



Street Preaching

By William Taylor

Why do you preach in the streets and highways?

I. BECAUSE IT IS A DUTY ENJOINED BY THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

The "great commission," under which every true ambassador goes forth in the "ministry of reconciliation," by direct implication, enjoins the duty of out-door preaching: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Did the apostles understand the Great Teacher to mean that they were to preach in the temple, in the synagogues, in "hired houses," and "upper rooms?" Certainly. Did they understand him to mean nothing more than that? Certainly not. They well knew that the temple, and the synagogues, and all the house room they could by possibility command, were they all open for their use, would contain but a very small proportion of the creatures embraced in their commission. Every word of this great command, framed by infinite wisdom, is simple and unequivocal. It evidently contemplates a proclamation of the Gospel as wide as "all out of doors," and so specific and personal as to embrace every single rebel of the fallen race.

Again. The Saviour, illustrating, by the parable of the "Great Supper," the bounteous provision of mercy in the Gospel, enjoins, by direct command, the duty of out-door preaching: "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind." "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."

II. IT IS SUPPORTED BY DIVINE AND APOSTOLIC PRECEDENT AND EXAMPLE

The only sermon of our Divine teacher on record, was preached on a mountain. Many others of which we have full "reports," were preached by the sea-shore, on the decks of ships, and in the streets of Capernaum. He preached, to be sure, in the temple and in the synagogues, but of his sermons on those occasions, there is less recorded than of his "out-door sermons." We believe that he established by his own example, the precedents he designed to be practically operative through all time, namely: To get all we can into the synagogues and churches, and there preach to them, and then to "go out into the streets and lanes of the cities, and into the

highways and hedges," and hunt up all the rest, and preach to them also. The apostles acted accordingly. The great apostle to the Gentiles was celebrated as an out-door preacher.

III. IT HAS BEEN CONFIRMED BY DIVINE ATTESTATION

God has always signally owned and blessed the faithful preaching of the word in the streets, lanes, highways, and hedges, through all the history of the Church to the present time. Without going back to instance the singular courage displayed and success attained by the out-door preaching of some of the Vaudois missionaries, in the Dark Ages, we would invite attention to the "field and street preaching" of more modern days. Witness the labors and successes of Whitefield, and Wesley and Fletcher, and their coadjutors in the same work. God made the out-door preaching of those men a leading, instrumentality in awaking the masses of the "United Kingdom of Great Britain," and in bringing about the great reformation of the eighteenth century. See the labors and good fruits of the street preaching of "the apostle to the Irish," Gideon Ouseley. Should there be a resurrection of the brute creation, the experience of "Ouseley's white horse," from whose back he so often preached, will furnish an interesting chapter in the annals of "the new heavens and new earth." Again, witness, in quite modern times, the street preaching and Gospel triumphs of the champions of the "Free Church of Scotland."

Thus Jesse Lee drove the entering wedge of Methodist Christianity into New England. American campmeetings of the different Churches come under the apostolic precedent of out-door preaching. See how they have been honored of God. Recount, if you can, the multiplied thousands of souls who have been converted at camp-meetings, multitudes of whom have washed their robes in the blood of Jesus, and are today seated above the circle of the heavens, praising God for camp-meetings. Strike out of the Church in America all her ministers and members who have been brought to God through the instrumentality of camp-meetings, and you will have a practical demonstration of the truth of our position which will astonish you. I instance camp-meetings not as a proof that the Gospel ministers of America have fulfilled all their duty in regard to out-door preaching, but as evidence that they have gifts eminently qualifying them for that work, and especially to demonstrate the truth of the position with which I set out, namely, that God has always signally owned and blessed the out-door preaching of his ambassadors. But says one, "The most of your instances relate to periods when houses of worship were not available, or were entirely inadequate to meet the demand. We have plenty of good churches now, and if the people want to hear the Gospel, let them come to church." Thank you, sir; that will help me to another argument, which I will, according to "Thomsonian practice," call Number

IV. DEMONSTRATING THE MORAL NECESSITY OF STREET PREACHING

This section is based on the principle suggested, namely: The facts as they are exhibited in the present history of the world.

Passing by heathendom and foreign Christian countries, I will confine my investigations to our own country. And now allow me to inquire of the objector, what proportion of the population of your town or city will your churches accommodate? And what proportion of the people attend church? Now What can you do for those "creatures" embraced in the provisions of your Divine commission, but not embraced in your church accommodations? To say that the vast proportion of your non-church-going population must either come to Church or go to hell unwarned, is to institute a new condition of salvation unknown to the Gospel. Now, in California, all the churches, Catholic and Protestant, will accommodate, say sixty thousand persons, which will leave two hundred and forty thousand "outsiders," and no church room to receive them; "no, not so much as about the door." What would Jesus do in such a case? There is room

enough for every one of them in the compassion of God, and in the kingdom of grace; for they "are not common or unclean," not excluded from the covenant of promise. Very many of them are the sons of our fathers and mothers in Israel, who have died in the faith. They went down to their graves praying for their children. The last words they uttered, as one by one they left the shore, were, "Tell my dear children to meet me in heaven?" Their sons have become prodigal and reckless in California, and yet the mention of their sainted mother checks the giddy laugh, and brings tears to their eyes. What would those fathers and mothers have us do for their wandering, lost children in the wilderness? Would they not say, would not the angels say, as Jesus hath said, once for all, "Go out quickly, and compel them to come in?" And do you not respond, "Amen! Go, my brother; go out quickly?" Though I have been singing and preaching the "royal proclamation," in the "highways," to these wanderers, for seven years, my tears would now, as I write, saturate the manuscript, at the remembrance that I have done so little to save them, and that I have seen so many hundreds of them dying in this land, without any hope of heaven.

But let me ascend to a higher stand-point, and take a wider view of the subject. According to statistics furnished by the United States Census of 1850, the Methodists of this great republic have 12,467 churches, which would accommodate 4,209,333 persons. Now, we profess to "believe that God's design, in raising up the people called Methodists, was to reform the continent, and spread Scriptural holiness over these lands." I am no croaker. I think I have a just appreciation of the great work God hath wrought through the Methodists, and other denominations of Christians as well, and I think I am imfeignedly thankful. But let us look again at the facts before mentioned. We have been engaged in this work of reforming the continent for upward of eighty years. We have in our favor the constitution and laws of the land, one common language, ready access to all classes of society, and every desirable facility for communicating truth. We also have at command the mighty appliances of our mighty Gospel, and the spiritual resources of omnipotent grace. And yet, in all this lapse of four-score years, we have only reached with the sound of the Gospel jubilee about one fifth of the population of the United States. As ambassadors of Christ, we have, at last, "challenged for a healing" say 5,000,000 at one time, a little over 1,500,000 of whom, now living, have closed with the terms of the Gospel, and are now reconciled to God. The remaining 3,500,000 have possibly taken the matter under advisement, leaving say 20,000,000 of precious souls for whom we have no room in our churches. What shall we do to reach them, especially the masses not embraced under the ministry of any other Church? But I would go up still higher, to a point whence I can have one grand view of the whole "field." According to the census returns of 1850, all the churches of the United States, Catholic, Protestant, and all together, will accommodate 14,000,000, leaving about 10,000,000 of souls in this Christian republic, for whom there is no room in any of the churches. Four tenths of the population of these United States never go to church!

"But," it is asked, "does not a much larger number than that indicated by the aggregate capacity of the churches occasionally attend church, alternately with other occasional church-goers?" If you will make a calculation of the actual aggregate attendance in the churches throughout the land, you will find the number resulting from such a calculation so far below the number indicated by the aggregate capacity of the churches, that you will have plenty of room left to accommodate all your occasional church-goers, without calling on one of our outside ten millions.

Now, it is a question; which rises infinitely above any mere sectarian view of the subject, How shall the enlightening, purifying, elevating influences of the Gospel be brought to bear upon this mighty mass of neglected humanity? "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." Our nation is reproached and enfeebled far beyond safe precedent by the church-going sinners, but look down to the lower strata, and see the ten millions who have no fear of God before their eyes, no care for the honor of the nation, no sympathy with the grand

institutions which every American citizen should cherish as he does his life. They are, by their accumulating vices, locking the very wheels of government. They are corrupting the life-blood of the body politic. And they are deteriorating rapidly, and multiplying continually; first, by foreign immigration, and, second, by their own children, brought up under the special tutorship of Satan. Among the foreign immigration to our shores, are very many whose citizenship would be an honor to any nation; but a large proportion may be set down, at best, as fifth-rate humanity, morally considered.

These millions of neglectful and neglected souls are all subjects of redeeming mercy in Christ, and the infinite heart of Jesus, with every pulsation, throbs in sympathy with their woes. They can be redeemed and elevated to good citizenship in a Christian republic, and to heirship in the kingdom of glory. But the question remains, How shall they be reached and saved? The statesman replies, "Educate the masses, multiply public schools, academies, and colleges; teach every prattler in the nation how to read." That is a suggestion worthy of a statesman, a most desirable end to be attained. What will mere intellectual training, however important, secure the end proposed? Hear what General Washington says on this subject: "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert the great pillars of human happiness, those firmest props of men and citizens! The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it be simply asked, Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are instruments of investigation in the courts of justice? And let us indulge with caution the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of a peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle." Educate a rogue, (I use the term "educate" in the popular sense of intellectual training,) and the increase of his intellectual power will but make him the more act accomplished as a rogue, and proportionably more dangerous to society. The American Bible Society, the grand Christian institution on whose catholic platform all denominations of Christians meet, and pray, and labor together, and realize and exhibit how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity," has pledged itself to place a Bible in the hands of every American family, a conception and purpose worthy so noble an institution. The Tract Societies of different grades are doing a great work for the moral improvement of the masses. An increasing diffusion of religious literature in general is looked upon, and justly too, as a great means of good to society. But, after all, the question arises, Will a man, who never goes to church, nor desires to go, read the Bibles, and tracts, and religious books you put into his hands? A few may, but the mass of such people certainly will not. They have no desire for religion, and no taste for religious literature, and they are not so self-denying as to spend time in reading what is not agreeable to their views and feelings. These means of diffusing religious knowledge, however important as auxiliaries, do not constitute the peculiar instrumentality ordained of God for the enlightenment and salvation of the world. If this were so, then the great commission would have been framed accordingly, and would read: "Go, publish Bibles, tracts, papers, and religious books, and scatter them abroad as "leaves from the tree of life for the healing of the nations." Jesus says no such thing; but "Go YE into all the world, and PREACH the Gospel To EVERY CREATURE." Let the ambassadors of Jesus use all the collateral appliances at their command, as valuable aids, but not to be substituted for God's appointment of PREACHING the Gospel.

The whole matter resolves itself into this, that these ten millions of our neighbors, whom we are commanded to love as we love ourselves, must have "the Gospel preached unto them," or the mass of them will go to perdition. They are blinded by the god of this world, and will not come to us. Should we not, in the name and spirit of Him who came to seek and to save the lost, "go" to them?

In concluding this argument, I would most respectfully submit a suggestion for the consideration of wise and good men. Let a good representation of the American pulpit, for the love of souls, as the visible representatives of Jesus, "go out into the highways, and preach the Gospel." Let each act upon his own responsibility, as he that must give an account; but, as far as practicable, let the ministers of all denominations act in concert. Let them, like the ancient heralds of the great jubilee of the Jews, simultaneously "proclaim liberty throughout all the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof." Let the rising, swelling blasts of ten thousand trumpets, unite their echoes from Dan to Beersheba, from Maine to Mexico, and from South Carolina to California; and let all the laity, who "know the joyful sound," "run to and fro," bearing the "tidings," personally, to their neighbors, and knowledge shall be increased.

William Taylor was a Methodist in the California Conference in the mid-1800's. Although published in 1867, this article speaks to our generation. Mr. Taylor spoke about cultural refinement, secular education, the negative effects of immigration, the apathy of the churches, and other topics that apply today. The book from which this chapter is taken is called, "Seven Years' Street Preaching in San Francisco, California."