know that sleeping is absolutely out of the question when we are driving our vehicles. We know it is not something we may do. Even though sometimes we may get caught with it we know it will not work for us. Nevertheless, we are not so convinced about that in the preaching service. We think it can work and for that reason we get careless. I do not say that all sleeping is due to carelessness spiritually.

We know there are places and times where sleeping is absolutely out of the question. We know it is unacceptable. We may say on the basis of the authority of the Word of God that it is unacceptable as far as God is concerned too, even though we as a church do not discipline people who sleep in church. Perhaps we need to. Perhaps it is because of our being of like passions and all of us facing drowsiness from time to time, we are inclined to be easy on that. Nevertheless, think about that. A sleeping hearer cannot be an attentive hearer by any means. No, he cannot be an attentive hearer and he has a hard time. He is not merely a hearer and not a doer, he is not a hearer either. That is not the way to respond to the Word of God.

There are some other responses which were negative. I would like to think about Isaiah 28 a little. In Isaiah 28 there were people who were quite apostate. They were priding themselves in their ability to do a lot of bad things, and they seemingly thought that it was not hurting them. This is one of the questions they raised in verses 9–11. These people who were tired of good Gospel preaching said, “Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he

make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. (10) For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: (11) For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.”

The people did not like preaching. They criticized the method of preaching here. They said, “This is how it comes. It is precept upon precept, and line upon line. It is here a little and there a little. It is disorganized, and it is with stammering lips and another tongue.” Notice this in verse 12, “To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing; yet they would not hear.” What is he saying? He is saying that this method, “precept upon precept; line upon line . . . here a little, and there a little,” is the method to be refreshed spiritually, “But you would not hear it.” “But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little;” and the result was “that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken” (verse 13). That was a bad response to preaching. They

criticized the method and missed the message altogether.

There are others who criticized not only the method but the messenger. We see that in 1 Chronicles 36:16 gives a summary of what was occurring in Israel’s day. It says, “But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words,” and God said that “there was no remedy” for these people. He cut them off and sent them into captivity because of that. Again, we know that preachers do not always do such a good job. We realize that you can find fault both with the delivery and with the messenger very often. Nevertheless, beware if the messengers presenting the Word of God, and if they are then you must give attention.

Matthew 11:16–19 is an interesting account in Jesus’ day. It has always impressed me how Jesus criticized the people for not hearing what He was saying. “But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, (17) And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. (18) For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. (19) The Son of man

came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.”

What is He saying? He is saying that this generation of people are like children playing a game. The one side never catches on to what the other side is doing. While the one is dancing as in a wedding dance the others do not comprehend. They do not respond. They hear one side is maybe making the music — that is the idea. “You piped.” Therefore, the other side should dance. The other side does not dance to the piping and then they mourn and expect the other side to weep and they do not. Then, Jesus says “That is how this generation is.”

John the Baptist came and they said “There is something wrong with him. He is not eating and drinking — he has a devil.” They did not listen to what he said. Then, the Son of man came and He ate and drank and they said “He is a glutton and a

winebibber.” — “You do not believe Him either. You are simply out of touch with the Word of God.” That is what Jesus was saying was the problem with these people. That is quite a challenge as we think of negative responses to the Word of God.

We know what happened with Stephen. He preached the Word of God and his hearers responded negatively too. “They were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth” (Acts 7:54), rather than saying, “Men and brethren what shall we do to be saved.” I believe that you folks enjoy preaching, and I believe you folks have needs equally like I have needs. We want to be open and attentive to the message of truth as it comes. Remember it is God’s method of saving souls. “The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is . . .” What is it? It is “the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). May God help us to respond that way.

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Jesus Himself set the example. Wherever He went, He was that

same meek, unassuming, loving, sympathetic, zealous, pure, perfect, powerful Being — the great Light, sent from heaven to dispel the darkness of this world, and fill it with the ineffable light of glory. Having set the example, He says to his followers, “Ye are the light of the world. . . Let your light shine.”(Matthew 5:14, 16).

His earthly mission being fulfilled, He is again at the right hand of God interceding for us. We are His witnesses, left upon earth to shine with the light which He graciously gives us. If we are His true followers, our lights, though borrowed, and dimmed by human imperfections, will radiate to the world around us. The life and light of Christ in the soul is very essential. There are

THREE USES

which we may make of this light: (1) We may hide it under a bushel. (2) We may display an imitation of it before the world. (3) We may simply let it shine. These uses may be illustrated as follows:

John Jones, John Brown, and John Smith settle in the same neighborhood, and present their letters to the same congregation.

1. John Jones is very careful that no one should think him

“pious.” He is never heard to pray, avoids conversation on religious topics, seldom reads the Bible, attends a pleasure party in preference to a prayer-meeting or gospel service, seeking the companionship of questionable characters, and acts very inconsistent in other ways. The only evidence that anyone has that he makes any pretensions to Christianity is the fact that he claims to “belong to church.” His light (if he has any) is so securely hidden under a bushel that it cannot long remain there without being put out.

2. John Brown is quite the opposite of John Jones. He considers it an honor to be known as an earnest church worker. He boasts of his piety, and tells of his wonderful experience and mighty achievements. He sneers at those less accomplished than himself, and puts himself forward whenever and wherever possible. His polished appearance and prepossessing manners give him the “right of way,” and soon he is regarded as a remarkably pious man, and becomes the hero of the hour.

This is bringing out his light in a vain and brilliant display, but in this emblazoned light, some dark spots on his character begin to appear. It is observed that his professions and his life do not

tell the same story. As he becomes better known, it becomes more and more apparent that his piety was mostly "put on," and that his zeal was born of an ardent desire to have his fellow man praise him.

3. Of a different character is John Smith. He is content to be a humble worker for Jesus. His first appearance in the new congregation is scarcely noticed; but his excellent deportment soon begins to count. He is never known to indulge in foolish or vulgar talk, nor to become entan-

gled in neighborhood gossip. He never talks reproachfully of anyone, and in all that he does, shows himself to be straightforward and conscientious. These things are noticed by other people, and the more he is tried, the more he is trusted. The world respects him for his genuine Christian qualities, and the church is delighted to find in him a worthy member, who can be depended upon to do his best in whatever task is laid upon him. It is the genuine Christian, letting his light shine.

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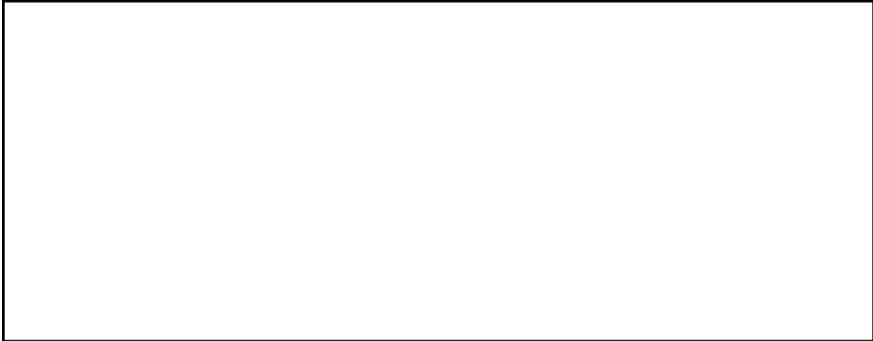
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