

## **SECTION 10**

### **A Brief History of Preaching**

# THE PREACHING TRADITION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

## A Brief Annotated Historical Sketch

### I. THE PATRISTIC ERA - (AD 100-500)

1. **Justin Martyr** - (100-165) first of the apologists, opened a school in Rome.
2. **Clement of Alexandria** - (150-220) opened a school in Alexandria to instruct candidates for church membership in the principles of Christianity. One of his existing sermons is based on Mark 10:17-31.
3. **Tertullian** - (160-230) lawyer converted at 30; credited with the founding of Latin (West) Christian thought. Wrote a defense of Christianity.
4. **Origen** - (185-254) father was martyred when he was 17. Succeeded Clement as head of the Alexandrian school. Superb teacher. Wrote prodigiously and was also an apologist. Eloquent preacher. Famous for his allegorical interpretation. (emasculated himself).
5. **Cyprian** - (200-258) wrote works on preaching dealing with practical problems of conduct and order. Martyred.
6. **Gregory of Nazianzus** - (329-389) became a preacher when he was almost 50 years old. Famous in East as a theologian.
7. **Ambrose** - (340-397) works included homiletical commentaries and hymns. His preaching convicted Augustine of his sin. Baptized Augustine.

#### Two men who represented the pinnacle of Patristic Preaching:

1. **Augustine of Hippo** - (354-430) Bishop at Hippo for 35 years. Preached 6 times/wk. 400+ sermons exist plus his commentaries. Wrote the first significant work on homiletics dealing with both rhetoric and preaching. Believed that the sermon should be an exposition of Scripture. Saw in biblical authors a pattern of eloquence for the church.
2. **John Chrysostom** - (347-407) trained in rhetoric. His great oratorical skills earned him the name “golden-mouth”. Preached many times weekly; homilies are still available and valuable. From the Antiochen School which emphasized historical, grammatical interpretation (natural versus allegorical).

The Sermon during this period came to have a traditional place in the church service, introduced by short prayer. Average time for sermons not more than 30 minutes. Usually the message was based on Scripture that was read and was expository in nature (running commentary). Greeks called sermons “homilies” – “to converse in company”. It was common for people to applaud the preacher. Usually the preacher sat while the people sometimes stood.

Preaching waned at the end of the Patristic period because of:

1. Asceticism/Monasticism
2. Ceremonialism/Ritualism - Increase in liturgy
3. Christianity became the state religion - A.D.313 Constantine made Christianity the official religion.
4. Secular power of the church
5. Fall of Rome in A.D.476

## **II. MIDDLE AGES - (AD 500-1500)**

1. **Boniface** - (675-754) missionary preacher to Germany  
After A.D.1000, the church, amidst political and theological disputes, needed a rallying point. Fall of Holy Land to the Turks resulted in some persecution of Christians. Pope Urban I preached a sermon in France in 1095 that was so stirring the congregation reportedly cried out, "God wills it!" This became the slogan of the Crusades.
2. **Peter the Hermit** - (1050-1115) a short, but fiery enthusiast. Appealed to the spirit of adventure and love of war. Often struck chest with a heavy crucifix drawing blood and then shedding torrents of tears before the cross. Exceptional eloquence.
3. **Bernard of Clairvaux** - (1090-1153) involved with Second Crusade. Pious Cistercian Monk. Mastered techniques of sermon preparation. Most effective preacher of his century. When he preached, monks and people pressed to hear him. Made a gripping impression. Loved to preach. Preached without notes. Very allegorical, with close to 90 sermons on the opening chapters of the Song of Solomon.
4. **Dominic** - (1170-1221) founded preaching order named "Preaching Brothers of Dominic." Purpose: convert heretics by preaching truth. Known for fervor.
5. **Francis of Assisi** - (1182-1226) founded preaching order named "Brothers of the Poor of Francis of Assisi." Purpose: reform movement, opposed to wealth and immorality of existing monasteries. His preaching was conversational. (Rebirth of preaching occurred under these in later part of Middle Ages).
6. **Thomas Aquinas**, - (1225-1274) greatest theologian of the Middle Ages. Called "Angelic Doctor." Also known as the "Dumb Ox." Wrote a mammoth Systematic Theology - *Summa Theologica*.
7. **Vincent Ferrer** - (1359-1419) used evangelistic or revival sermon.
8. **John Wycliff** - (1320-1384) "Morning Star" (forerunner) of the Reformation. Trained his priests to preach simply and directly to the people. Followers called "Lollards" (from dutch word meaning "mumbler"). They preached throughout the countryside. Championed primacy of preaching. Translated Bible into the language of people.
9. **Savonarola** - (1452-1498) prophetic preaching. Pulpit pounder. Worked to change the harshness of his voice. Sermons were emotional and somewhat (?) expository. People thronged to hear him. ("cold gray eyes that flashed of fire") Burned in Florence by the order of the Pope (via the de Medici's).
10. **John Hus**

### III. THE REFORMATION - (AD1500-1600)

1. **Martin Luther** - (1483-1546) began Reformation in 1517. Known for expository sermons. Tenor voice – “Not right for the devil to have all the good tunes.” Sermons on Psalms and his *Table Talk* are especially good. Believed in *solo scriptura* and the primacy of preaching.

Luther’s list of qualifications of a preacher was as follows:

1. He should be able to teach plainly and in order.
2. He should have a good head.
3. Good power of language.
4. A good voice.
5. A good memory.
6. He should know when to stop.
7. He should be sure of what he means to say.
8. He should be ready to stake body and soul, goods and reputation, on its truth.
9. He should study diligently.
10. He should suffer himself to be vexed and criticized by everyone.

“The Reformation gave centrality to the sermon. The pulpit was higher than the altar, for Luther held that salvation is through the Word ... but the Word is sterile unless it is spoken. All of this is not to say that the Reformation invented preaching, but the Reformation did exalt the sermon.” - Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: New American Library, 1950), 272.

2. **John Calvin** - (1509-1564) a solid preacher and great thinker and lover of truth. His *Institutes* was the great theological work of the Reformation. Written Word and its exposition through preaching was paramount. Expounded books of the Bible in sermons, preached through books in order. Calvin's Commentaries are excellent.

### IV. POST-REFORMATION PREACHING - (17TH-19TH CENTURIES)

#### A. 17TH CENTURY

1. **John Donne** - (1573-1631) entered ministry at age 42 after sinful youth. Great poet who loved to preach from the Psalms. Short, sharp sentences characterized his preaching.
2. **John Owen** - (1616-1683) rabbinical and classical scholar. Theologian who often preached over the heads of his people due to his great learning.
3. **Richard Baxter** - (1615-1691) best known of the Puritan preachers. Wrote three classical works: *The Saints Everlasting Rest*; *The Reformed Pastor*; *Call to the Uncoverted*. Once a year intentionally preached over the heads of his people to keep them humble and to let them see what he could do every Sunday if he chose.

4. **John Bunyan** - (1628-1688) languished in Bedford Jail for 12 years. Offered liberty if he would abstain from preaching. "If you let me out today, I should preach tomorrow!" Famous Classic: *Pilgrim's Progress*

### **A Summary of Puritan Preaching**

Four Axioms as noted in Perkins' *Art of Preaching* (1595)

- Axiom 1 - The Primacy of the Intellect
- Axiom 2 - The Supreme Importance of Preaching
- Axiom 3 - Belief in the Lifegiving Power of Biblical Truths
- Axiom 4 - The Sovereignty of the Holy Spirit

### **Seven Characteristics of the Puritan Sermon**

1. Puritan preaching was expository in method.
2. Puritan sermons were doctrinal in their content.
3. Puritan preaching was in an orderly arrangement. A sermon that was needlessly hard to remember would have been considered a bad sermon.
4. Puritan preaching, though profound in its content, was popular in its style.
5. Puritan preaching was practical and experimental in interest.
6. Puritan preaching was realistic in its application.
7. Puritan preaching was, or at least aspired to be, powerful in manner.

## **B. 18TH CENTURY**

1. **Matthew Henry** - (1662-1714) notable expositor, author of famous devotional commentary of the whole Bible.
2. **John Wesley** - (1703-1791) short, barely 5ft. tall. Converted at Aldersgate in England when he felt his heart strangely warmed upon hearing a reading of Luther's preface to Romans. Riding all over England on horseback, he preached more times than anyone before him. His Journal is the best history of the rise of Methodism.
3. **George Whitfield** - (1714-1770) most passionate evangelist of his century. Crossed Atlantic 13 times to preach in America. Key preacher in the Great Awakening in America. Slightly cross-eyed, he possessed a rich, powerful voice that could reach 30,000 in open air preaching and be heard on the back row. He and Wesley differed on theology (Whitfield was a Calvinist) yet both were used mightily of God.
4. **Jonathan Edwards** - (1703-1758) pastor at Northampton, Mass. Brilliant thinker. Sermons written out and then read from a manuscript. Effect of his preaching upon people almost without parallel in preaching history. His sermon "Their feet shall slide in due time" was so powerful that men grasped the railings of the pews as if about to sink into hell. Son-in-law David Brainerd was a missionary to the Indians and died of tuberculosis before his 30th birthday. Known for his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

John Piper gives a summary of 10 characteristics that gives the essence of Edward's preaching:

1. Good preaching aims to stir up "holy affections."
2. Preaching strives to enlighten the mind. He states, "There must be heat in the heart and light in the mind."
3. Good preaching is saturated with Scripture, not just ideas from the Scripture but quotes.
4. Good preaching employs analogies and images that awaken the imagination.
5. Edwards believed in heaven and hell, therefore threats and warnings were an important part of his preaching.
6. Edwards was a Calvinist, but he believed in pleading for a response to the Gospel. (In keeping with the tradition of his day inquirers were invited to his office, there was no "walk the aisle" invitation at the close of the service.)
7. Powerful preaching is like surgery, it prods the heart for hidden sin.
8. The goal of preaching is utter dependence on the mercy of God for its fulfillment - yielding to the Holy Spirit.
9. Good preaching comes from a spirit of brokenness and tenderness.
10. Compelling preaching is intense, it grasps the preacher's own soul.

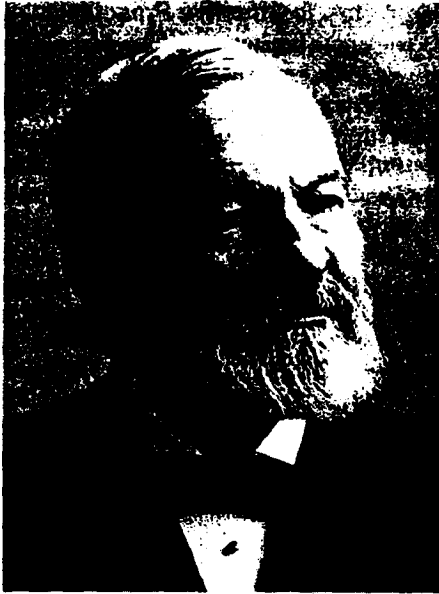
#### **C. 19TH CENTURY**

- **F.W. Krummacher** - (1796-1868) pastor of Trinity Church in Berlin, wrote *The Suffering Savior*, also works on Elijah and Elisha. Preached without notes, popular imagination.
- **Charles Finney** - (179-1875) attorney before conversion. Great orator with vivid imagination. Preached in New York State area and was mightily used of God to bring revival. Theology was borderline heresy.
- **Phillips Brooks** - (1835-1893) Episcopalian pastor, spoke rapidly with clear, flowing style. Famous *Lectures on Preaching* reprinted as *The Joy of Preaching*.
- **D.L. Moody** - (1837-1899) converted when a shoe salesman in Chicago at 17. Preached in Chicago's Moody Tabernacle, founded YMCA, lacked education but was master of illustration in sermons.
- **C.H. Spurgeon** - (1834-1891) began preaching in London at age 19. Prince of Preachers and Baptists. Great gift of imagination, humor, oratory. Great mind. 38 volumes of his sermons were published in his lifetime.

#### **D. 20TH CENTURY**

- **George W. Truett** - Pastor of FBC Dallas (1897-1944)
- **Harry E. Fosdick** - Classic liberal based in New York

- **W.A. Criswell** - Pastor of FBC Dallas (1944-1992)
- **John R.W. Stott** - Influential English preacher and writer
- **Martyn Lloyd-Jones** - Outstanding preacher in England (formerly a medical doctor)
- **Billy Graham** - Greatest evangelist of the 20th century
- **Steven Olford** - MK. classic expositor with significant influence
- **John MacArthur** - Prolific preacher and writer
- **Chuck Swindoll** - President of Dallas Seminary
- **Charles Stanley** - FBC Atlanta
- **Adrian Rogers** - Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis
- **Jerry Vines** - FBC Jacksonville, Florida
- **Warren Wiersbe**



# A Founder Speaks

John Albert Broadus on preaching.

Preaching is characteristic of Christianity. No false religion has ever provided for the regular and frequent assembling of the masses of men, to hear religious instruction and exhortation. Judaism had something like it in the prophets, and afterwards in the readers and speakers of the synagogue; but Judaism was a true religion, designed to be developed into Christianity.

The great appointed means of spreading the good tidings of salvation through Christ is preaching—words spoken, whether to the individual, or to the assembly. And this, nothing can supersede. *Printing* has become a mighty agency for good and for evil; and Christians should employ it, with the utmost diligence and in every possible way, for the spread of truth. But printing can never take the place of the living word.

When a man who is apt in teaching, whose soul is on fire with the truth which he trusts has saved him and hopes will save others, speaks to his fellow-men, face to face, eye to eye, and electric sympathies flash to and fro between him and his hearers, till they lift each other up, higher and higher, into the intensest thought, and the most impassioned emotion—higher and yet higher, till *they* are borne as on chariots of fire above the world—there is a power to move men, to influence character, life, destiny, such as no printed page can ever possess. *Pastoral work* is of immense importance, and all preachers should be diligent in performing it. But it cannot take the place of preaching, nor fully compensate for lack of power in the pulpit. The two help each other, and neither of them is able, unless supported by the other, to achieve the largest and most blessed results.

When he who preaches is the sympathizing pastor, the trusted counselor, the kindly and honored friend of young and old, of rich and poor, then “truths divine come mended from his lips,” and the door to men’s hearts, by the magical power of sympathy, will fly open to his word. But on the other hand, when he who visits is the preacher, whose thorough knowledge of Scripture and elevated views of life, whose able and impassioned discourses have carried conviction and commanded admiration, and melted into one the hearts of the multitude, who is accustomed to stand before them as the ambassador of God, and is associated in their minds with the authority and the sacredness of God’s Word, when he comes to speak with the suffering, the sorrowing, the tempted, his visit has meaning and a power of



which otherwise it must be destitute. If a minister feels himself specially drawn towards either of these departments of effort, let him also constrain himself to diligence in the other. Religious *ceremonies* may be instructive and impressive. The older dispensation made much use of these, as we employ pictures in teaching children. Even Christianity, which has the minimum of ceremony, illustrates its fundamental facts, and often makes deep religious impressions, by its two simple but expressive ordinances. But these are merely pictures to illustrate, merely helps to that great work of teaching and convincing, of winning and holding men, which preaching, made mighty by God's Spirit, has to perform.

It follows that preaching must always be a necessity, and good preaching mighty power. In every age of Christianity, since John the Baptist drew crowds into the desert, there has been no great religious movement, no restoration of Scripture truth and reanimation of genuine piety, without new power in preaching, both as cause and as effect.

But alas! How difficult we find it to preach *well*. How small a proportion of the sermons heard weekly throughout the world are really good. The dilettanti men of letters who every now and then fill the periodicals with sneers at preaching, no doubt judge most unkindly and unjustly, for they purposely compare ordinary examples of preaching with the finest specimens of literature, and they forget their own utter lack, in the one case, of that sympathetic appreciation without which all literary and artistic judgment is necessarily at fault; but we who love preaching and who try to preach are better aware than they are of the deficiencies which mar our efforts and the difficulties which attend our work. A venerable and eminently useful minister once remarked, as he rose from the couch on which he had been resting, "Well, I must get ready to preach tonight. but I can't preach-I never did preach-I never *heard anybody preach*."

And yet in this work of ours, so awful and so attractive, so difficult and solemnly responsible and yet so blessed, we ought to aspire after the highest excellence. If in other varieties of public speaking, then most of all in this, may we adopt Cicero's words with reference to the young orator, "I will not only exhort, but will even beseech him, to labor."

### **Nature of Eloquence.**

What is good preaching? Or more generally, what is eloquence? This is not a merely speculative inquiry, for our fundamental views on the subject will influence, to a greater extent than we may be aware, our practical efforts. Without reviewing the copious discussions of the question, the following statement may be offered: Eloquence is so speaking as not merely to convince the judgment, kindle the imagination and move the feelings but to give a powerful impulse to the will. All of these are necessary elements of eloquence, but that which is most characteristic is the last. There may be instruction and conviction without eloquence. The fancy may be charmed, as by a poem or novel, when you would not think of calling it eloquence. The feelings may be deeply stirred, by a pathetic tale of a harrowing description, but no corresponding action being proposed, we do not speak of it as eloquence. On the other hand, it is not strictly correct to say that "eloquence is so speaking as to carry your point;" for there may be an invincible prejudice, or other insuperable obstacle, as, for example, a preacher may be truly eloquent, without actually inducing his hearers to repent. There must be a *powerful impulse* upon the will; the hearers must feel smitten, stirred, moved to, or at least moved towards, some action or determination to act. Words that by carrying conviction, kindling imagination and arousing emotion, produce such an effect as this upon the

will, are rightly called eloquent words. Augustine says, *Veritas pateat, veritas placeat, veritas moveat*, “Make the truth plain, make it pleasing, make it moving.”

Eloquence, then, is a practical thing. Unless it aims at real and practical results, it is spurious. Mere holiday eloquence does not deserve the name. And the preacher who kindles the fancy of his hearers merely for their delectation, who stirs their passions merely to give them the luxury of emotion, is not eloquent. There is too much preaching of just that sort. Besides vain pretenders who care only to please, there are good men who, if they can say very handsome things and can make the people *feel*, imagine that they are preaching well, without inquiring *why* the people feel, and to what truly religious ends the feeling is directed. It is a shame to see what vapid and worthless stuff is often called eloquence, in newspaper puffs and in the talk of half-educated younglings, returning from church.

Eloquence is a serious thing. You cannot say that a discourse, or a paragraph, is very amusing and very eloquent. The speaker who is to deserve this high name must have moral earnestness. He *may* sometimes indulge, where it is appropriate, in the light play of delicate humor, or give forth sparks of wit, but these must be entirely incidental and subordinate to a thorough seriousness and earnestness. Therein, in his useful little treatise, “Eloquence a Virtue,” insists that eloquence belongs to the ethical sciences, the character and spirit of the speaker being the main thing. The theory is an exaggeration but contains an important element of truth, as Quintilian already had partly observed.

“What is the true ground of eloquence,” says Vinet, “if it is not commonplace? When eloquence is combined with high philosophical considerations, as in many modern examples, we are at first tempted to attribute to philosophy the impression we receive from it, but eloquence is something *more* popular; it is the power of making the primitive chords of the soul (its purely human elements) vibrate within us—it is in this, and nothing else, that we acknowledge the orator.” it is impossible to be eloquent on any subject, save by associating it with such ideas as that of mother, child, friends, home, country, heaven, and the like; all of them familiar, and, in themselves, commonplace. The speaker’s task is, by his grouping, illustration, etc., and by his own contagious emotion, to invest these familiar ideas with fresh interest so that they may reassert their power over the hearts of his hearers. He who runs after material of discourse that shall be absolutely new, may get credit for originality and be amply admired, but he will not exert the living power which belongs to eloquence. The *preacher can* be really eloquent only when he speaks of those vital gospel truths which have necessarily become familiar. A just rhetoric, if there were no higher consideration, would require that a preacher shall preach the gospel—shall hold on to the old truths and labor to clothe them with new interest and power.

### **Requisites To Effective Preaching**

They may be stated as four, viz. piety, natural gifts, knowledge, skill.

(1.) Piety. Men sometimes do good by preaching who turn out to have been destitute of piety. It is one of the many wonderful ways in which God brings good out of evil. But such cases are exceptional, and as a rule, the prime requisite to efficiency in preaching is earnest piety. This inspires the preacher himself with ardent zeal and keeps the flame alive amid all the icy indifference by which he will so often be encompassed. This gains for him the good-will and sympathy of his hearers, the most ungodly of whom will feel

that devout earnestness of his part is becoming and entitles him to respect. And this is authorized hope for the blessing of God upon the labors which it prompts. Much false theory and bad practice in preaching is connected with a failure to apprehend the fundamental importance of piety in the preacher. As was said above on a kindred topic, just rhetorical principles, as well as other and far higher considerations, imperatively require that a preacher of the gospel shall cultivate personal piety. It is *bad rhetoric* to neglect it.

(2.) Natural gifts. The preacher needs the capacity for clear thinking, with strong feelings and a vigorous imagination; also capacity for expression and the power of forcible utterance. Many other gifts help his usefulness; these are wellnigh indispensable to any high degree of efficiency. Each of these can be improved almost indefinitely, some of them developed in one who had not been conscious of possessing them, but all must exist as natural gifts.

(3.) Knowledge. There must be knowledge of religious truth and of such things as throw light upon it: knowledge of human nature in its relations to religious truth and of human life in its actual conditions around us. It was a favorite idea of Cicero that the orator ought to know everything. There is of course no knowledge which a preacher might not make useful. We may thankfully recognize the fact that some men do good who have very slender attainments, and yet may insist that it should be the preacher's lowest standard to surpass, in respect of knowledge, the great majority of those who hear him, and should be his sacred ambition to know all that he can learn by life-long and prayerful endeavor. Piety furnishes motive power; natural gifts, cultivated as far as possible, furnish means; knowledge gives material; and there remains

(4.) Skill. This does not refer merely to style and delivery but also to the collection, choice and arrangement of materials. All who preach eminently well-and the same thing is true of secular speakers-will be found, scarcely an exception, to have labored much to acquire skill. Henry Clay, in an address to some law-students at Albany towards the close of his life, mentioned that during his early life in Kentucky, he "commenced, and continued for years, the practice of daily reading and speaking upon the contents of some historical or scientific book. These off-hand efforts were made sometimes in a cornfield, at others in the forest, and not infrequently in some distant barn, with the horse and the ox for my auditors." We are told that the Indian orators of the Six Nations were known to practice their speeches beside a clear pool. "Patrick Henry, the most illustrious example of natural oratory, so far as there is any such, went through a course of training in his daily studies of human nature as drawn out by himself in his little shop, his every-day trials on his lingering customers of the power of words, his deep and enthusiastic investigations into history, and particularly his patient and continued study of the harangues of Livy and the elaborate translations he made of them, which, to say the least, is very uncommon." Any one whose good fortune it has been to be intimate with some of those noble Baptist preachers, who beginning with hardly any education have worked their way up to the highest excellence in their calling, will have seen ample proofs, particularly in their unrestrained private conversation, that their power of clear and precise expression, and of forcible and attractive delivery, is the result of sharp, critical attention, of earnest and long-continued labor. The difference between skill and the lack of it in speaking is almost as great as in handling tools, those, for example, of the carpenter or the blacksmith. And while no real skill can be acquired without practice according to the true

saying, “The only way to learn to preach is to preach” yet mere practice will never bring the highest skill; it must be heedful, thoughtful practice, with close observation of others and sharp watching of ourselves, and controlled by good sense and good taste.

Now in respect of skill, preaching is an art; and while art cannot create the powers of mind or body nor supply their place if really absent, it can develop and improve them and aid in using them to the best advantage. To gain skill, then, is the object of rhetorical studies, skill in the construction and in the delivery of discourse.

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Excerpt from *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, by John A Broadus, 1872, pp. 17-25.