

# Life of Wililam Jay

by Ian Murray

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*This sermon explores the life and legacy of William Jay, a great preacher who embodied the principles of Calvinism in his preaching and can help us cultivate the art of preaching.*

**Duration:** 1:02:41

**Scripture:** Psalm 16:3, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Sermon Preparation", "Homiletics"

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## Description

In this sermon transcript, the speaker emphasizes the importance of structuring sermons with clear divisions to aid in the retention and understanding of the message. He argues that without a well-organized sermon, the truth of God's word can easily be forgotten. The speaker also highlights the benefit of clear divisions for the preacher, as it allows them to be more independent of written notes in the pulpit. He encourages preachers to strive for a concise and memorable structure, with three to five points, to ensure that the congregation can easily remember and apply the sermon's teachings.

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## Transcript

My subject this morning is William J. the Preacher, or William J. perhaps, and the Art of Preaching. There are some preachers of the past whose lives we cannot study, for the only record of them is in heaven. There are others whose lives are set down in literature, and we shall never get time to study them.

And finally, there is a third group of ministers of the past whose biographies we both can and we must study, because they contain information which is calculated to be of outstanding help to ministers of the gospel in all ages. This third category is the category in which William J. is to be placed. When he was 74 years old, he wrote his autobiography, and it was published along with his personal reminiscences, and in doing this, he tells us, he was prompted by the desire to set down those lessons of his life which might especially aid a following generation of ministers.

Many years ago, I found William J.'s autobiography in the Epworth Press in City Road. There was a shelf of his works. I didn't buy one of them.

I lament to this day. But I bought the autobiography, and this is the volume from which I will largely speak this morning. J.'s autobiography is one of the most valuable ministerial records of the last century.

We should all be far more effective preachers of the gospel if we made it our business to work at the lessons which he commended to his brethren who would follow him in the ministry in later years. And our purpose then this morning is largely to let William J. speak to us himself on the subject of preaching. Now let me first remind you who William J. was.

He was born in a humble country cottage in the month of May in 1769. 1769, on the edge of the Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire in the village of Tisbury. His father was a stonemason.

His parents were poor, hard-working religious people. They went to the Presbyterian church in Tisbury where the minister was an Arian. They, like so many others in that century, they looked up and they were not fed as they went week by week to church.

William J. had a very meagre education which finished when he was 14 years of age and at that age he became an apprentice stonemason working with his father. Just a short time after that an evangelical gentleman moved to the village of Tisbury and he commenced services in his own home. He would invite a visiting preacher and this man would take a service on Saturday evening and then at 7 o'clock on Sunday morning.

They did not conflict with the times of the other churches but in the home of this evangelical Christian, William J. was brought to a knowledge of Christ. He sat there in this little group of people with his leather apron on and his flannel jacket. I suppose perhaps the only young person in the gathering.

And there, at about the age of 14 or just 15, he came to an experience of the grace of God. Now a little while after that, there was a visiting preacher in this home one weekend. A man by the name of Cornelius Winter.

Now Cornelius Winter himself is a fascinating man. He was, in the latter years of George Whitefield, his personal associate. You know, when Whitefield became an old man, he became very shy of friendship.

I think he had been let down so many times and it was quite proverbial that Whitefield was a very difficult man to get access to. But Cornelius Winter, in about the last eight years of Whitefield's life, had the privilege of serving him, of living with him. Whitefield was his counsellor and guide in many respects.

Winter was converted under Whitefield. Well, at this date, in the 1780s, Cornelius Winter lived in Marlborough, which is a small country town, for the sake of some of you who come to us from abroad. It's a small country town in Wiltshire.

You can go through it on the way to Wales from London. And living in Marlborough, he had a theological academy. Now Winter then was the visiting preacher on this weekend and as he arrived in the home and the people were gathered, here he saw this young apprentice.

And conferring with the Christians of the household, he learned who William Jay was and Cornelius Winter had the very distinct and decided impression that Jay was called for a life of great usefulness in the Church of God. You remember how Richard Nill met Spurgeon when Spurgeon was ten years old and Nill was convinced that Spurgeon was raised up for a great ministry. Well, Cornelius Winter had that same kind of conviction.

So he encouraged William Jay to come to Marlborough and to study at the academy. And so William Jay came in the early summer of the year 1785 and he remained for just over three years until mid-summer of

1788. Now, Cornelius Winter's academy was not exactly a theological seminary in the sense that we know it.

Its greatest merit lay in Winter himself. In later years, William Jay wrote a biography of Cornelius Winter and he made this comment. He was, in fact, speaking of John Newton.

He said of John Newton, I deem him the most perfect instance of the spirit and temper of Christianity I ever knew, shall I say with the exception, no, but with the addition of Cornelius Winter. So that the students at Marlborough had as their teacher a man whose daily work was to indicate by his own example that a spiritually-minded Christian is the only man who can prepare himself in any sense for the work of the gospel. In addition, then, to Winter's own life, he had a great fund of practical wisdom on the subject of preaching.

And what would happen is this. The area around Marlborough, Wiltshire, was destitute of the gospel at that time, very largely. And Winter was exercised often to be about in the villages and the countryside.

And he would say to Jay, Billy, he would say, come up with me on my horse. And young Jay would climb on the back of the horse. And while they were on the road, journeying to a place where Winter would preach, while they were on the road, Jay says, he would examine me upon Latin syntax, made me scan some of the verses in Virgil, and he says this was his invariable practice.

I'm sure it wasn't like that at Princeton, this degree. The teacher on the horse and the young man behind him scanning Virgil and Latin syntax. Well, that gives you a pretty good idea of what kind of man Winter was.

He was a thorough scholar. And yet he was also an earnest preacher. And somehow, in this rather chaotic way, he sought to do the two things at his little academy in Marlborough.

Well, William Jay himself preached his first sermon when he was 16 years of age. And by the time he was 19, he had preached 1,000 sermons. And some idea of his early preaching can be gained by noting the way in which he was received in London when he first preached in London in July 1788.

Now, I think that probably at that date, London was better supplied with evangelical ministers than probably any city in the world. People could still hear John Wesley preaching in the city road. William Romaine was preaching at St. Anne's in Blackfriars.

John Newton was at St. Mary Woolnoth. Cross the Thames, and Rowland Hill was preaching in Surrey Chapel. Rowland Hill was so like Whitfield.

And these were just a few of the many evangelicals preaching in London at that day. And yet, coming into that city, when he was only 19 years of age, William Jay was heard with something akin to a sensation. And he was almost immediately put on a pinnacle of popularity.

And Cornelius Winter, even far away in Marlborough, heard news of this, and he wrote two letters to his young friend, and they included this advice. I am thankful, he says, to hear you are acceptable. I hope the Lord will continue to make you so daily, and keep you low and humble before him.

If you really have performed your appointment for Mr. Hill, now Jay was preaching at the Surrey Chapel, if you have really performed your appointment for Mr. Hill, I would advise you to attend no further invitation,

but leave London immediately. Come into the country to pray and reflect, and wherever you go, set the picture of your mortality before you, and consider that he who has raised you can sink you, and will, unless you give him the glory of the gifts he has given you. And Jay accepted the wisdom of this exhortation, and he refused invitations to settle in London, and instead he went to a pastorate in a tiny village at Christian Malford, near Chippenham, on a salary of £35 a year, and there he settled in the autumn of 1788.

He remained about one year, and then he went to Bristol, where he ministered for two years, and finally, in January 1791, he settled in the charge where he was to remain until the last year of his life. This was the independent congregation meeting in the Argyle Chapel in Bath. Jay's ministry at the Argyle Chapel was remarkable in many respects, but in terms of long-sustained usefulness, it can scarcely have any parallel in English church history.

After forty years at the Argyle Chapel, during which time the building had been twice enlarged, an anniversary meeting was held in 1831, and at this time Jay reported that there were only three members of the congregation who had signed his call in 1791 still alive. In his physical and spiritual preservation, he saw only the grace of God. He says, And Jay went on to see both his fiftieth and his sixtieth anniversary, and only after completing sixty-two years in the pastorate at Bath did he retire in January 1853, when in his eighty-fourth year of age.

His determination was not to outlive his usefulness, and the last page of the last book which he wrote was collected by him in the proofs just a week before his death. He died on December the twenty-seventh, 1853. The last sermon he preached was on the text, Behold, I am vile.

To those around him on his deathbed he said, Oh, none of you know what it is to die. And again, The language of the publican did, does, and ever will befit me, and even down to death must be my cry, God be merciful to me, a sinner. Turning from these few facts on Jay's life to the question of his influence as a preacher, it can be said that for all round usefulness, he was for nearly half a century one of the best-known preachers in England, and through his published volumes he was possibly the most widely read of them all.

I was astonished the other day in the Evangelical Library going through their catalogues to see the extent of the publications which they have of his, and it was said that his books sold even more widely in the United States. He preached the annual sermon for the foremost Evangelical society of that age, the London Missionary Society, more frequently than did any other minister. Such was his popularity in London that for more than 50 years he preached for two months every summer at Surrey Chapel.

Surrey Chapel was an extraordinary building. I told you Roland Hill was there until his death in 1834. It seated, I suppose, approaching 4,000 people.

There were regularly up to a dozen police officers in the congregation. All the riffraff was there. There were pickpockets and so on.

The police were scattered about. And there was a great Evangelical body of people. The missionary collection that was taken there every year was never less than 400 pounds at the Surrey Chapel, and bear in mind the difference in money in those days.

So it was the largest non-conformist church in London, larger even than Whitfield's Tabernacle in Tottenham Court Road. And here, Jay preached every summer for two months for over 50 years. And at

Bath, which of course at that time was the heyday, in its heyday as a resort for nobility and members of Parliament, William Wilberforce had a house there, who became a great friend of Jay's.

It was a great centre of influence. Now, in all these spheres, William Wilberforce Jay was certainly one, if not the most, prominent preacher in England. In fact, some people thought he was the latter.

A certain Dr. Johns, who was rector of Christ Church Baltimore, visited this country and Bath in 1852, and this is what he wrote. In reply to the inquiries of American friends as to whose preaching I like best of all that I heard while in England and Scotland, my answer has uniformly been the old preacher at Bath, whom you all know as the author of *The Morning and Evening Exercises*, Jay's best-known book. His sermon was full of Christ, discriminating and searching, while in point of style I did not notice a sentence out of joint from the beginning to the end.

C. H. Spurgeon prized the memory of hearing Jay preach in Cambridge in 1851, and he later urged Jay's writings upon the attention of all his students who trained at the pastor's college. William Williams, you know, I'm sure you know that lovely book, *William Williams' Personal Reminiscences of C. H. Spurgeon*. Williams was a student at the college, and he says, Jay of Bath was ever a great favourite with Spurgeon.

He often read a chapter or two from Jay in college and advised each student to get his works. And then Spurgeon himself, in commenting and commentaries, when exhorting us to make the best use of Matthew Henry, does so by indicating how greatly William Jay had been aided by Henry. He says Mr. Jay's sermons bear indubitable evidence of his having studied Matthew Henry almost daily.

Matthew Henry is Jay writing. Jay is Matthew Henry preaching. What more could I say, he says.

What more could I say in commendation of the preacher or the author? Matthew Henry is Jay writing. Jay is Matthew Henry preaching. Judged by any standard, William Jay of Bath certainly belonged to the front rank of the preachers of the past.

But why, it may be asked, should we be interested in the reviving of his memory at the present time? And to that question I offer these three answers. First, Jay belonged to one of the most stimulating periods in British church history. He was born in the last year of Whitefield's ministry in England and he was buried in the first year of C.H. Spurgeon's ministry in London.

And between those two dates, 1769 and 1854, the reign of George III, and a date in Queen Victoria's reign when Victoria had reigned for some 17 years, between these two dates there was enormous spiritual growth in this country. Churches grew, the work of foreign missions bounded forward, evangelical literature multiplied, the slave trade was broken, and in short, there was in many areas of religious and public life a thrilling testimony to the power of the gospel. It is customary to explain all this as the aftermath of the great evangelical revival of the mid-18th century.

And certainly the momentum of that revival was a continuing reality. Nonetheless, we are in danger of underestimating the caliber of the men like William Jay who God raised up to consolidate and to carry forward his work. These men were no mere echoes of Whitefield or Wesley.

They deserved study in their own right, and if we neglect such study we shall lose the benefit of the lessons of a truly great period in history. That's my first answer to the question, why revive Jay's memory? Second, there is a parallel between the situation at the time of Jay's birth and our own days. Two hundred years ago, Calvinistic belief was almost everywhere on the increase.

The Wesleyan Methodists alone were Arminian. Elsewhere, both in church and chapel, the doctrines of sovereign grace were in the ascendancy in practically all evangelical pulpits. Yet because a minister professes the tenets of Calvinism, he does not necessarily become an effective preacher.

On the contrary, his preaching may lose biblical proportion and produce stunted and unattractive Christians. And there was a good deal of this in the late 18th century. A school of men arose who believed that John Wesley would end in hell, and they hated him as much as they did any Unitarian.

If you want evidence of that, consult the life of Walker of Dublin, who was one of the representatives of this school. This not inconsiderable group of high Calvinists had been rightly charged with antinomianism. Their theology was lopsided and in measure erroneous.

They preached election without insisting sufficiently upon the practical effects of election in the life. They preached faith but said little of work. They taught the perseverance of saints as a privilege but not as a duty which the Bible enjoins upon all who profess to be saints.

What relevance has this to ourselves? I think it may be said that we are living in the first resurgence of Calvinism in England since the 18th century. Today Calvinistic theology is gaining ground steadily among evangelical ministers. But a great issue has not yet been decisively settled.

It is the issue whether this theology is going to produce attractive, compelling preaching which will win the ears and the hearts of the people. It is no use our saying that the way that issue is settled depends entirely upon God and that we cannot be held responsible. There are definite reasons why the high Calvinistic preaching of the late 18th century ran to seed and developed or led to dwindling congregations.

Now I do not say this because I think that we are afflicted with antinomianism but I think that many of us are conscious of the problem how to give a biblical theology its full weight in the pulpit and at the same time see to it that we are not simply supplying our people with propositions and intellectual principles simply to stretch their minds. To preach doctrinal ideas even though those ideas be true will never lead to attractive preaching. This was the danger which John Newton had in view when he said with his usual wisdom he says Calvinism was one of the worst systems preached theoretically but one of the best preached practically.

And this is why I mention this. It is not the parallel between antinomianism but it is the danger of the theoretical preaching. You see, these high Calvinists began with the theoretical preaching and that led on in time to the lopsidedness of the antinomianism.

But the danger of the theoretical preaching of the Calvinistic system is certainly a danger which will always occur when there is a revival of this theology. Of course, some men escape from this simply by diluting the theology. And here, I think, is where Jay is so helpful.

He was fully cognizant of this danger and he was a thorough, committed Calvinist of the Puritan school. He was a great reader of John Owen, of Flavel, of Thomas Watson. And yet he knew and he cultivated the art of preaching as John Newton says, preaching Calvinism practically.

And this is my second reason then for believing that he is worthy of our attention today as a guide and mentor. My third reason is connected with the last and has to do with the whole question of the art of preaching. By the term art, I refer to that skill which makes sermons more likely to obtain the right effect.

The art of preaching has to do not so much with the message itself nor with the spirit in which the message is delivered but with the form and shape of the sermons. Now, many of us have an almost instinctive hostility to this phrase that I am now using. We have the suspicion that those who taught most of the art or the craft of preaching are those who have lost the truth for which the pulpit exists.

And we are prone to treat the art of preaching as a type of cleverness which has no place in sacred things. The term art suggests to us human ingenuity and over against this we have insisted that the prerequisites to powerful preaching are purity of doctrine and holiness of life. This insistence is right but in our zeal against the misuse of skill in the pulpit we are far overreacted.

The form of a sermon is not the first consideration yet that does not mean that we are justified in treating it as an irrelevance or almost an irrelevance. We must surely recognize that a minister may be orthodox and a converted man and yet in his pulpit be comparatively ineffective. Are we right in assuming that such ineffectiveness has nothing to do with the form of the sermon? Could it not be connected with a neglect of the art of preaching? Now the history of preaching can throw light on this question.

We know, for instance, that in the 17th century when the pulpit exercised such power the Puritans gave a great deal of attention to the form in which Scripture is preached. If you read a great book by William Perkins *The Art of Prophesying* you'll see that this is his great theme or in the section on the Directory for Public Worship in the Westminster, or appended to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, in the Directory on the public preaching of the Word there again you have this insistence upon the form and the skill of preaching. The Puritans believed that it was not enough that a preacher should simply know the truth and be a spiritual man.

He had also to acquire an art in regard to the way he preached. Now when we come to the 18th century the scene has altogether changed. The regular non-conformist ministers who of course were the successors of the Puritans the dissenters, as they were sometimes called they retained much of the old form of preaching.

But William Jay makes this severe criticism of their sermons. He says, the dissenters were educated ministers themselves for at that time there was scarcely a lay preacher among them and their sermons were not only orthodox but studied, grammatically correct and methodical but with a very few exceptions pointless, cold and drawled off from notes. With the great evangelical revival in the late 1730s there came a new type of preaching.

It rejected the formal style of the non-conformist pulpit and proclaimed evangelical truth with spirit and with fire. The characteristic of the preachers in the Methodist tradition was their liveliness and in the type of preaching which they popularized there was little and sometimes practically no study given to form. They preached the truth feelingly vehemently and earnestly but their sermons were too often unstudied rambling and even incoherent.

The Methodist lay preachers nearly all belonged to this type but some of the leading preachers in the revival including Whitefield himself were in measure responsible for encouraging this pattern by their own example. So you see, you had in the first half of the 18th century this strong contrast. You had the old dissenters continuing the form the Puritan form but drawing it off from their notes and then you had the fire and the life of the new Methodist type without any form scarcely at all.

And this was the kind of contrast which existed when William Jay began his ministry and to it he gave a great deal of thought. He was near enough to the Evangelical revival to know both the strengths and weaknesses of the preachers whom God had so greatly used. He also observed that Rowland Hill probably the most popular preacher in London followed the rambling Methodist style.

To Rowland Hill's lively sermons there was scarcely any form at all. You know the story no doubt. After one such sermon one of his hearers said to him, well Mr Hill you have taken us over the whole land from Dan to Bathsheba.

And Rowland Hill entirely unrepentant said yes he says and it is all holy ground. Now William Jay no doubt aided by the wisdom of Cornelius Winter made an early decision not to fall into this style. He saw that what was needed was preaching that was both arousing in its spirit and in form adapted to achieve the maximum usefulness.

In other words he believed as the Puritans believed that the work of the pulpit involves an art to be learned. Of all the reasons why William Jay deserves studying today I think that this is the key. He took the lead in giving currency to a form of preaching which did enormous good.

When C. H. Spurgeon suddenly came into prominence in the 1850s and there were many of these newspaper articles written as you know it was commonly said of Spurgeon that his plan and method were those of William Jay and that he was following William Jay in that respect. And I think there's a large measure of truth in that. We all tend simply to take the form of Spurgeon's sermons for granted without realising how utterly different his sermons would have been had he adopted Rowland Hill's method.

Indeed had he done so very few would be reading Spurgeon today. The great usefulness of Spurgeon's sermons has much to do with the fact that he preached the truth with due regard to both spirit and form. This was not achieved off the cuff.

It was following a tradition which Jay and others had worked hard to establish in England. I turn now more directly to William Jay's own thoughts on preaching. It should at once be said that his concern about the form of preaching was far removed from any desire to make the pulpit a place where we show our ability.

I quote, The end of preaching should always be regarded to win souls to Christ. When I preach I want to preach Christ. When I invite the sinner I wish to invite him to Christ.

When I persuade men I want to persuade them to flee to Christ. When I warn the careless I warn them to beware of neglecting Christ. When I apply the truth I do it only to glorify Christ.

This is our business as ministers. Yet it is often lost sight of. That is the end of Jay's quote.

Now this spiritual concern with Jay was closely connected with the form of preaching. For, if our objective is to help our hearers we must necessarily be anxious that our sermon should be planned in a form most likely to attain that end. Human nature has to be studied in this regard.

And the art of preaching means that we so understand men that our preaching proceeds upon the lines most likely to do them the maximum of good. This in no way implies a lack of dependence upon God. It has to do with our responsibility to be as efficient as we can be.

There are, I believe, upstairs quite a number of copies of an old Banner of Truth magazine with this splendid article by J.C. Ryle on simplicity of preaching. And some of you will remember in it that he refers to a friend of William Jay, Richard Cecil. And Cecil was once counselling a young man who came to him and was concerned about his preaching.

He said to Cecil that... He said, I need... He said, I think I want more faith. No, said the wise old man. You want more works.

You want more pains. You must not think that God will do work for you though he is ready to do it by you. This is the point I'm making now here.

All William Jay's axioms upon preaching flow out of his insistence that we study our people. And if we do that thoroughly, he believed, then the following things will mark our preaching. So that flowing out of our understanding, our consideration of our hearers and their nature, if we consider them aright, then these things will follow.

First, we shall aim at being both intelligible and interesting. The chief business of the preacher, says Jay, is to strike and stick. That is to say, he must both gain the attention of his hearers and then deliver the truth to them in forms which will stick and abide when his preaching is done.

In his autobiography, Jay writes of the benefit it was for him to begin preaching among plain English villagers because it taught him the necessity of simplicity and also led him to the conviction that genuine simplicity in preaching is only attained by real labour. He knew very well that a congregation can stare intently at the preacher and yet scarcely follow a word he says. Speaking of his village sermons, he writes, I always peculiarly studied for these occasions, only my study was how to be intelligible and interesting.

The minds of the rustics are not inaccessible, but you must take the trouble to find the avenues to them. There are modes of making them look eagerly and hang upon the preacher's lips and the preacher who secures their attention, whatever some think, has the honour of resembling him of whom it was said the common people heard him gladly. To be intelligible, Jay employed language plain and penetrating.

His style was not ornate or flowery. In that way, he's not really Victorian. Of course, he was pre-Victorian for most of his life.

but he has this pithy plainness about him. At the same time, he aimed, in every sermon, to strike his hearer's emotions and imaginations as well as their minds. He believed that intellectual preaching, which deals only in abstract ideas and lengthy arguments, is seriously deficient.

Sermons without description, without illustration, without similes and anecdotes will in most cases fail. Upon this he writes, John Bunyan's motto, borrowed from Hosea, could never be adopted by some preachers. I have used similitudes.

But such a usage is sanctioned by the example of him who spake as never man spoke. Dr. Carey, Jay goes on, is reported to have said to a young minister who had preached before him, My young friend, I have much approved of your sermon, but it had one deficiency. It had no likes in it.

And when asked for an explanation, he said, Why, when you read our Lord's discourses, you constantly meet with the expression the kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, like unto mustard seed, like unto a net, like unto a marriage, and so on. Now Carey said, Now never preach again, my young friend, without

some likes in your address. And Jay goes on, God, the only wise God, who having made us, knows what is in man and what is necessary to him, has given us the largest proportion of the Old and New Testament in the form of history and biography.

Is it not, therefore, strange that public instructors should lose sight of God's method and be always getting into the commonness of declamation or the dryness of speculative discussion? A story, says Cecil, will hold a child by the ear for an hour together, and men are but children of a larger growth. So that's the first point. If we study our hearers, we will work at being intelligible and interesting.

In the second place, Jay considered that a proper appreciation of our hearers will lead us to arrange the matter we put into sermons with careful regard to order and division. It was for him a capital error to suppose that liberty and freedom in preaching means that we dispense with planning the structure of our subject matter under well-selected heads. These two things are not antitheses.

A sermon should have a few specific points to make, and the whole should be arranged to enable the hearer to see clearly what these points are. To preach a rambling discourse, as Ryle says in that article referred to, is like sending a disorderly rabble into battle instead of a well-regimented army, or like serving a meal on one plate with soup, meat, dessert, and coffee all mixed up together. Now the main argument which Jay uses to enforce this, the necessity of division and a few straight points, his main argument is that divisions are indispensable aids to the memories of our hearers.

In preparing sermons, we should never think that benefit will only come during the time when the message is delivered. A preacher may hold a congregation with fervor and fireworks for forty minutes, but that is no indication of the effectiveness of his preaching. Within another forty minutes, the whole thing can be forgotten.

The truth has to be presented so as to stick in men's minds. And on this he writes, I always loved arrangement and division. The lower orders peculiarly need it.

It relieves and quickens their attention. It aids their apprehension and understanding. It also enables them, the better, to retain and carry away what they hear.

And how limited is the efficiency of what pleases and interests in the act of hearing only. He says, how utterly inefficient is our preaching if just in the time when we are preaching we please our hearers, and that is all. How desirable it is that our people should keep in memory what is preached unto them that they may not believe in vain.

Hence, he says, it is much to be wished that the divisions should be short, simple and easy, the language everywhere plain, natural and familiar. Few can imagine how much I have always made this my aim and effort. And there's one quote from Ryle.

Ryle says, to the same effect, I find it of the utmost importance to make people understand, remember and carry away what I say. And I am certain that divisions help me to do so. They are, in fact, like hooks and pegs and shells in the mind.

If you study the sermons of men who have been and are successful preachers, you will always find order and often division in their sermons. And then Ryle goes on on a very nice piece about Spurgeon which I will not give you. Try to get this for yourself.

Now, in the case of William Jay, there's abundant evidence that he was blessed in this respect. Let me give you an illustration of it. Two men once met each other.

One was a Dr. Bowie who tells this story. And Bowie asked this other man had he ever heard a piece about Spurgeon which I will not give you. Try to get this for yourself.

Now, in the case of William Jay, there's abundant evidence that he was blessed in this respect. Let me give you an illustration of it. Two men once met each other.

One was a Dr. Bowie who tells this story. And Bowie asked this other man had he ever heard William Jay preach. Yes, the man said, I have heard him.

Had he preached, he said, on Psalm 16, verse 3. And then the man proceeded to give Dr. Bowie the whole outline of his sermon. And Dr. Bowie said, and when did you hear him preach on that verse? He said it was 35 years ago. And he had the whole structure of the sermon in his mind.

Now, that is just one illustration, but there are many others that could be given. Jay worked at this with all his might to give his hearers a structure of three to five points, never more than five, which he expected them to carry away in their memories. That's what he meant by this word, stick.

That's my first reason then for divisions. Culled out of Jay. It's an amazing preacher who can really preach so as to be remembered in years to come if his sermon is not ordered.

There is another reason why sermons need to be prepared with clear divisions. This is my second reason. Namely, that it facilitates the memory of the preacher and makes him more largely, if not entirely, independent of written notes in the pulpit.

To be bound to notes is crippling for a preacher. If we cannot remember our own message, how can we expect our hearers to remember ours? It really is as simple as that. If we are staring at our notes in the pulpit, we are really telling the people that we are not remembering the very message which we are supposed to be delivering to them.

But if we are not to be tied to paper in the pulpit, we are faced with only two other alternatives. Either we have to ramble and wander about the land from Dan to Beersheba in Hill style, or we must have an orderly structure clearly in our minds. In William Jay's case, it was not until he was in his seventies that he took any note into the pulpit, and even then it was only a slip of paper.

We have no doubt all wrestled with the problem of how far we need to have our eye upon notes when we are preaching. It may not have occurred to us sufficiently, however, that our over-dependence upon notes may be too easily excused on the grounds of our weak memories when in fact we are to blame for not planning our sermons so that they can be retained in our minds. So this, you see, is the second argument.

The division of the sermon greatly facilitates the freedom of the preacher. Can I digress for one moment? When I was reading Jay at large on this, I envied him in one point. He says, we are to do most of our study in the open air.

Now, brethren, I don't know how you do it, but I don't do that. But you see, neither, perhaps, will we be preaching when we're in our mid-eighties. These men did their work more in the open air.

And how did they do it? Well, because of their whole sermon structure. You see, they had their divisions, their heads. With those heads, they proceeded to walk in the open air, and there they hammered out and filled out their heads.

Mr. Greer was mentioning earlier this morning Mr. McCrae Stornoway, who did so much for this conference at its beginning. And Mr. McCrae Stornoway did exactly the same as William Jay. His structure was more or less identical.

I don't know that he ever read Jay. I suppose he had. But then he would take his head and he would proceed round his manse by the mile on Saturdays.

I remember him very clearly telling me this. From the front door round to the back, and he would go round and round by the hour. And, of course, he was completely oblivious of where he was, but he was working on his sermon.

And Mr. McCrae was also preaching in his 80s. And here we are, often bowed over our desks. These men, this is a third argument which I haven't put on paper, their health was improved.

Ah! I draw a third and a last comment from Jay on how a wise consideration for our hearers will influence the form of our preaching. It will lead us to aim at variety and to avoid wearying our people. Preaching as he did for 63 years in one charge William Jay is surely entitled to speak to us on this point.

We may suppose that in Jay's day it was comparatively easy to gain and keep a congregation. Yet that is not true. In fact, in his long lifetime he saw not a few comparatively able and orthodox men who were pulpit failures.

And the reason for their failure was often the monotonous character of their preaching. The peril is that we unconsciously lose our awareness of the reality of this danger. And when this happens we can fall into modes of preaching which too easily lend themselves to wearying our congregations.

For example, the preacher who usually preaches an expository series is vulnerable at this point. William Jay was not blind to the benefits of preaching that is expository and consecutive rather than textual. But, like Spurgeon, he believed that the average minister may be hard put to it not to weary people with this method.

You may recall even Spurgeon believed that he would have wearied a congregation with that method. Jay regarded it as utterly reprehensible that a preacher known to him preached for 19 Sundays on the list of evil characters listed in the four verses of 2 Timothy chapter 3. Now, I don't know what you've heard, brethren, but I've sometimes heard men and it becomes almost a point of ambition how long have you preached on a few verses? And that is the very thing that Jay strikes at here with great force and he does it elsewhere. He was equally critical of another who, he says, though not young in age not green, he says, in years was nevertheless three years in going through the Ten Commandments.

Well, to him such a man was utterly ignorant of these basic principles connected with the art of preaching. The preacher who does not take a series may equally tax his hearers if he keeps to the same themes. Jay instances the case of Dr. Thomas Howis or Howis as sometimes he is pronounced who for many years was the minister of the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel in Bath.

He says, the doctor's style of address was all too invariably terrific and derived from such texts as these. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings. Depart ye cursed etc.

Not surprisingly he tells us Thomas Howis' chapel was emptied and Howis, great man though he was, finished his days sitting as a hearer in William Jay's congregation. Undue length in preaching Jay also treated as a failure in consideration towards our hearers. He rejected entirely the idea that powerful sermons are in any way synonymous with long sermons.

He writes, Whitfield and Wesley and most of the early Methodists were short. Writing of Richard Cecil, who we've referred to earlier, and who he regarded as one of the most useful preachers of the late 18th century, this is what Jay says, Among many other excellences in his preaching he was always brief. I never heard him exceed 40 minutes.

This is an excellence which did not distinguish our forefathers and it is, I fear, very unlikely to be a characteristic of the moderns, especially our younger preachers who show in their long harangues the confidence they have in their own ability and acceptance. There is no excuse for a long sermon. If it be good, it need not be long.

And if it be bad, it ought not to be long. He goes on. Queen Anne, after hearing Dr. South, said, You have given us an excellent sermon, Dr. South.

I wish you had had time to make it longer. And our hearers can still say that to us when they don't always mean it. Nay, he said, nay, please your majesty, I wish I had had time to make it shorter.

Jay's own practice was generally to take 45 minutes for a sermon on Sundays and 35 minutes for a weekday sermon in his own congregation. Now I've run out of manuscript and I have just a few words and then I will close. But my conclusion is just to say and speak briefly on how Jay attained to his skill as a preacher.

I have spent the great bulk of the time on what I think is the greatest lesson of his ministry this whole question of the art based upon a proper understanding of our hearers. As I say, a last point in just a few words, how did he attain to this excellence? Well, in the first place it was his deliberate aim from his earliest days in the pulpit to excel in this way. And he quotes these words of Richard Baxter.

There is much truth in the remark of Richard Baxter that our success commonly bears a much more exact proportion to our design, our desire, and our hope than we are apt to imagine. Let this thought be enthroned in the mind. Many times he says that there are very few men who can excel in more than one thing.

And the one thing which pastors and ministers are to excel in is in this art of preaching. Let me give you one illustration. One summer's day he was leaving Bath on the morning coach to address students at the Theological Academy in Bristol.

He was speaking to them on this subject of preaching. And it was a fine morning and I think he wanted more time to meditate and reflect. So instead of going into the coach in the lower part he climbed up behind the coachman on the box and they were joined by another man who sat himself down next to the coachman.

Now unfortunately for Mr. J this other man was a very talkative gentleman and had a great deal to disturb the peace of the scenery with. But the coachman on the other hand had very little to say. He was a very withdrawn kind of doer fellow.

And this led to almost a contention on the box of the coach because what developed was this. This talkative gentleman would say to the coachman he would say and who lives in that villa over there? And the coachman would shake his head and he said I don't know. And a few moments later and where does that new road go there? He would say pointing up the hill.

And the coachman would return exactly the same answer I don't know. Then again and whose house is that? He would say pointing down in the valley. And the coachman again would say I don't know.

By this time this gentleman was thoroughly aggrieved by this situation and he said to the coachman is there anything you know? He said I know he said how to drive a coach. And when William Jay got to Bristol he told this to the students. There are many things which they cannot and they need not know.

But the one thing that they must know they must like the bath coachman he says they must know how to drive that is to do their work and that is to preach the gospel of Christ. And how do you learn to do that? Well my only answer which I take from Jay but it's his greatest answer everywhere he says by hard work. We have different natural gifts being given to us as we have been considering already.

We are dependent upon the measure of aid given to us by the Spirit of God but the labour and the work which God enables us to do will in almost every instance be the measure of our success. And Jay to an old man was a working preacher. I don't know what time he went to bed and that doesn't matter but he started his study work soon after five in the morning and from that hour until lunch midday he was alone.

And he was altogether intolerant of anything that would draw a preacher from that seclusion. Let me give you this quotation. He says I have no opinion of a pastor that is not very studious but study demands leisure and retirement and quoting Scripture and through desire a man having separated himself seeketh and intermedleth with all wisdom.

He should therefore as much as possible avoid publicity and be covetous and niggardly of every fragment of time. A man who has some degree of talent especially an easiness and fluency of speech may do for an itinerant or an occasional preacher by his brisk superficialities but let him become stationary and have to preach three or four times a week to the same people and he will soon abound with sameness and become sapless and unedifying. The young will feel little attraction the intelligent will be tempted to withdraw the dull will become drowsy and the ignorant that remain will be ignorant still.

And if you get his autobiography as I hope you will you'll see how very much he says on this. I would commonly ascertain before I left the study how I should succeed in the pulpit. With me the tug of war was always alone.

If I felt that I had grasped my subject and could gain a certain frame of spirit made up of the solemn and the tender I rather longed for the service than dreaded it. Just one more. He says it is a bad case when a man has acquired the knack of preaching and can talk on for an hour in the pulpit without effort and without effect.

It is well he says for a young minister to feel difficulties and if these induce him to retirement to study and prayer he will in time surpass at least inefficiency and usefulness many who proudly towered above him at

the beginning. This is one of the cases in which the first shall be last and the last first. And I close with this quotation from the editors of Jay's autobiography.

In a qualified sense they say Mr. Jay was born a preacher but this was not all. He owed much to those gifts lavished upon him by the hand of God but he owed much also to his own sagacity diligence and unwearied endeavours after improvement. He saw the pulpit he saw the power of the pulpit as God's great instrument for accomplishing this end.

And almost from the time of his first entering in he made it as we have already seen the object of his ambition to excel there. To be a useful preacher was his aim and it was thus by constant and unwearied effort that he became one. And if this were the habitual study of all who are called to occupy the pulpit if with an intense longing after the salvation of immortal souls and an unwavering determination to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and him crucified if with a truly philosophical view of the adaptation of preaching to awaken attention and produce impression if with a recollection of what has been done by the great masters in the art of preaching all ministers were to study the best models of evangelical pulpit eloquence and were to take extraordinary pains to acquire by the aid of divine grace a commanding and interesting style of pulpit address and while cherishing a sense of absolute dependence upon the work of the spirit they were to recollect that the spirit works by appropriate means and took half the pains to make their speaking in the pulpit as impressive as the actor does to make his successful upon the stage if concerning the powerful preaching of the gospel they said this one thing I do and called in all collateral aids to do it in the best manner we should not hear as we sometimes do of the declining power of the pulpit it is for a wonder a lamentation and a reproach that they who have to do the most momentous work under the sun give themselves the least pains to do it effectually

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