



The delivery of the sermon

He should watch his voice

1. The purpose of it

The human voice is the God-given instrument by which the God-given message is conveyed through a God-given messenger to accomplish a God-given result. What a marvellously intricate thing the human voice is! The multitudinous thoughts as they pass through the delicate apparatus of the vocal chords, tongue and lips, are miraculously transformed into words by which these thoughts are conveyed to others. More wonderful still, through the hearing and believing of the gospel, precious souls are regenerated by the Spirit of God! What a privilege, therefore, to be a mouthpiece for Deity! (see Acts 15:7; Isaiah 58:1; John 1:23; 1 Corinthians 14:8).

The human voice has four powers: *compass*, or range of pitch; *volume*, or quantity of tone; *penetration*, which describes the distance it can be clearly heard; and *melody*, or sweetness of tone. The voice also has three registers, or pitches: *low*, *high* and *middle*. The middle is the one used in ordinary conversation. This is the pitch to be used in preaching, for preaching is simply sustained conversation. The high pitch is what we use when denoting joy, triumph, defiance and entreaty; while the low pitch is used to express solemnity, sorrow, awe and fear. This can be easily verified as we hear someone describing an experience through which he has passed. Quite naturally, he changes from one register to another as the situation demands. Thus we can say that the purpose of the voice is to express what one wishes to *impress* on the hearer.

2. Some poor examples of the use of the voice

1. The mumblor

This person apparently tries to speak with his lips closed, or at least conveys the impression he has a small potato in his mouth. As a result, there emerges a mass, or mess, of inarticulate mumbblings. It was said of our Lord that '*he opened his mouth and taught*' (Matthew 5:2). Since '*faith cometh by hearing*', and no one can distinctly hear the mumblor, he is really doing his audience a great disservice (see 1 Corinthians 14:10-11). Such a mumblor had far better keep off the platform and remain silent if he cannot be heard. Mumbling can and must be cured. Here is where that mentor friend will prove invaluable by faithfully informing the speaker of his guilt in this matter. Persevering practise has turned many a useless mumblor into a useful speaker.

2. The yeller

This person is the exact opposite of the mumblor. He begins his sermon with a roar, goes on with a roar and ends up with a roar. The ears of the audience literally ache with the din. Once again the faithful mentor should be delegated to do his duty, and seek to curb this 'yeller streak' on the part of the speaker.

3. The sing-song

This speaker adopts a kind of chant. His voice rises and falls with regular, calm and rhythmic flow until it becomes a lullaby to the audience. One by one the listeners, in self-defence, succumb to the chant, and are thus put out of their misery. This sing-song intonation is anything but the preacher's *natural* voice. When engaged in ordinary conversation he can talk intelligently enough, but, alas,

once he mounts the rostrum he begins his artificial chant which proves to be anything but enchanting to the hearers. Here again the mentor can help by faithful counsel. The preacher must resolutely determine he will use his natural voice in the pulpit.

4. *The monotone*

There is no rise or fall to this person's voice. Everything he says is couched in a flat, expressionless and colourless tone. It matters not what the theme may be, the same monotonous and vapid voice is used. There is no change of speed in the delivery, or short pauses to break its insipidity, and the sermon is as flat as a pancake. This must surely lie in a lack of conviction as to the truth of his message. This type of speaker is advised to get into the presence of God concerning his lack of earnestness.

5. *The voice-dropper*

This preacher begins his sentences in an audible tone but, as he nears the end of them, he drops his voice to a whisper, so that no one can hear the concluding words. Perhaps this person imagines that by this habit he is producing an impression, but all he does is to create a depression of spirits on the part of his audience. Such a person should write, in large letters: 'I must keep my voice up at the end of my sentences,' and then place it on the pulpit so that he may have it before him during the entire period of the sermon.

6. *The repeater*

This person has the annoying habit of repeating his sentences over and over again, as though his hearers were either deaf, or mentally incompetent. By this method a ten-minute address is stretched to thirty minutes, and the audience is made to feel its time has been wasted, its intelligence outraged and its patience sorely tried. His favourite phrase is: 'As I said before and now again I repeat.' Surely if a thing has been said once, it would be far better to say something else next time, instead of moving in a tiresome circle of endless repetitions. Such a speaker should be made to listen to a recording of his sermon and realise what the audience has to put up with each time it has to endure him.

7. *The throat-clearer*

The preacher indulges in a slight, but entirely unnecessary, clearing of the throat at the end of each sentence, and sometimes in the middle of a sentence. His remarks, if stenographically recorded, would read something like this: 'My (ahem!) dear friends. It is (er er) with great (ahem!) pleasure that I (er er) stand (ah) before you (ahem!),' etc., and so on, far into the night, ad infinitum, ad nauseam. This crippling habit can and should be cured. An aid would be for him to read aloud with his mentor friend present to curb the coughing. One thing is certain: the most heroic measures would be perfectly in order if it would cure a throat-clearer from coughing his weary way through a sermon.

8. *The meanderer*

This preacher's sermon consists of a number of disconnected thoughts which apparently occur to him as he speaks. This leaves the audience wondering what he is driving at, or whether he possesses a mind capable of containing anything definite. He wanders from Dan to Beersheba, and has a little to say about everything in general, and nothing to say about anything in particular. Such meandering can only be cured by a holy determination to make and take time for definite and systematic study and thorough preparation of the sermon.

With some preachers a course of voice cultivation would be helpful in producing the tones from the diaphragm. Constant practise, particularly of the consonantal endings of a word, will help the preacher to better fit himself for the grand task of '*preaching the word*'.

3. He should watch his audience

To do this he must keep his eyes open. Many find this a real difficulty due to extreme timidity and shyness; but this must be resolutely practised until it becomes a natural thing to do (see Jeremiah 1:17).

1. *This commands the respect of an audience*

The human eye commands authority, and people respect the preacher who like Longfellow's Village Blacksmith, 'looks the whole world in the face'.

2. *It enables the preacher to see the reaction of the audience to his message*

A puzzled look will indicate he has not made himself clear, and thus an illustration is now in order. A bored look will inform him he is getting prosy, and this calls for something to revive the lagging interest. He may perceive anxiety of soul on the part of some, and be able to approach them afterwards for personal conversation.

3. *It permits the speaker to see if the audience is comfortable or not*

If the room is too warm, windows should be opened. If too cold, heat should be turned on. He should put out all lights which are immediately above his head or behind his back, for this produces a glare, and becomes a source of discomfort to those who wish to look at the speaker. Not only so, but this glare provides an additional inducement for the hearer to close the eyes and go to sleep. The preacher should, at all times, be in command of the audience, and be ready to act in the case of any emergency: therefore the necessity to look at one's audience.

4. He should watch his time

'Time is the stuff out of which life is made' said a French philosopher. It is therefore a most valuable commodity, for 'time lost is never regained'. The preacher should see to it that he uses his time to the very best advantage.

1. *He should plan the service within the limitations of the period at his disposal*

The length of the opening service should be determined by the time limit of the whole service. If the service is to last an hour, twenty minutes should be ample for the preliminaries. This will leave 30-35 minutes for the address, and five minutes for the closing hymn and prayer.

As a general principle, the preacher should start the service on time, even though only a handful is present. The audience will soon accommodate itself to this arrangement, except that band of incorrigibles who never seem to be able to come on time for anything, except to their own places of business, or to serve their own selfish interests.

2. *He should finish on time*

Having *begun on time*, he should also make it a point of honour to end on time, for the audience came on the understanding that the meeting should end at a certain time. This punctual closing will inspire confidence in the speaker as a man of his word. The speaker who has no terminal facilities will only succeed in outwearing his welcome.

If the meeting is to be shared with another speaker, it is the height of discourtesy for the first speaker to trespass on the time of the second. To steal another person's time is to take from him that which can never be restored. This form of platform robbery is altogether too common and cannot be too severely condemned.

It is far better to leave an audience *longing* than *loathing*. It is an excellent principle to stop when the interest is keen rather than go on at interminable length until the interest gives place to boredom and resentment. One person, when asked his opinion of a preacher's sermon replied: 'He lost five excellent opportunities of closing his address!' Someone once asked the doorkeeper of a church building if a certain preacher had finished his sermon. The reply he got was: 'Yes, he

finished his address about ten minutes ago, but he hasn't stopped yet!' Happy is the man who knows when he is *finished* — and *stops*!

A particularly exasperating thing for a preacher to do is to say: 'And lastly, my friends' and then proceeds to *last!* The audience, hearing this phrase, takes courage and looks forward to a speedy release from its sufferings but, alas, it is doomed to disappointment. Should a speaker realise his time is running out, he can always condense his sermon so as to finish within the allotted time. The audience will not notice the condensation and will be favourably impressed by the speaker's punctuality.

5. He should watch his theme

All will agree that we are living in difficult days, when the latest is considered the best. The preacher will be tempted to invent and introduce something new and startling, instead of expounding what the word of God distinctly teaches. The Devil is busy, together with his host of wicked spirits in sowing the evil seed of false doctrine by which sinners shall be blinded to the truth of the gospel. New-fangled theories are springing up on every hand. There are always plenty of people who arrogantly refuse to accept God's truth in the light, but who seem quite willing to swallow Satan's lies in the darkness. The Bible has foretold this condition of things (see 2 Timothy 4:3, 4; 1 Timothy 4:1-3).

1. *The necessity of preaching and teaching the word of God*

The paramount need of today is for God-gifted men who are determined to preach the word of God, without fear or favour, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul's words to Timothy should come as a challenge to each herald of the gospel: '*Preach the word; be instant in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*' (2 Timothy 4:2). Note these directions: '*Preach the word*', not science, philosophy, civic reform, better government, politics, or the latest sensational novel. This calls for persistency, for it is '*in season and out of season*'. It demands courage, for it involves '*reproving and rebuking*'. It implies earnestness, for there is to be longsuffering exhortation. It demands watchfulness, for he is urged to '*watch*'. It requires patience, for endurance is one of the qualifications. It suggests *zeal*, for he is to 'do the work of an evangelist'. It demands *faithfulness*, for he is to 'make full proof of his ministry'.

2. *The qualities of an effective sermon*

It should be full of the Holy Spirit. It should be delivered in dependence on Him, and in His power. It should be full of the word of God, which alone gives it authority to an audience. It should be full of Christ, for He is the Centre and Essence of the message, for '*we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord*' (2 Corinthians 4:5). It should be full of earnestness, for eternal issues are at stake. It should be full of love, both for Christ and the souls to whom we preach.

3. *The seven cardinal truths of the gospel*

It should be the aim of a preacher, each time he presents the gospel, to set forth at least seven great truths.

I. *The need of the Gospel, or ruin by the fall.* This is anything but popular, but it is essential to proclaim it if the need of the sinner is to be brought home to him in convicting power. The truth of the total depravity of man is all too little heard from the pulpits of today. By '*total depravity*' is meant man's total incapacity to comprehend divine truth apart from a revelation from God Himself. Man's need as a guilty, lost, helpless, hopeless and hell-deserving sinner needs to be preached with no uncertain sound (Romans 3:10-23; 5:12; Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:18; Colossians 1:21; Romans 8:5-8; Isaiah 53:6; 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4; Luke 19:10; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:11-15).

II. *The provision of the Gospel, or redemption through the precious blood of Christ.* This comes as good news to the convicted sinner. The preacher must make much of Christ's Deity; His virgin birth; His infinite grace; His vicarious and substitutionary sacrifice, by which all the

work essential to salvation of the sinner was accomplished at Calvary; His victorious resurrection, ascension and present ministry in heaven and His Second Coming.

- III. *The command of the gospel, or repentance toward God.*** This is essential; Christ insisted on it (Luke 13:3). God commands it (Acts 17:30). Paul preached it (Acts 20:21). Repentance is a change of mind which produces a change of attitude and results in a change of action.
- IV. *The condition of the gospel, or reception of Christ as Saviour, and confession of Him as Lord of the life.*** This is the great end of the gospel. The preacher should so proclaim, prove, portray and persuade that the convicted repentant sinner will trust and own the Saviour (Romans 10:9; Matthew 11:28; John 10:9; 1:12; Romans 1:5; Ephesians 1:13; 2 Timothy 1:12).
- V. *The result of the gospel, or regeneration by the Holy Spirit.*** The preacher must be clear as to this. No person can start a new life until he has a new life to start with. The Spirit of God provides this by His indwelling presence, and the imparting of a new and Divine nature (2 Peter 1:4; Ephesians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; Galatians 5:22-26; Ephesians 1:19, 20).
- VI. *The solemnity of the gospel, or the responsibility of the hearer.*** This needs to be driven home. God will hold each hearer responsible for his treatment of the gospel message (see John 12:47, 48; Mark 16:15; John 3:36).
- VII. *The penalty of rejecting the gospel, or the eternal retribution upon the Christ rejecter.*** Care must be taken not to charge God with vindictiveness in this matter. There should be tears in the heart, if not in the eyes, when this solemn reality is proclaimed. This eternal retribution is factual (see Matthew 11:19-24; 12:36, 37; Luke 16:19-31; Mark 9:43-48; Matthew 25:41; John 5:36). It is eternal. The same word, used to describe the duration of the blessed in heaven, is used of the duration of punishment on the wicked.

6. He should watch for results

1. *God has promised them (Isaiah 55:11; Psalm 126:6).*

2. *Only God can give them*

The preacher must ever remember that: '*Salvation is of the Lord*' (John 2:9; Zechariah 4:6). '*Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it*' (Psalm 127:1). The preacher is shut up to God in this matter. His sole task is to preach the gospel in the power of the Spirit, and then leave the results with God.

3. *He must be aware of creating results*

Professional evangelism, with its insatiable appetite for 'results', as distinct from 'fruit' from God, has been responsible for the manufacturing of countless thousands of mere empty professions of salvation. These have 'held up their hands for prayer'; or 'come forward to the altar'; or 'made a decision'; or 'signed a card'; or 'given the evangelist their hand'. But these, in many cases, have never been convicted of sin and brought into living contact with the Son of God, 'Whom to know is eternal life? These professional evangelists attempt to extract a *maximum* of reaping from a *minimum* of sowing. Too often, there is an ounce of gospel followed by a ton of appeal. Frequently, the so-called 'invitation' lasts longer than the address.

4. *The preacher should expect results*

Each preacher should therefore be on the look-out for any anxious inquirer, and ready to do personal work with any interested soul. He should invite any who are concerned to stay behind for further conversation, and have a room set apart where he can quietly deal with anxious souls. Moreover, he should seek to do a thorough work with these souls. He must anchor them to the

word of God for their assurance of salvation once they have trusted Christ as their personal Saviour and confessed Him as their Lord.

May these simple studies in homiletics be used of the Lord to better fit each student for the great task of preaching the gospel and teaching the word of God. It is a lifetime task, and one in which the preacher may experience the conscious sense of the presence of the One who not only commanded His people to '*preach the word*', but who also promised:

'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age'

(Matthew 28:19, 20)

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