

A Student of the Word

by George Kulp

The sermon emphasizes the importance of Scripture in a Christian's life, its power to transform, and the need for humility and watchfulness in our Christian walk.

Scripture: Jeremiah 15:16, Matthew 9:37, Romans 10:14, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:12, James 1:22

Topics: "Biblical Study", "Evangelism"

Description

George Kulp preaches about the unwavering dedication of Mr. Smith to the Word of God, emphasizing his commitment to reading and memorizing Scripture daily, which led to a profound understanding of evangelical and experimental religion. Mr. Smith's ministry was marked by a deep focus on presenting God's truth for the salvation of souls, with a unique simplicity and theological depth in his preaching. Despite facing challenges and opposition, Mr. Smith's relentless pursuit of souls' conversion through prayer and preaching exemplified his dedication to his mission and the importance of relying on the Holy Spirit for success.

Transcript

"Preach the preaching that I bid thee."

"Search the Scriptures; they testify of Me."

"Give attendance to reading, to doctrine."

"These things command and teach."

"The Word of God is quick and powerful."

Of Mr. Smith's personal attachment to the Word of God, and its influence on his ministry, the testimony of Mr. Calder is very striking. "The whole force of his mind," Mr. Calder remarks, "was directed to the object for the accomplishment of which he undertook the Christian ministry, -- the presenting God's truth to men in order to effect the salvation of those who heard him. And while he was fully capable of luxuriating in the riches of literary pleasures, he steadily and conscientiously avoided that species of reading which, though innocent in itself, was not immediately connected with his great work. He would frequently remark to me, in relation to any work of a generally interesting character, Yes, it is very good, I have no doubt; I shall be glad to read it at a future period, if God spare my life; but I must read my Bible more; I must devour God's book, or how can I know His mind? I do not legislate for others, but I must be allowed to follow my own

views on this subject.' The result was a compactness of thought, a distinctness of conception on the subjects of evangelical and experimental religion, accompanied by a simplicity and perspicuity of statement, I had almost said, unique in its kind. His style and manner of preaching always accorded with the great end of leading men to God. It was emphatically scriptural and in the best sense of the term, highly theological. Indeed he was a great divine, if understanding God's Word makes a man such, and especially understanding and exhibiting God's mode of saving a sinner.

"His memory was extraordinary, and I believe it would have cost him very little trouble to commit any moderate sized volume to its storehouse. To God's book his pious and devout heart turned as to an ever-living fountain of truth and light, to satiate and delight his soul. He usually read twelve chapters, or the whole of a scripture-book, in a day, and committed a portion of it to memory. In consequence of being shortsighted, and not able to read when traveling on foot, he was accustomed to repeat some considerable portion of the sacred oracles as he itinerated his circuit; and when I informed him on one occasion, in a village where he met me to assist in holding a missionary meeting, that he must preach before the public meeting commenced, it being his appointment, he smilingly replied that he had no sermon to preach, but that he would go into the pulpit, and repeat the Epistle of St. James, having just done so on the road as he walked to the village. I need scarcely add, that we had not the Epistle so repeated, yet it ought to be stated, that amongst those causes which contributed to the wonderful success attending his ministerial labors, the aptitude with which he could use the Sword of the Spirit may be deemed not one of the least. To souls in distress on account of sin his quotations of Scripture, as suited to their state, were singularly appropriate, and attended with blessed effects.

"His own views of Divine truth might, with great propriety, be described as those of a minister of the Spirit. His mode of presenting the subject of God's love to man, His willingness to save sinners, the value of the atonement, and the power of faith to secure personal salvation, as known in its different degrees of justification or entire purity, might well entitle him to the designation of a master in Israel."

Notwithstanding his simplicity, plainness and vehemence, the congregations at Brighton increased considerably soon after his arrival. Some, no doubt, came from motives of curiosity, many were surprised, and a few were terrified. His own feelings may be readily gathered from the following sentence, from a letter to a friend:

"Our congregations increase, but we are not in the way, I am afraid, of looking for present blessings. This is of the greatest importance. He cannot do many mighty works because of our unbelief. In the circuit I had a prayer-meeting after preaching in every place during my last round. We saw nothing very particular. Perseverance; we must have souls converted."

Under the influence of this last sentiment he appears constantly to have lived. Whether in the pulpit or in the closet, in social intercourse or alone, he never lost sight of the great design of his mission. Of that species of preaching which only produced intellectual pleasure he had a holy abhorrence. Nothing can be more characteristic of the man than his remark to a friend, on sermons in which power of intellect or imagination is almost exclusively predominant: "They achieve nothing, sir." Perfectly capable, as he was, of appreciating what was refined and intellectual, a sermon which achieved nothing, however characterized by taste, argument, eloquence, or even abstract and generalizing theology, was to him merely as the play of the painted fly in the sunshine, whose parent is a worm, and whose life is a day. The importance of the object of his vocation held his faculties in a state of excitement which was too rigid to be affected by lighter interests. All his subordinate feelings lost their separate existence and operation by

falling into the grand one. There have not been wanting trivial minds who have marked this as a fault in his character; but he is above their sphere of judgment. The invisible spirits who fulfill their commission of philanthropy among mortals, do not care about the objects we so much admired: no more did he, when the time which he must have devoted to them would have been taken from the work to which he had consecrated his life. Such a sin against taste is very far beyond the reach of common saintship to commit. It implied an inconceivable severity of conviction, that he had one thing to do, and that he who would do some great thing in this short life must apply himself to the work with such a concentration of his forces, as to idle spectators looks like insanity.

Where the results which he desired did not attend his ministry, he would spend days and nights almost constantly on his knees, weeping and pleading before God, and especially deploring his own inadequacy to the great work of saving souls. He was, at times, when he perceived no movement in the church, literally in agonies, travailing in birth for precious souls, till he saw Christ magnified in their salvation. He was accustomed to saying, that a preacher ought to have restless solicitude on the subject of fruit, that God demands this of us, and that whenever it is found it will secure His approbation. How far he was right let the case of Jeremiah testify, who said: "If ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride, and mine eyes shall weep sore, and run down with tears; or, indeed, the Prince of preachers, in His weeping over Jerusalem.

Of Mr. Smith's humility and watchful jealousy over himself, the following private memorandum will give some idea:

"Dec. 6, 1818. -- I am more fully persuaded of the necessity of looking constantly to Jesus, in order to be preserved from falling; yet I am afraid I am not sufficiently sensible of the great evil of falling. Gracious God, deliver me not up to vile affections! I wish to be more diligent in redeeming the time, and in my studies; I am persuaded that much depends on this. I have been one of the most unfaithful of all the servants of God; yet I am encouraged to come to Him, because I 'have an Advocate' with Him, 'Jesus Christ the Righteous;' and 'Jesus' blood, through earth and skies, Mercy, free, boundless mercy, cries!"

In further illustration of these amiable and Christian qualities, we give the following incident: During Brother Smith's residence in Brighton, a certain lady became deeply distressed because of her condition as a sinner. He deemed it right to pay her several visits in order to instruct, and pray with her. The husband, a violent and unconverted man, was greatly incensed at these intrusions, and, it was said, put Mr. Smith out of the house -- by violence. After his departure from the circuit, the man was converted, and he greatly deplored his former action. In days after, Mr. Smith said the man did not thrust him out, but, said he, "I saw he was under the power of strong feelings, and I apprehended that he was about to lay hands on me, so I left the house, not because I was afraid of him, but because I was afraid of myself, not knowing to what I might have been tempted had he touched me."

Again, ponder the following extract and see how severe is his self-accusation:

"Dec. 11. -- I have not had that lively sense of the presence and favor of God, the whole of this day, which I wish to enjoy. I am deeply sensible of my ignorance, and of my want of ability for the work of the ministry; yet the Lord is all-sufficient, and He will qualify and help. I trust I shall be more diligent than I have been. I have to lament my instability in everything. I have not prayed against it as I ought to have done. By the grace of God, I will make a renewed effort."

Under the same date as the foregoing, he writes thus to Miss Hamer:

"I am glad that the good Spirit of God continues to strive with you; but I would just say, do not let Him strive: Yield to Him: be led by Him at all times. Be as much in private as possible. Come to the throne of grace with boldness ... God's having given His Son is an infinite and everlasting proof of His willingness to save us to the uttermost. Oh, get transforming views of Christ: these you must get in private. Do not rest without the constant enjoyment of the perfect love of God. Get deeper baptisms, signal revelations of the love of God in your heart. Experience the Word, feel that you have the same Spirit that inspired the sacred penman. Of late I have had severe and peculiar temptations, and, blessed be God, I have had strong and peculiar consolation and support." In reference to the work of God he adds: "Our prospects are very cheering. Congregations increase, the people in many places are greatly quickened, and some are brought out of darkness into God's marvelous light. Last Tuesday night in one of our country places, there were many in distress, and several professed to be made happy. On Wednesday night also there were some in distress. Oh, if we were always filled with the Holy Ghost before we go to the house of God we should see signs and wonders."

Mr. Smith's letters to his parents usually contained a few words specifically addressed to his mother, as she was often much afflicted; they commonly suggested some topics of consolation. The following is a specimen:

"Dec. 22. -- Your bodily indisposition has a tendency to weigh down your spirits, but cast body and soul on Christ. However you may feel, trust in Christ. Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. The father attends to the afflicted child, because it is afflicted; and we have not a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities," etc.

Nothing could be more sober and scriptural, nothing farther removed from the visionary and enthusiastic, than Mr. Smith's sentiments on the subject of Christian consolation. One of his friends relates, that "to a person suffering from debility, he said, 'You must not make joy the criterion of your state, but confidence in the truth of God. It would be a miracle for you to rejoice.' And again, to the same person, 'Now, do not be giving way to despondency because you are weak. I used to do it, but I know better now. I use my privilege, and rejoice:' " meaning, of course, by the term "rejoice," in this latter case, not to describe the abounding of active delight, but the calm satisfaction arising from an unshaken sense of God's fidelity.

In the letter from which the above it extracted, he elsewhere remarks: "Let us plead with God for deeper baptisms. We want more of the Spirit. This should be our grand petition, -- The Spirit. He will purify, strengthen, comfort, yea, all is in Him. Give God no rest. How soon can He come down and shake the mountains, and dash the rocks to pieces? We may be assured if we are not saved, the hindrance is in us. Let us take hold of our fellow creatures, consider ourselves one with them, and plead with God for them." All around us there are hungry souls, people who are waiting for some earnest believer to lead them to Jesus.

A wealthy merchant had an only son to whom he was tenderly attached. He spared no expense with his education; he sent him to foreign lands, and at home denied him no gratification. To the sorrow of his father, he became despondent, and a deep melancholy settled upon him. Physicians were called in, who prescribed amusements, entertainments, recreation, and pastimes. All this did no good; young associates surrounded him; he was taken to the theater, to balls, parties, and soirees. Nothing relieved him; like the woman in the Gospel, he seemed no better, but rather worse. The physician thought a sea voyage might do him good. A yacht was fitted out to send along the coast. On the land and on the water, the settled

melancholy weighed him down. The yacht ran into a harbor on Cape Cod; the young man stepped ashore, listless, indifferent, careless about where he was or where he was going. The shades of evening fell upon him. He saw a light in the distance, and walked on toward it. As he approached the building, he heard the voice of song. The house was a carpenter's shop, fitted up for worship with a rude altar and ruder benches. It was a season of revival, and a few earnest Christians had assembled for prayer and praise. Exhortation followed prayer, and praise followed exhortation. As one after another spoke of the love of the Savior and the joy of religion, the despondent individual arose. "This that you've been talking about is what I want. Will your Savior accept me? Are there any blessings left for one as wretched as I am?" Christians gave the poor seeker a hearty welcome; led him to the altar and prayed with him. That night, he found peace in believing, with an elastic step, he went on board his yacht, and turned its prow homeward. He entered his home, and informed his astonished household what great things the Lord had done for him, and what great peace He had imparted. He entered a theological seminary, fitted himself for the ministry, and went out to tell a dying world what peace and joy there are in religion.

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