

Objections to Street Preaching Considered

by William Taylor

Street preaching can be a powerful tool for spreading the Gospel and increasing church attendance, but it requires a special unction of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to face challenges.

Scripture: Proverbs 11:30, Proverbs 15:30, Proverbs 25:25, Isaiah 52:7, Matthew 28:19, Acts 5:29, Romans 10:14, 1 Corinthians 9:16, 2 Timothy 4:2

Topics: "Street Preaching", "Evangelism Methods"

Description

William Taylor addresses common misconceptions about street preaching, emphasizing the necessity of a preacher's deep spiritual calling and practical approach to reach sinners effectively. He shares personal experiences where street preaching led to positive outcomes, including increased church attendance and conversions. Taylor acknowledges potential challenges like creating disturbances or conflicts with authorities but encourages preachers to remain steadfast in their mission. He also dispels concerns about health issues, stating that preaching in the open air can actually benefit the preacher's voice and overall well-being.

Transcript

I. DO I HEAR YOU SAY IT IS A DEGRADATION OF MINISTERIAL DIGNITY?

I reply: Any minister of the Gospel, whose "ministerial dignity" depends, for its elevation and support, upon the sacredness of a consecrated pulpit, is not, I confess, a suitable person for a street preacher. A preacher, to succeed in the streets, must be dignified by a special unction of the Holy Spirit. He must feel such an undying thirst for the salvation of sinners as will prompt him, like Aaron to run out into the camp, and "stand between the living and the dead;" not only to offer the incense of earnest prayer to God on their behalf, but also to warn them from the example of their neighbors, who have perished in their sins. Then the accompanying presence of Him who hath said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," will consecrate any place in which he may open his commission, as much as the spot where "Jacob slept, and dreamed, and saw the ladder that reached from earth up into heaven;" and cause every one to feel, "Surely the Lord is in this place. How dreadful is place! This is none other but the house of God and this is the gate of heaven."

II. IT MAKES THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL TOO COMMON

I think there is much more danger of making the preaching of the Gospel too uncommon than "too common," too abstract in the matter of it, and too high in its mode of delivery. Not common enough to flow readily into the common channels of human thought and sympathy, nor materially to affect the common relations and conduct of men. A man, to succeed as a street preacher, must be eminently practical in his preaching. Nothing but the simple preaching of our common Gospel, in a manner to arrest the attention and engage the feelings of the common people, will enable him to get, or to hold an audience in the "highways." It was this that made the "common people" hear Jesus gladly will here add, that the street is not the place for sectarian discussions; but the Gospel, in all its essential characteristics, should be clearly announced.

III. IT WILL DETRACT FROM THE INTEREST OF THE PEOPLE IN THE REGULAR MINISTRATIONS OF THE PULPIT

Such a proposition is philosophically unsound, and is contradicted by the facts in all history relating to this subject. Street preaching, where churches were not, has always led to their erection, and when efficiently administered, even in old cities, has always contributed to increase the congregations in church. Such is, so palpably, the testimony of history, that I need not instance the proofs; and such is the result of my own observations. I had the honor of preaching two years (excepting the cold weather) in the streets of Georgetown, D.C. The effect was manifestly good in the increase of the regular church audiences. And in a revival there, under the superintendence of Rev. Henry Tarring, of precious memory, now in glory, quite a number of the converts testified that they received their religious awakening under the "market-house preaching." Among those converts were several Roman Catholics, who had never heard Protestant preaching until attracted by the street exercises.

I also had the pleasure of preaching a year in the Belair Market, Baltimore City. Two persons, I remember, kneeled on the pavement, and cried for mercy, and were there happily converted. One of them, by the name of "Shilling," I learn is still a useful member of the Church in North Baltimore Station. During the summer of my preaching in that market, "Father Darling," the sexton of the Monument-street Church, who knew the faces of all the regular auditors, said, "I cannot tell where so many strangers come from. They keep coming in every Sunday night, more and more." During the revival in the fall, under the direction of my much-esteemed colleagues Revs. C. B. Tippet and J. S. Martin, a number those strangers made a profession of religion, and testified that, though they had lived for years in the city, they had not been to church, till attracted by the market-house preaching. My worthy colleagues there, took a part in the street preaching.

In the city of San Francisco my street preaching has been a regular advertisement for the churches in general, for I always take occasion to announce the church appointments. It has always contributed to our church congregations; and a majority of those whom I had the happiness of seeing converted in this wicked city, say two hundred, testified to the fact that they were awakened under the street preaching. This city, however, does not furnish a fair test of the legitimate effect of the preached word, in doors or out, as I will take occasion to show in the progress of this work.

IV. IT CREATES RIOTS AND CONFUSION IN THE STREETS

I apprehend that much of the trouble which has been heard of in connection with street preaching, resulted from injudicious attacks upon Romanism, or upon personal character, or for want of tact in controlling large audiences. I do not know, definitely, the merits of any given case, but can readily see how, in various

ways, a man could bring upon himself a great deal of trouble, and defeat the object of his mission.

Still, "men love darkness rather than light," and it would not be surprising if an earnest, faithful, modern street preacher should share the same lot that St. Paul did at Athens, Philippi, and other places, but we never learned that the apostle considered that a sufficient objection to lead him to desist from preaching in the streets. I have been preaching regularly in the streets for more than ten years, and seven of them among California gamblers and rum-sellers, and through the good providence of the Lord, I have never had a serious disturbance, nor lost a congregation in the streets.

V. IT WILL BRING THE PREACHER INTO COLLISION WITH THE CIVIL AUTHORITIES

We should be careful, while we do our duty fearlessly, not to provoke a collision with "the powers that be." If we succeed in controlling the masses, and preserve order at our meetings, we will not be likely to have any trouble "at court." But if, after all, we should be interfered with in the conscientious discharge of our duty, under the functions of our high commission, then return the apostolic answer, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

VI. THE PREACHER IS NOT ABLE TO PREACH IN CHURCH AND OUT DOORS TOO, AND MUST GIVE THE PREFERENCE TO THE REGULAR SERVICES OF THE SANCTUARY

Very well, if such is the fact in your case, I think you choose the right alternative. I would not advise you to neglect your regular appointments by any means; but yet, are there not very many who can, in addition to their regular appointments in church, take an extra one in the streets? I never have, nor do I now, sit in judgment on the consciences of my brethren in regard to this matter. Nearly the whole itinerant family are out-door preachers at camp-meetings and other extra occasions, and many of them preach themselves into a premature grave. I, nevertheless, believe that there are ten thousand ministers in the United States, among the different denominations, who are naturally well adapted to this work, and who, by proper application, would excel as street preachers, and fill their pulpits all the better for it. They have good voices for singing, a ready utterance: and a fair development of tact in the management of promiscuous audiences; and all that is necessary, is for them to feel that "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel" in the streets, and go at it, and stick to it, till the Master says, "It is enough."

VII. IT WILL GIVE THE PREACHER BRONCHITIS

I give it, as my candid opinion, that your throat and lungs will suffer much less in the pure open air than they do in the carbonized, sickly atmosphere of crowded churches. I am accustomed to listen to the same clear voice in the streets, three hundred and sixty-five days in each year: "Fish! fish! fresh salmon!" "Eggs! eggs! fresh California eggs!" "Candy! Here's your celebrated cough candy! Everybody buys it; now's your chance!" "Here's your fresh California pears, apples, oranges, and peaches! Only two bits a pound! Buy 'em up!" "Latest news from the East! Arrival of the 'John L. Stephens!' Here's your New York Herald, New York Tribune, and New Orleans True Delta!" Who ever heard of the fish, egg, candy, or fruit "crier," or the newsboys getting bronchitis? An auctioneer will stand in the street, and "cry" at the top of his voice for two hours every day, and yet we never heard of an auctioneer taking the bronchitis "He gets used to it." It is his business, and his physical functions adapt themselves to it. Rev. I. Owen and myself were, a few years ago, highly entertained for a few minutes, as we passed along the streets of San Francisco, with the extraordinary earnestness of an auctioneer. I said to my friend, "If we could get ministers to 'cry aloud' as earnestly over living immortal souls as this man does over spoiled cheese at two cents per pound, what a

waking up they would produce among the sleeping thousands of this land!"

VIII. IT WILL CRACK AND INJURE THE VOICE

If you will not bind your neck with a tight cravat, and if you will stand erect, head up, speak naturally, and not strain your voice, you will experience an improvement in the quality and an increasing compass and power of voice, and a greater facility in natural utterance by regular street preaching. Ten years ago, preaching two sermons in church and one in the streets, caused me hoarseness of voice and great weariness of body; but now, with three sermons in church and two in the streets, each Sabbath, I have no hoarseness, and but little weariness. Before I commenced street preaching, I was subject to violent colds and soreness of throat and lungs; but I have known, by experience, nothing of "sore throat" or "sore lungs" for years. I would not intimate that I am invulnerable to such affections; but I do believe that the danger is lessened, at least fifty per cent., by the out-door preaching.

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