

***JAMES  
STALKER***



***THE PREACHER  
AND HIS  
MODELS***

**James Stalker**

# **The Preacher and His Models**

**The Yale Lectures on Preaching 1891**

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# PREFACE

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These nine Lectures on Preaching were delivered, on the Lyman Beecher Foundation, to the divinity students of Yale University in the spring of this year. With the kind concurrence of the Senate of Yale, five of them were redelivered, on the Merrick Foundation, to the students of Ohio Wesleyan University at Delaware, Ohio.

In the Appendix an Ordination Address is reproduced, which I wrote when I had been only four or five years in the ministry, and which I have been requested to reprint. My friend, the Rev. Dr. Walker, who was present when it was delivered, having published it in *The Family Treasury*, another friend, noticing it there, had it printed as a pamphlet at his own expense and distributed to all the ministers of the Church to which he and I belong. It was a very characteristic act; and I have ventured, as a memorial of it, to dedicate this volume to him. I do so, however, not for this reason only, but also because there has been no one in this generation who has done more than he has done, by the example of his own impressive ministry and by his generous encouragement of younger ministers, to promote the interests of preaching in his native land.

My thanks are due to the Rev. Charles Shaw, who on this as on former occasions has kindly assisted me in correcting the press.

Glasgow, *October 1st, 1891.*

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# **LECTURE I.**

## **INTRODUCTORY**

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# **LECTURE I.ToC**

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## **INTRODUCTORY.**

Gentlemen, it would be impossible to begin this course of lectures without expressing my acknowledgments to the Theological Faculty of this University for the great honour they have done me by inviting me to occupy this position. When I look over the list of my predecessors and observe

that it includes such names as Bishop Simpson, Henry Ward Beecher, Dr. John Hall, Dr. W.M. Taylor, Dr. Phillips Brooks, Dr. A.J.F. Behrends, and Dr. Dale—to mention only those with which it opens—I cannot help feeling that it is perhaps a greater honour than I was entitled to accept; and I cannot but wish that the preaching of the old country were to be represented on this occasion by some one of the many ministers who would have been abler than I to do it justice. It is with no sense of having attained that I am to speak to you; for I always seem to myself to be only beginning to learn my trade; and the furthest I ever get in the way of confidence is to believe that I shall preach well next time. However, there may be some advantages in hearing one who is not too far away from the difficulties with which you will soon be contending yourselves; and the keenness with which I have felt these difficulties may have made me reflect, more than others to whom the path of excellence has been easier, on the means of overcoming them.

I warmly reciprocate the sentiments which have led the Faculty to come across the Atlantic the second time for a lecturer, and the liberality of mind with which they are wont to overstep the boundaries of their own denomination and select their lecturers from all the evangelical Churches. It is the first time I have set foot on your continent, but I have long entertained a warm admiration for the American people and a firm faith in their destiny; and I welcome an opportunity which may serve, in any degree, to demonstrate the unity which underlies the variety of our evangelical communions, and to show how great are the things in which we agree in comparison with those on which we differ.

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The aim of this lectureship, if I have apprehended it aright, is that men who are out on the sea of practical life, feeling the force and strain of the winds and currents of the time, and who therefore occupy, to some extent, a different point of view from either students or professors, should come and tell you, who are still standing on the *terra firma* of college life, but will soon also have to launch forth on the same element, how it feels out there on the deep.

Well, there is a considerable difference.

The professorial theory of college life is, that the faculties are being exercised and the resources collected with which the battles of life are subsequently to be fought and its victories won. And there is, no doubt, a great deal of truth in this theory. The acquisitions of the class-room will all be found useful in future, and your only regret will be that they have not been more extensive and thorough. The gymnastic of study is suppling faculties which will be indispensable hereafter. Yet there is room amidst your studies, and without the slightest disparagement to them, for a message more directly from life, to hint to you, that more may be needed in the career to which you are looking forward than a college can give, and that the powers on which success in practical life depends may be somewhat different from those which avail most at your present stage.

There are two very marked types of intellect to be observed amongst men, which we may call the receptive and the creative. Receptive intellect has the power of taking



fully in what is addressed to it by others. It separates its acquisitions and distributes them among the pigeon-holes of the memory. Out of these again it can reproduce them, as occasion requires, and even make what may be called permutations and combinations among its materials with skill and facility. The creative intellect, on the contrary, is sometimes anything but apt to receive that which people attempt to put into it. Instead of being an open, roomy vessel for holding things, it may be awkwardly shaped, and sometimes difficult to open at all. Nor do things pour out of it in a stream, as water does from a pitcher; they rather flash out of it, like sparks from the anvil. Instead of possessing its own knowledge, it is possessed by it; it burns as it emits it, and its fire is contagious.

The former is the serviceable intellect at college, but it is the latter which makes the preacher. There may, indeed, here and there, be miraculous professors who attach more importance, and give higher marks, to the indications of the creative intellect than to the achievements of the receptive intellect. But few can resist the appeal made by the clear, correct and copious reproduction of what they have themselves supplied. Indeed, they would not, as a rule, be justified in doing so; for the first indications of originality are often crude and irritating, and they may come to nothing. The creative intellect is frequently slow in maturing; it is like those seeds which take more than one season to blossom. But at a flower show it would not be fair to withhold the prize from the flower which has blossomed already, and reserve it for one which may possibly do so next year.

Of my fellow-students in the class to which I belonged at college, the two who have since been most successful did not then seem destined for first places. They were known to be able men, but they were not excessively laborious, and they kept themselves irritatingly detached from the interests of the college. But the one has since unfolded a remarkable originality, which was, no doubt, even then organizing itself in the inner depths; and the other, as soon as he entered the pulpit, turned out to have the power of casting a spell over the minds of men. Both had a spark of nature's fire; and this is the possession which outshines all others when college is over and practical life begun.[1]

But, if the viewpoint of practical life is different even from the professorial, it is still more different from that of students; and this may again justify the bringing of a message from the outside world. The difference might be put in many ways; but perhaps it may be best expressed by saying that, while you are among the critics, we are among the criticized.

In the history of nearly all minds of the better sort there is an epoch of criticism. The young soul, as it begins to observe, discovers that things around it are not all as they ought to be, and that the world is not so perfect a place as might naturally be expected or as it may have been represented to be. The critical faculty awakes and, having once tasted blood, rushes forth to judge all men and things with cruel ability. This is the stage at which we agree with Carlyle in thinking mankind to be mostly fools and pronounce every man over five-and-forty who does not happen to agree with our opinions an old fogey. It is the

time when we are confident that we could, if we chose, single-handed and with ease, accomplish tasks which generations of men have struggled with in vain. Only in the meantime we, for our part, are not disposed to commit ourselves to any creed or to champion any cause, because we are engaged in contemplating all.

This period occurs, I say, in the history of all men of the abler sort; but in students, on account of their peculiar opportunities, the symptoms are generally exceptionally pronounced. Students are the chartered libertines of criticism. What a life professors would lead, if they only knew what is said about them every day of their lives! I often think that three-fourths of every faculty in the country would disappear some morning by a simultaneous act of self-effacement. Of course ministers do not escape; ecclesiastics and Church courts are quite beyond redemption; and principalities and powers in general are in the same condemnation.

Such is the delightful prerogative of the position in which you now stand. But, gentlemen, the moment you leave these college gates behind, you have to pass from your place among the critics and take your place among the criticized. That is, you will have to quit the well-cushioned benches, where the spectators sit enjoying the spectacle, and take your place among the gladiators in the arena. The binoculars of the community will be turned upon you, and five hundred or a thousand people will be entitled to say twice or thrice every week what they think of your performances. You will have to put your shoulder under the huge mass of your Church's policy and try to keep step with

some thousands whose shoulders are under it too; and the reproaches cast by the public and the press at the awkwardness of the whole squad and the unsteadiness of the ark will fall on you along with the rest.

Seriously, this is a tremendous difference. Criticism, however brilliant, is a comparatively easy thing. It is easier to criticize the greatest things superbly than to do even small things fairly well. A brief experience of practical life gives one a great respect for some men whom one would not at one time have considered very brilliant, and for work which one would have pronounced very imperfect. There is a famous passage in Lucretius, in which he speaks of the joy of the mariner who has escaped to dry land, when he sees his shipwrecked companions still struggling in the waves. This is too heathenish a sentiment; but I confess I have sometimes experienced a touch of it, when I have beheld one who has distinguished himself by his incisiveness, while still on the *terra firma* of criticism, suddenly dropped into the bottomless sea of actual life and learning, amidst his first struggles in the waves, not without gulps of salt-water, the difference between intention and performance.

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But do not suppose that I am persuading you to give up criticism. On the contrary, this is the natural function of the stage at which you are; and probably those who throw themselves most vigorously into it now may also discharge most successfully the functions of the stages yet to come. The world reaps not a little advantage from criticism. It is a very imperfect world; no generation of its inhabitants does its work as well as it ought to be done, and it is the

undoubted right of the next generation to detect its defects; for in this lies the only chance of improvement. There is something awe-inspiring in the first glance cast by the young on the world in which they find themselves. It is so clear and unbiassed; they distinguish so instantaneously between the right and the wrong, the noble and the base; and they blurt out so frankly what they see. As we grow older, we train ourselves unawares not to see straight or, if we see, we hold our peace. The first open look of young eyes on the condition of the world is one of the principal regenerative forces of humanity.

To begin with, therefore, at all events I will rather come to your standpoint than ask you to come to mine. Indeed, although I have for some time been among the criticized, and my sympathies are with the practical workers, my sense of how imperfectly the work is done, and of how inadequate our efforts are to the magnitude of the task, grows stronger instead of weaker. And it is from this point of view that I mean to enter into our subject. I will make use of the facts of my own country, with which I am familiar; but I do not suppose that the state of things among you is substantially different; and you will not have much difficulty in correcting the picture, to make it correspond with your circumstances, whilst I speak.

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In the present century there has certainly been an unparalleled multiplication of the instrumentalities for doing the work. The machine of religion, so to speak, has been perfected. The population has been increasing fast; but churches have multiplied at least twice as fast. Even in a

great city like Glasgow we have a Protestant church to every two thousand of the population.[2] And, inside the churches, the multiplication of agencies has been even more surprising. Formerly the minister did almost all the work; and it comprehended little more than the two services on Sunday and the visitation of the congregation; the elders helping him to a small extent in financing the congregation and in a few other matters largely secular. But now every congregation is a perfect hive of Christian activity. In a large congregation the workers are counted by hundreds. Every imaginable form of philanthropic and religious appliance is in operation. Buildings for Sabbath Schools and Mission Work are added to the church; and nearly every day of the week has its meeting.

The machine of religion is large and complicated, and it is manned by so many workers that they get in each other's way; but, with all this bustling activity, is the work done? This is the question which gives us pause. Has the amount of practical Christianity increased in proportion to the multiplication of agencies? Are the prospects of religion as much brighter than they used to be as might have been expected after all this expenditure of labour? Is Christianity deepening as well as spreading?

In Glasgow, where the proportion of churches to population is so high, they speak of two hundred thousand non-church-goers, that is, a third of the inhabitants; and, if you go into one of our villages with two or three thousand of a population, you may find three or four churches, belonging to different denominations; but you will usually find even there a considerable body of non-church-goers.

Not long ago I heard a London clergyman state, that, if, any Sunday morning, you went through the congregations belonging to the Church of England in the district of a hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants in which he labours, you would not, in all of them put together, find one man present for every thousand of the population. One of the English bishops recently admitted that in South London his Church is not in possession; and certainly no other denomination is. Thus, with all our appliances, we have failed even to bring the population within the sound of the Gospel.

Inside the churches, what is to be said? Is the proportion large of those who have received the Gospel in such a way that their hearts have manifestly been changed by it and their lives brought under its sway? We should utterly deceive ourselves if we imagined that real Christianity is coextensive with the profession of Christianity. Many who bear the Christian name have neither Christian experience nor Christian character, but in their spirit and pursuits are thoroughly worldly. Even where religion has taken real hold, is the type very often beautiful and impressive? Who can think without shame of the long delay of the Church even to attempt the work of converting the heathen? And even yet the sacrifices made for this object are ludicrously small in proportion either to the magnitude of the problem or the wealth of the Christian community. The annual expenditure of the United Kingdom on drink is said to be a hundred times as great as that on foreign missions.

Religion does not permeate life. The Church is one of the great institutions of the country, and gets its own place. But

it is a thing apart from the common life, which goes on beside it. Business, politics, literature, amusements, are only faintly coloured by it. Yet the mission of Christianity is not to occupy a respectable place apart, but to leaven life through and through.

Vice flourishes side by side with religion. We build the school and the church, and then we open beside them the public-house. The Christian community has the power of controlling this traffic; but it allows it to go on with all its unspeakable horrors. Thus its own work is systematically undone, and faster than the victims can be saved new ones are manufactured to occupy their places. Of vices which are still more degrading I need not speak. Their prevalence is too patent everywhere. If there is any law of Christianity which is obvious and inexorable, it is the law of purity. But go where you will in the Christian countries, and you will learn that by large sections of their manhood this law is treated as if it did not exist. The truth is that, in spite of the nations being baptized in the name of Christ, heathenism has still the control of much of their life; and it would hardly be too much to say that the mission of Christianity is still only beginning.

In what direction does hope lie? It seems to me that there can be no more important factor in the solution of the problem than the kind of men who fill the office of the ministry. We must have men of more power, more concentration on the aims of the ministry, more wisdom, but, above all, more willingness to sacrifice their lives to their vocation. We have too tame and conventional a way of thinking about our career. Men are not even ambitious of



doing more than settling in a comfortable position and getting through its duties in a respectable way. We need to have men penetrated with the problem as a whole, and labouring with the new developments which the times require. The prizes of the ministry ought to be its posts of greatest difficulty. When a student or young minister proves to have the genuine gift, his natural goal should not be a highly paid place in a West End church, but a position where he would be in the forefront of the battle with sin and misery. Nowhere else are the great lines of Chapman more applicable than in our calling:—

Give me a spirit that on this life's rough sea  
Loves to have his sails filled with a lusty wind,  
Even till his sailyards tremble, his masts crack,  
And his rapt ship runs on her side so low  
That she drinks water and her keel ploughs air.

I am well aware that men of this stamp cannot be made to order. They must, as I have suggested already, have a spark of nature's fire, and, besides that, the Spirit of God must descend on them. Yet I have thought that it might be helpful towards this end to go back to the origins of preaching, and to study those in whom its primitive spirit was embodied. Perhaps that which we are desiring could not be better expressed than by saying that we need a ministry prophetic and apostolic. And I am going to invite you to study the prophets and apostles as our models.

Though we may not believe in apostolic succession in the churchly sense, we are the successors of the apostles in this sense, that the apostles filled the office which we hold, or

hope to hold, and illustrated the manner in which its duties should be discharged in such a way as to be an example and an inspiration to all its subsequent occupants. The air they breathed was still charged with the spirit poured into it by Christ; they were made great by the influence of His teaching and companionship; the power of the Holy Ghost, freshly descended, burned on their hearts; and they went forth on their mission with a force of conviction and a mastery of their task which nothing could resist.

One among them embodied in himself, above all others, the spirit of that epoch of creative energy. St. Paul is perhaps, after our Lord Himself, the most complete embodiment of the ministerial life on all its sides which the world has ever seen. And, fortunately, he embodied this spirit not only in deeds, but also in words. Circumstances made him a writer of letters, the most autobiographical form of literature. His friends, such as Timothy and Titus, drew out of him lengthy expressions of the convictions wrought into his mind by the experiences of a lifetime. His enemies, by their accusations, struck out of him still ampler and more heartfelt statements of his feelings and motives. St. Paul has painted his own portrait at full length, and in every line it is the portrait of a minister. There is more in his writings which touches the very quick of our life as ministers than in all other writings in existence. It is my desire to reproduce this straight from the sources. I have no intention of going over the outward life of St. Paul. This you can find in a hundred books. But I desire to exhibit the very soul of the man, as he himself has revealed it to us in his writings.

If we are the successors of the apostles, the apostles were the successors of the prophets, who did for the Church of the Old Testament what the apostles did for that of the New. In outward aspect and detail, indeed, the life of the prophets differed much from that of the apostles. In force of manhood and in variety and brilliance of genius they far excelled them. But their aim was the same. It was to make the kingdom of God come by announcing and enforcing the mind and will of God. And this is our aim too.

The writings of the prophets are very difficult, and their period is less popularly known than any other period of Scripture history, either before or after it. But it is beginning to attract more attention, and in the near future it will do so much more, because it is beginning to be perceived that in it lies the key to the whole Old Testament history and literature.[3] The writings of Isaiah especially have of late attracted attention. Commentary after commentary on them has appeared;[4] till now the reader can see his way pretty clearly through the tangled but enchanting mazes of his writings. With such helps as have been available to me I have endeavoured through the writings to get at the man; and I will take Isaiah as the representative of the prophetic spirit in the same way as St. Paul is to represent for us the apostles. But here again my aim is neither that of the commentator nor that of the biographer. It is the soul of the man I wish to depict and the spirit of his work.

It may be thought that, by taking up the subject in this way, I am missing the opportunity of dealing with the practical work of to-day. But I do not think so. There are, indeed, some details nearly always discussed in lectures on

preaching which I do not care to touch. There is, for instance, the question of the delivery of sermons—whether the preacher should read, or speak *memoriter*, or preach *extempore*. This can be discussed endlessly, and the discussion is always interesting; but, if it were discussed every year for a century, it would be as far from being settled as ever. Besides, it is my duty to remember what others have handled exhaustively here before me. Indeed, the Senate mentioned to me that it was desirable that the subject should be taken up from a new point of view. They have been good enough to express their approbation of the way in which I mean to treat it; but it is not in deference to their instructions that I take it up in this way, but in accordance with the bent of my own mind; and I think I see my way to bring to bear on it all the practical experience which I may be in possession of; for I quite recognise that the value of such a course of lectures largely depends on its being, from beginning to end, what in literature is called a Confession, that is, a record of experiences. Although I am to go back to the ages of the apostles and the prophets, I do not intend to stay there. My wish is to bring down from thence fire which will kindle your hearts, as you face the world and the tasks of to-day.

There is another objection, which may have already occurred to some of you, and would doubtless occur to many, as I went along, if I did not anticipate it. It may be felt, that both apostles and prophets were so differently situated from us, especially through the possession of the gift of inspiration, that they can be no example for us to follow. To this I will not reply by seeking in any way to

minimise their inspiration. It is, indeed, difficult to say exactly how their inspiration differed from that which is accessible and indispensable to us; for we also are entirely dependent for the power and success of our work on the same Spirit as spoke through them. But, however difficult it may be to define it, I am one of those who believe that there is a difference, and that it is a great difference. The mind and will of God expressed themselves through the prophets and apostles with a directness and authority which we cannot claim. But the difference is not such as to remove them beyond our imitation. Although in some, or even many, respects they may be beyond us, this is no reason why we may not in others imitate them with the greatest advantage. It will be seen at a glance how little there is in this objection, if it be considered that our Lord Himself is the great pattern of the ministry. In some respects He is of course much farther away from us than either prophets or apostles; yet He is near us as a model in every detail of our duty. No mode of treating my subject would have been so congenial to me as to set Him forth in this character. But, having attempted to do so elsewhere, I have chosen the method now announced under the conviction, that the nearest approach to the study of how Christ fulfilled the duties of the ministry is to study how prophets and apostles fulfilled them.



There is one thing more which I should like to say before closing this somewhat miscellaneous introductory lecture. I would not have come to lecture to you on this subject if I were not a firm believer in preaching. If in what has been

already said I have seemed to depreciate its results, this is only because my ideal is so high of what the pulpit ought to do, and might do.<sup>[5]</sup> I do not, indeed, separate preaching from the other parts of a minister's life, such as the conducting of the service of the sanctuary, the visitation of the congregation, and taking part in more general public work. As I go on, it will be seen, that, so far from undervaluing these, I hold them to be all required even to produce a healthy pulpit power. Yet preaching is the central thing in our work. I believe in it, because Christ Himself set His stamp on it. Read His sayings, and you will see that this was what He sent forth the servants of His kingdom to do. "Christ," says St. Paul, "sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel"; not, I think, thereby ignoring baptism, but putting it and all other ceremonies in their proper place of subordination to the preaching of the Word.

It is often charged against the evangelical, and especially the free, Churches at the present day, that they give preaching a position of too great prominence in public worship; and we are counselled to yield the central place to something else. It is put to us, for example, whether our people should not be taught to come to church for the purpose of speaking to God rather than in order to be spoken to by man. This has a pious sound; but there is a fallacy in it. Preaching is not merely the speaking of a man. If it is, then it is certainly not worth coming to church for. Preaching, if it is of the right kind, is the voice of God. This we venture to say while well aware of its imperfections. In the best of preaching there is a large human element beset with infirmity; yet in all genuine preaching there is conveyed