

# THE EVANGELISTIC PASTOR. <sup>1</sup>

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It will not be doubted by anyone here that our main business, before and above all else, is to win men to Christ. "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth, go therefore, and make disciples of all nations." That is the first point of our Lord's last command, the prime element of our divine commission. What Christ put *first*, his ambassadors and servants have no right to make *secondary*. Our Lord came into this sin-cursed world to seek and to save the lost. The ministry of his apostles had this for its chief aim. To convert sinful men and women to Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, was the master purpose of Paul and his fellow missionaries. He became all things to all men, if by any means he might save some. The keynote of the whole Bible, the heavenly music running through every book, and echoing loudest at the last to linger longest in the memory, is the gospel invitation to sinners, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that hears say, Come; and let him that is thirsty come; and whoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

To call my theme "The Evangelistic Pastor" is to countenance a pernicious error. That pastor who is not first of all an *evangelistic* pastor, is a man whom God never called to preach the evangel of a crucified Saviour. There are many heresies abroad, but the worst heresy of all is the notion that the chief business of the church or the pastor is to hold the fort. When we and our people are at ease in Zion, admiring and perfecting our fortifications, making no inroads into Satan's kingdom, winning no new territory for Christ, it is consoling to say, "We are holding the fort, we are strengthening the things that remain, we are protecting the truth." This saves our face and salves our conscience, but it covers a deadly heresy; for our chief duty, according to Christ, is not to stay and make defenses, but to go and make disciples. The church of Christ is nothing if not aggressive. It is *moribund* <sup>2</sup> if it is not *marching*. Conservation, defense, protection, are important; but the pastor or the church or the seminary that puts the accent there has got the wrong end of the gospel foremost. *It is not the running stream, but the stagnant pond, that breeds corruption.* The secret of a pure theology, as well as of a conquering church, lies in putting that first which Christ put first: the making of disciples, the winning of men to the Lord Jesus...

...The first thing for our pastors to do is to resolve most deeply that, as the first element of our commission is to make disciples, therefore we will never be satisfied without *conversions in our fields*. A profound self-dissatisfaction is the first step upward. We have no bishops to censure us, no presiding elders to pass upon our work and keep us up to the mark, and our friends tell us only pleasant things. We are greatly tempted to self-complacency. It is appalling how easy it is for a Presbyterian pastor, in the absence of keen-eyed overseers, under the deadening influence of routine, and amid the thousand details of administrative work, to forget the main errand on which he is sent: namely, to make disciples. I know how easy it is, for in the last twelve months I have made this awful

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<sup>1</sup> The opening address of the Conference on the Bible and Christian Work – delivered in the Union Seminary Chapel, Richmond, Va., May 11, 1904; in Union Seminary Magazine, vol. 16, (1904-1905), p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Moribund*: not growing or changing; without force or vitality; on the verge of death.

mistake. But I am determined by God's help never to make it again. This is the first step — dissatisfaction with ourselves and repentance toward God.

The question of method comes next. There are two methods: *individual* evangelism and *pulpit* evangelism.

**I. The first method is INDIVIDUAL EVANGELISM.** As the vast majority of the unsaved never enter our churches or come in sound of our pulpits, it is this first method that needs to be stressed today. Though called the “*new* evangelism,” it is the oldest way of bringing men to Christ. It is the personal touch, the individual relation. It is Andrew after Peter, Philip after Nathaniel, Christ after Zacchaeus. Bringing back this element into the work of the church is already beginning to mark a new era in the progress of the gospel. Every Christian engaged in personal work to save others is the divine ideal to which every pastor must urge his members and lead the way.

In the fourth chapter of Ephesians, there is a passage that presents in one sentence the pastor's relation to his people and their great mission on earth. “And he gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,” Why? The old version says, “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,” as if the pastor had three things to do — perfect the saints, do the work of the ministry, and edify the body of Christ. But there are not three “fors” in the Greek. The true version is, “He gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints *unto* the work of ministering, *unto* the building up of the body of Christ.” In other words, the pastor's business is to develop in his people all those forms of service that build up the body of Christ out of a lost and ruined humanity. He is to reach the unsaved *through his people*.

Many pastors, especially in the North, are organizing classes among their members for instruction and practice in individual evangelism. A score of little books and pamphlets, giving courses of study and abundant practical directions, are issuing from the press, so that any pastor who wants to, can begin at once to train his people for personal work. A minister laid his hand on the shoulder of a young man, and asked him if he was a Christian. The reply was, “No, sir, I have heard you preach every Sunday for seven years; but I am not a Christian yet.” What seven years of preaching had failed to do, five minutes of heart contact and personal relation accomplished; and that young man is now a faithful, active Christian. Not every preacher can be eloquent, but here is the place of power for every man: he can be sympathetic, earnest, courageous, self-sacrificing, ever-watching for the right moment to speak the right word in the name of Christ.

The possibilities of this personal work are startling. If there were only one Christian in the world today, and in one year he were to win another to Christ, and the next year each were to win one more, and every man brought to Christ were to win just one each year, it would take only thirty-two and a half years to bring the whole world to Christ. Personal work for souls in which the pastor trains his members and leads the way — *that* is the first method.

**II. The other method is PULPIT EVANGELISM.** From the pulpit the pastor can inspire his people to personal work, and above all he can preach from his pulpit directly to the unsaved with the official authority and power of a God-sent ambassador of Jesus Christ. He should often preach directly to them in the regular course of his ministry. There should

also be special seasons in which for one, two, or three weeks the preaching, the praying, and the personal efforts of the whole membership should be concentrated on the supreme work of winning men to Christ. I know the objections often urged against these special seasons, but the objections are as nothing to the advantages, especially when the pastor conducts his own meeting.

Pardon a bit of personal experience. Four years ago my elders and I had made an engagement with an excellent Presbyterian evangelist to preach for us in January. After the engagement was made, my session began to feel that the pastor should do the preaching. I shrank from it exceedingly, assured that a new voice would awaken more interest, and apprehending a dismal failure. One Sunday morning we talked the matter over, and decided that each one of us should seek special divine guidance throughout the day. That night we met again, and the conviction was unanimous that the pastor should preach. I cancelled the engagement with the brother as best I could, and started in, feeling, as I never felt before, my utter dependence on God. I called all the Sunday-school teachers together, and tried to lay on each his personal responsibility for the unsaved members of his class. Then we bowed together and besought the Lord to give us willingness and power for service. We had a men's prayer-meeting every day at noon in the heart of the city, conducted by the men — and several ladies' prayer-meetings every afternoon in different quarters of the town. I requested my people to abstain from all public social functions while the meeting was in progress. The singing was done by the regular choir.

In the after-meeting, only the pastor and elders conversed with inquirers. No opportunity was given any one at any time to take a public stand for Christ by standing or shaking hands or anything of the kind; and the session did not meet to receive new members until a week after the meeting closed — *all this to prevent shallow work and self-deception*.<sup>3</sup> For about three weeks I preached every night except Saturdays. There were inquirers and conversions every night from first to last; Some joined other churches, about sixty joined our own, of whom about one third were adults, and one-fourth heads of families — several of the families belonging to the unchurched outside element. Only three weeks ago I received a letter from one of the adult converts of that meeting, now living in Pennsylvania — a day laborer with a wife and children to support, enclosing five dollars for Home and Foreign Missions.

Two years later we had another similar meeting in our church. We used the same methods; we preached almost exactly the same sermons (texts, illustrations, and all) that we had used before; and we had the same results.

Since the beginning of my ministry I have attended a score of meetings conducted by many of the ablest pastors and preachers of our church. My experience and observation, extending now over eighteen years, have left in my mind certain fixed convictions as to the prevalent defects of Presbyterian preaching to the unconverted. These defects in the PULPIT EVANGELISM of our church I believe to be mainly four; and I mention them, God knows, with no sense of having attained.

**1. I mention first, the lack of a TARGET** — *the absence of a single definite aim toward which the whole sermon moves from the first word to the last.*

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<sup>3</sup> For more about this, see Jonathan Edwards, [\*Religious Affections\*](#) (1746), concerning the Great Awakening.

In a meeting I once attended, conducted by an eminent pastor, the sermons were instructive, clear, earnest, tender; but the results were very disappointing. And why? Because he never got down to business, so to speak, till the sermon was half through — the people wearied, and his opportunity was gone. He would spend the first ten or fifteen minutes in explicating his text, dwelling exhaustingly upon its contextual, historical, geographical, and doctrinal relations. This is a common blunder.

In preaching, as we all know, there are three elements, any one of which may control: the *text*, the *topic*, and the *end* aimed at. If the *text* rules, the result is an exposition or exegesis; if the *topic* controls, it is an essay or discourse; if the *end* aimed at is kept vividly in view and controls the whole arrangement and delivery, *then we get properly a sermon*. Take Moody's or Torrey's sermons, or those of any other man whose preaching God has greatly blessed to conversions, and you cannot fail to notice how every fact, every illustration, every sentence, is aimed at one thing — to convict and convert that man in the pew. These men know what preaching is for. They never sink the preacher into the exegete or essayist. They know that the text, the topic, the introduction, the treatment, *the whole sermon*, is nothing but a means to an end; and that end is the awakening and saving of a sinner. *They have just thirty minutes in which to produce that tremendous effect*. Do they waste ten precious minutes in beating about the bush, and explaining the context? Not unless that explanation is itself a grip laid on the ears, the mind, the heart, the conscience of the sinner; not unless that explanation is itself but the drawing back of the string to send the arrow all the swifter to the mark.

If we ministers could get it into our heads that our sermons are not an end in themselves, but simply a means to an end; and if we would frame them and value them with a single eye to their fitness to that end; the result would be the salvation, of a multitude of our bearers, and the destruction of a multitude of our old sermons.

## **2. A second prevalent defect is the lack of a SIMPLE STYLE.**

Some years ago I attended a meeting conducted by one of the ablest pastors and preachers in the South. The quality of the preaching was excellent, but the language was above the heads of nine-tenths of the very class aimed at. For example, I noticed one night a thoughtful boy of fourteen sitting in the audience. When the sermon began, he started to listen closely, but such words as “imperious,” “proscribe,” “environment,” “obnoxious,” and similar bookish terms staggered him in almost every sentence, till after trying ten minutes to follow the sermon, he turned away, opened a hymn-book, and gave no more heed to the preaching. I have seen that happen frequently. It is hard for a man after seven years of college and seminary life, who breathes a bookish atmosphere every day in his study, to preach with simplicity. A simple style is a difficult attainment; but without it, our preaching will never be fruitful of conversions.

One of the greatest and best of the old Puritans said that most preachers shoot over the heads of the people. One of our latest writers on preaching says,

“As a rule, preachers are not simple enough. They imagine that deep thoughts and big words must go together. Let them read the first chapter of John's Gospel. No profounder piece of composition was ever written, and most of it is in monosyllables.”

John Wesley used to make St. John's writings his model. He attained his wonderfully simple style by often reading his elaborate sermons to a maid servant. Whenever Bettie

could not understand, she said, “Stop, sir,” and the great man would then change the expression till the common people could hear that sermon gladly. In the introduction to a volume of his sermons Wesley says,

“I labor to avoid all words which are not easy to be understood, all which are not used in common life; and in particular those kinds of technical terms which so frequently occur in bodies of divinity, those modes of speaking which men of reading are intimately acquainted with, but which are an unknown tongue to common people.”

These are golden words for every young preacher who would win men to Christ. Henry Ward Beecher’s advice to young preachers was to put the jackscrews under the *sills* if you wish to lift the house, under the *roof* if you wished to lift only the top heads in the congregation. Wesley put his levers under the whole audience to which he preached. Instead of wondering eyes and gaping mouths, he was rewarded with hearts open to receive the Word of Life.

A month ago in Baltimore, a pastor asked me to conduct a Wednesday evening’s evangelistic service in his lecture-room. Many of the audience were young people, and on the front seat were two little bright-faced girls about ten or twelve years old. I determined to try to hold their attention. They listened closely all the way through. The effect on them I do not know, as there was no after-meeting. But after the service a grown young woman came up and told me that the talk had brought her to Christ.

If we put the vital truths of religion into swelling oratorical language, we shall have our reward in the praise of men; if by hard work we put them into simple language, we shall have our reward in the salvation of men and the praise of God.

### **3. A third defect is the lack of “INTERESTINGNESS.”**

A preacher must be interesting to the unconverted. Good Christian people may come out to hear dry preaching from force of habit and a sense of duty; but the impenitent, the outsiders, the young, the very ones we want to reach, simply will not. Often I have seen meetings start with good congregations, and then dwindle day by day. The preaching was sound, and able, and instructive, as nearly all Presbyterian preaching is; but those excellent qualities were well-nigh wasted because of one defect: *it was not interesting*.

*Uninteresting preaching is un-Christlike preaching.* Many of us preach to empty benches. The Saviour preached to multitudes. Why? Largely because “he did not speak to them without a parable.” His preaching was full of stories, figures, pictures, illustrations of every kind, drawn from every department of nature and human life. It was the most interesting preaching ever heard, because it was the most parabolic, the most story-full, the most picturesque. All the great evangelists, the men the unconverted crowd to hear, have the same secret of popularity. Like their Master before them, they put the gospel into stories; they wing it with anecdotes; they point it with parables; they make it potent with pictures and illustrations that reach and teach, that prove and move, that hold and mould. It is the best way of preaching to men and women. It is the best and nearly the only way of preaching to young people. For preaching to hold the *mind* it must first hold the *ear*; to win the *heart* it must first win the *ear*; to capture the *conscience* it must first capture the *ear*. To be effective, the preacher need not be eloquent or original or grammatical, but he *must be interesting*.

#### **4. We must be in EARNEST.**

Mr. Spurgeon says, "For soul-winning there is more in this matter of earnestness than in almost anything else," An old Scotch woman went for the first time to hear Robert Murray McCheyne. Someone asked her what she thought of him. She hesitated for a moment, and then said, "The man preaches as if he was a-dyin' to have you converted." *It is out of this passion for souls that spiritual power is born.*

David Brainerd used to say,

"I care not where I go or what hardships I endure, if I can only see souls won for Christ. All I think of by day, or dream of by night, is the conversion of souls."

Often he would go out into the forest and kneel down on the snow, and wrestle in prayer until his body was wet with perspiration. Many a time he spent the whole night in prayer for the souls under his care. After these seasons of spiritual wrestling, his diary is almost sure to have an entry like this,

"Today as I preached the Word, the power of God came down upon those stolid, immovable Indians, and melted and broke and swept them into his kingdom by scores."

My brethren, this purpose, this passion, must be paramount in our hearts. The sacred evangelistic fire, caught from the heart of Christ, we must keep burning on the altar of our hearts, fed with the fuel of faith, and prayer, and fellowship with our Lord. So will our ministry be owned of God. So will our preaching come in the power of the Holy Ghost. So will he say to us at the last day,

"Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things; enter into the joy of your Lord."

#### **STATISTICS**

I am glad that this conference will bring this subject to the front. It ought to be discussed and prayed over by every minister and session and seminary professor within our Southern General Assembly; for at this vital point, our church is sadly deficient. In the last church year, ending March 31, 1903, there were 10,489 new members added to the Southern Presbyterian Church on examination. Dividing the number of communicants in each of our Synods by the number of new disciples added in that Synod, we reach the following facts (fractions less than one-half being dropped, more than one-half counted as one.) In the Texas Synod there was one convert to every sixteen members. In the Louisiana Synod one to every seventeen.; Georgia, one to nineteen; Alabama, one to twenty; North Carolina, one to twenty-one; Missouri, one to twenty-two; Florida, one to twenty-two; South Carolina, one to twenty-four; Arkansas, one to twenty-four; Mississippi, one to twenty-six; Kentucky, one to twenty-eight; Tennessee, one to twenty-eight; Virginia., one to twenty-nine. Throughout our whole General Assembly the average was one to every twenty-two and four-tenths members.

In other words, it took twenty-two and four-tenths members, aided by the ordained ministry, a whole year to win one person to Christ. During twelve months, with all our working forces — preachers, teachers, officers, Sunday-schools and organized societies — we did not average for every one hundred Christianse as many new disciples as there are fingers on one hand. At this rate, how long will it take to win the world for Christ? When will the kingdom come? This is a subject for the prayerful study of every Christian, especially of every minister, and more especially of those who have the training of our ministry.

Let us make a comparison. I will not compare our church with the Methodist, Baptist or Episcopal, for their methods of counting and standards of accuracy may be different from ours. I shall compare with the Northern Presbyterian Church, whose reports are made out in the same way and with the same care as our own.

I find that for 1903, the whole Northern Presbyterian Church averaged up to almost exactly the level of the best of our thirteen Synods, namely, one convert to every sixteen and two-tenths members, against one to every twenty-two and four-tenths in the Southern Presbyterian Church. In other words, the Northern Presbyterians last year proved themselves thirty-eight and one-fifth percent more successful per member in winning men to Christ than the Southern Presbyterians. Had we measured up to them, we should have added by examination not 10,489, but 14,515. Had they measured down to us, they would have lost the addition of over 18,000 new disciples, an addition nearly equal to the whole Synod of Kentucky, or the Synod of South Carolina.

How does the number of new disciples compare with the number of ministers? I take it for granted that the two churches have about an equal proportion of W. C's. on their rolls. In the Southern Church in 1903, the average was six and nine-tenths new disciples to every minister. In the Northern Church it was eight and five-tenths new disciples to every minister. The Northern Presbyterian ministers averaged exactly twenty-three and one-half percent more converts per minister than the Southern.

Remembering that our chief business, before and above all else, is to win men to Christ, to go and make disciples, let us examine the soul-winning work of the Virginia Synod. I take this Synod because my audience is mainly Virginian, just as to a Carolina audience I should present the Carolina work. Of the four hundred and sixty-seven churches in the Virginia Synod, I find that one hundred and eighty-five, two-fifths of the whole number, report not one new disciple made during the whole twelve months. These one hundred and eighty-five churches represent a membership of over eighty-two hundred professing Christians, nearly one-fifth of the whole Synod. But, you say, these churches are without ministers. Even if they were, they have ruling elders, four hundred and forty-seven in number, and ninety-two of them have Sunday-schools. But as a matter of fact, more than half of them have ministers. Furthermore, fifty-three churches, with an aggregate membership of nearly four thousand, report each just one person brought to Christ. Of these fifty-three, only fourteen are reported vacant. So here we have two hundred and thirty-eight churches, more than one-half the whole number, with an aggregate membership of more than one-fourth the whole Synod, reporting fifty-three new disciples as the soul-winning work of twelve thousand Christians for twelve months.

One more fact along this line. When we consider not the last year alone, but the last *ten* years, how does the Southern compare with the Northern Presbyterian Church in this supreme work of bringing men to Christ?

*First*, as to the number of converts per minister. For the five years ending 1898, there were four percent more converts per minister added in the Northern Church than in the Southern. For the next five years ending 1903, there were twenty-one percent more converts per minister added in the Northern Church than in the Southern. For the last year of these five years, there were twenty-three and one-half per cent more converts per minister added in the Northern Church than in the Southern.

*Secondly*, as to the comparative soul-winning efficiency of the total church membership, led by the ministry. For the five years ending 1898, the Northern Church was sixteen and one-half per cent more successful per member than the Southern. For the next five years ending 1903, the Northern Church was thirty-six and one-third per cent more successful per member than the Southern. For the last year of these five years, the Northern Church was thirty-eight and one-fifth percent more successful per member than the Southern. The simple truth is that, for the last ten years, our Northern brethren have been outstripping us in the church's supreme business of winning men to Christ, and the ratio of our inferiority is getting greater every year.

It is painful to me to bring out these facts. But gloomy as they are, there is something wholesome and medicinal in frankly facing them. It is better to know the saddest truth than to be blinded by the merriest lie. A know ledge of the facts is a prime condition of better things for the future. The men whom these facts most concern are the teachers of our ministry and our pastors.