



DR. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

The Importance of Sermon Preparation

The Best Possible Preparation

In chapter 4, Iain Murray shows Dr. Lloyd-Jones at work preparing his sermons. He was convinced that *"the Spirit generally uses a man's best preparation."* Basic to his sermon preparation were his outlines, or "skeletons." If in reading the Scriptures a particular verse stood out, struck and arrested him, he would stop, listen, speak to it, then in his mind work out a skeleton for a sermon and put it down on a scribbling-pad. From there on his mind would be constantly turning on this one idea. While travelling by train, he would work on the outline. If in the morning, while shaving and dressing, thoughts occurred strongly to him, he would go to his study and put these down. He regarded a skeleton as the hardest part of sermon preparation. Although *"further meditation and writing would fill out the main thoughts,"* the skeleton contained *"the real substance of what he meant to say, and what his hearers would carry away"* (p.87).

Next, he would read the Puritans, the practical and experiential preachers, who had great pastoral interest in and care for the people. Reading them would not only give him knowledge and information, but affect him personally. *"Don't read to get preaching material; reading is first to feed the preacher, and to make him think originally"* (p.106). In his *Preaching and Preachers* (pp.173-175), he refers to Richard Sibbes who was balm to his soul at a period in his life when he was overworked and subject to onslaughts of the devil. His books, *The Bruised Reed* and *The Soul's Conflict* quieted, soothed, comforted, encouraged and healed him.

Murray supplies three reasons for the importance of the practice of skeleton preparation.

1. This preparation can be done at any time and in any place.
2. A clear skeleton is easily memorized and becomes a helpful outline for a sermon which the preacher knows by heart.
3. A logical outline enhances the simplicity of preaching.

The whole sermon is to be shaped and structured according to a few leading ideas which are logically connected and then carried to a very clear conclusion. Murray gives various examples of M. Lloyd-Jones' sermon skeletons (pp.90-92).

Sermons That Inspire

Chapter 5 contains Murray's notes of a memorable address given by Dr. Lloyd-Jones as chairman of the Westminster Fellowship of Ministers on October 9, 1968. Due to illness (from which he had recovered following surgery), Dr. Lloyd-Jones had not preached at all for six months but instead had been a listener for four months. As a listener, his general impression was that for people, church services tended to be terribly depressing. To him, the general feeling of those who did go to church was that they went out of habit and that the minister, sensing this, thought that he must be short. Thus people came together in order to depart.

Dr. M. Lloyd-Jones considered it a privilege to be a listener, desiring for his soul to sense the presence God and to worship Him. As a listener he regarded the greatest danger to be that of professionalism which is characterized by a well-prepared, properly structured, and professionally delivered sermon, but without any fire. Consequently, listeners were not set on fire either. He heard

a sermon on Galatians 3:1, *“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?”* The minister spoke much about “bewitching,” and focused on things that could and did side-track the congregation. But he left out the highlight of the text – Jesus Christ evidently set forth and crucified among us. That is what he should have focused on. There is no hope of attracting outsiders while those inside the church are as they are (pp.101, 102).

Labouring to Have a Message

“What is wrong with us?” he asked. He answered: *“Our approach is wrong.”* The liberals *“start with what people are interested in.”* For us the *“danger is to forget people altogether. Our ideas, and the results of our preaching, suggest we have not thought about the people at all. We are too objective.”* At one time evangelical preaching was too subjective; now it has become too objective. This constitutes *“a mechanical approach.”*

While in favour of expository preaching and presenting a series of sermons, Lloyd-Jones recognized that it could be done inappropriately, i.e. not taking into account the condition of the hearers. As a result, ministers may treat a passage excellently, but fail to present a message to his listeners. When expository preaching becomes a running commentary, it is no longer a sermon. What is the difference? In addition to its form, a sermon should also have an application. The concern of a preacher should be firstly to have a message and secondly to put it into the best possible form for delivery. This was the glory of the preaching of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. It had form, thrust, and impact of message (p.103). It was the glory of the preaching of Robert M'Cheyne. He had the burden of his people on his soul. He came from God with a message (p.104).

Fire in the Pulpit

Assessing the whole situation, Lloyd-Jones emphasized that the ministers of the Word are to preach what is most profitable for the people. If they preach without moving the people, they fail. They must not merely present *“excellent lectures on doctrine.”* Neither may they take it for granted that those sitting under their preaching are already enjoying the Christian life and are able to convict others. Ministers of the Word must start with themselves. Do they know anything of this fire, and, if not, what are they doing in the pulpit?

Looking back over his own preaching, Lloyd-Jones stated that one defect in his own preaching was that at times it had been too demanding in terms of content. The danger lay in preaching that addresses the mind but not the whole person. *“We are to be like a mother feeding her child: she studies both the food and the amount. There is nobody hopeless; all can grasp doctrines. But we have to cook it well, and make it as attractive as we can.”* We are to *“use history and anecdotes as illustrations”* (p.105).

The burden of the sermon also has to involve the minister's entire personality. A medical specialist once said to Dr. Lloyd-Jones that he was puzzled that unconverted people could evidently enjoy his preaching. Lloyd-Jones himself was not puzzled: *“They are attracted by the presentation, and that should be attractive (as Whitefield's preaching was to Benjamin Franklin). Let us present the sermon the best we can – the best language, the best of everything. We have ... the curious notion. It's the doctrine that matters, and ignore this. With the message we have, we may not be cold, lifeless, and dull”* (p.106).

Dr. Lloyd-Jones also said: *“I am also troubled about our praying, and what passes as prayer. Prayer should not be a confession of faith – a recital of doctrine; that is spiritual poverty. No, in prayer, we are to assume all this doctrine”* (p.105).

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