

## Chapter Eleven

### The Personal-Delivery Element of His Preaching

The delivery of Jesus as a preacher should be studied with the same guiding principles in mind that determine excellence in other public speakers. Style in delivery forms the expression of the man as truly as does style in composition. The frequently quoted truths are here applicable: Buffon, "The style is the man"; Landor, "Language is a part of a man's character"; Lessing, "Every man should have his own style as he has his own nose." The personal-delivery element largely makes or mars the effectiveness of the discourse.

In this regard Jesus was not an exception, since he purposed to use oral discourse as the method of his ministry; he could have written books. However important and spiritual the material of preaching may be, even the Master Preacher could not afford to neglect the externals of method in the presentation. Genius has regard for details. Jesus harmonized his materials and methods. His delivery was graciously effective.

#### I. Jesus' Personal Appearance

1. Dress.—Carlyle has emphasized the fact that clothes do not determine a man's value to society. The Master had already declared that life could not be estimated in terms of meat and raiment. But the homiletical force of dress, care for the body, and general appearance should have consideration even in this study of Jesus. The history of the drama teaches the lesson of the place occupied by externals in popular appreciation; costume and stage adornments help to make the drama effective in delivery.

The present customs of the Palestinian Jew aid the effort to recast the far-away New Testament habits, since the Orient has changed but little with the centuries. Jesus followed the manners of his people in matters of dress. His family belonged to the middle class of society whose toil furnished them life's needs. He himself was a carpenter, a workingman, a son of labor. His dress would then consist of the shirt, or coat, which was worn next to the skin and was made with short sleeves and long body reaching below the knees. Around the waist the girdle of cloth or leather was wound, the shirt therewith being looped to form a flowing bosom, which might serve for a pocket. Then the cloak was thrown over the left shoulder and brought under the right arm to be fastened. (Editor's note: might it not have been reversed for those left-handed?) The materials for these garments would vary according to the wealth of the person, the workingman wearing substantial but not costly cloth. White goods were worn mostly, the colored garments belonging more to the gala days and to the richer classes.

The head was covered with the turban, which might be varied in shape, but which almost invariably protected the back of the neck from the scorching sun. Jesus probably conformed to this general practice and covered his head, though the

artists of all centuries have almost without exception painted him with head uncovered. Leather or wooden sandals were worn, but they rarely served for more than a protection for the soles of the feet; they were fastened by strings passed over the toes or around the ankles. The Gospels leave us to conclusions drawn from the general custom, since they do not describe Jesus' attire. The reference to the seamless garment was to his inner coat or shirt.

2. Likeness.—Christian art does not contribute an authentic portrait of Jesus. His immediate followers did not seem to feel the need for such portrayal either through words or sketches, and whatever traditions may have been current about his looks were lost; the early efforts to present Jesus were not true to life. The art of the first centuries, when Biblical subjects were attempted, was satisfied to present an imaginary image of Jesus, this being characteristic of both the groups with Jesus in them and the individual sketches of him.

The lack of an absolutely reliable likeness of Jesus is partially supplied by the wonderful wealth of artistic conception of his face and form. The history of Christian art discloses several types of the portraits of Jesus. The first type gave the face and form of a beardless youth, the artists giving their own conception of what Jesus should have been, attempts at accurate portrayal being far from the motive. This type of picture prevailed in the third and fourth centuries and could be found in the Catacombs, on sarcophagi, in mosaics of various kinds, and in other forms of art. Then came the type of the robust man with bearded face; this type belongs to the fourth and fifth centuries, gradually displacing the former type. Then followed the Byzantine type in the Roman mosaics of the fifth and sixth centuries, presenting Jesus under the growing ascetic idea of a man with a mature face, beard and long hair, deep-set eyes and hard features. Modern art represents him in ideal beauty and perfection but without attempting to reproduce the original likeness. Here belong the masters Fra Angelico, Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo, Titian and Rubens. (Editor's note: God may appear austere and still have a loving nature.)

In the early centuries the question of Jesus' likeness created two contending parties, each of which claimed the true ideal. Justin Martyr in the earliest record preserved spoke of Jesus as being "without beauty," finding justification for this opinion in certain Old Testament passages. Somewhat later Clement of Alexandria expressed the opinion that Jesus must have been "unlovely in the flesh." The brilliant Tertullian advanced the extreme view that Jesus was "not even in his aspect comely." This general opinion of the unattractiveness of Jesus was based upon a narrow and literal interpretation of the prophetic forecast: "he has no form nor comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him"—Isaiah 53:2. (Editor's note: as this Scripture applies to verses that are thought to be regarding the Crucifixion, it is easy to see where the beaten man would have his viewers hiding faces from him. Beginning with Caiaphas the high priest, early that morning, Jesus had begun to have his face hit by the accusers and then on through the day by Romans. But Jesus is the *Son of David*, and that king when a youth is described in I Samuel 16:12, "He was red cheeked, fair of face, and pleasant of bearing and conduct." The Father may have shaped the features of Jesus in the womb to be somewhat as his mother Mary who it was,

after all, that he had his genealogic descent through down from David.) Among this group of scholars also belonged Basil and Cyril of Alexandria. The other side of the question contended for the personal beauty of Jesus, but did not draw definite portraits, declaring him to be "fairer than the sons of men." Holding this view were Jerome, Augustine, and Chrysostom.

It seems best to admit that we can not restore the original picture of Jesus. But it is not presumption to suppose that his face reflected the nobility of his character, which conserved the best in human life and incarnated the divine goodness. While the Gospels do not mention form and feature, they present Jesus as the one to whom men naturally and irresistibly were drawn. In his face must have been mirrored the heart's graces, since the soul ordinarily leaves its character marks upon the countenance. The artists have brought their genius to create an ideal face for Jesus, and yet one does not find complete satisfaction with any one of these; something in one's thought of the Master is always omitted from the canvas. Modern artists have generally painted Jesus with the full beard in conformity with the Jewish custom. Among the Jews long hair was regarded as a disgrace except for the man under the Nazarite vow. The three essential duties of this vow were to abstain from all products of the grape, to refrain from the touch of the dead, and to wear long hair, the vow usually being for a definite period though applicable to life. Jesus certainly did not observe the first two restrictions, and there does not seem sufficient reason for following the artistic habit of thinking of Jesus with long hair. The Gospels do not suggest the complexion of Jesus, and in this regard variety obtains among the writers and artists in their opinions.

## II. Jesus' Homiletical Attitude

1. Posture.—The Oriental preferred the sitting position for the public speaker. Among the many given examples of this custom in the ministry of Jesus may be cited a few cases. He sat to deliver the Sermon on the Mount, the sermon in the Nazareth synagogue, the Table Talks, the conversation with the woman at Jacob's well, the seaside parables, and the talk with Nicodemus.

Another posture for preaching came from Jesus' habit to speak to the open-air congregations. He went through all parts of the Holy Land, giving his best thoughts upon dusty roads or in ripening grain fields; walking or standing he spoke freely his message from the Father.



Postures for prayer

Associated with his formal preaching was Jesus' method of prayer. The custom called for the public prayer to be offered while standing and the private devotions while kneeling or prostrating the body on the face. In Gethsemane "he went

forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed." Several instances are given in the Gospels of his standing for public prayer.

2. Movements.—In this word are to be included those helps to the speaker that come from gestures, general movements of the body, and tones of the voice. The Gospels do not tell anything definitely about the homiletical aspect of the voice of Jesus. However, certain inferences are justly made. The people wondered that he so far departed from the accredited method of the scribes and Pharisees as to teach "as one having authority." This impression of superiority was not alone due to Jesus' depth and dignity of themes but also to the regal splendor of his voice, whose tones bore the conviction of the King, while the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees could not fail to give the voice the hollow ring of the clanging cymbal. (Editor's note: reference can be made to Luke 23:27-31 and as well, John 21:5; both speak to Jesus' ability to communicate in difficult circumstances. The first is his carrying his cross to Calvary after first being beaten and scourged by soldiers; he responds to a woman along the way using a prophetic discourse that takes a full 45 seconds to say aloud—and she heard it and understood, for this event is recorded in Scripture. The second is following Jesus resurrection where approaching the place where his several Disciples fished, he called to them from the shore a distance, it says, of some hundred yards. His voice distinctly carries this distance of an American football field when they hear the Master say: "Have you caught anything, lads, to season your bread with? Cast to the right of the boat, and you will have a catch." They heard him, did as he requested, and made that catch.)

Depth and purity of discourse combined with impressiveness of utterance impelled the officers sent to arrest Jesus to (neglect that task and to) return the report, "Never man so spake." The calm assurance of the worth of his message, the intimate knowledge of human nature and thoughts, the complete self-surrender to his mission of Saviorhood, and the dignity of his sinless life must have lent themselves to the tone of his voice. He spoke loudly enough to be heard by his immediate audiences; the Oriental demand did not reach the modern oratorical duty of addressing immense congregations. In speaking to the great crowds Jesus remained true to his Oriental, conversational style.

The ministry of healing and benediction was so connected with the ministry of word as to call here for brief notice. He took the hand of the beneficiary in the healing of Peter's wife's mother, Jairus' daughter, and the demoniac lad at the foot of the mount after the Transfiguration. He stretched forth his hand to touch the leper, the two blind men, two other blind men at Jericho, the bier of the dead son of the widow of Nain, the woman with the eighteen-year infirmity, the dropsical man, Malchus, the man born blind, and multitudes afflicted in various ways. With his hand he blessed little children brought by many mothers, and at another time a little child. He offered thanks for the meal with hand uplifted in the cases of the feeding of the five thousand, the Memorial Supper, and after his resurrection the meal with his disciples behind barred doors.

These touches of healing and blessing have real homiletical value, since they brought the Preacher nearer the people to be benefitted. He demonstrated his

readiness to help them even though it led him to physical dangers and intimacy with the unfortunates. He was inseparably associated with the people, who would contrast his attitude with that of the Pharisees, who must resort to their baths after contact with the sick, the dead, or even persons of common degrees of culture and social standing. The marvelous Preacher humbled himself to the forms of life of his audience in order that he might reach them with his truths. His gentle touch sent the thrill of hope and companionship into the hearts of those who had been accustomed only to disdain and avoidance on the part of their religious guides. (Editor's note: several times people seeking aid, or thus delivered, felt they could throw themselves at his feet. He was personable and approachable.)

Jesus' movements in preaching included the movement of the eyes and the gestures of the hand. The raised hand was a favorite gesture with Jesus, as with most public speakers of all ages. When his family came to bring him from the crowded house in Capernaum, "he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said." The uplifted hand is attractive, authoritative, and quieting. Jesus used it effectively. In the *spurious* (false, fake) passage about the woman taken in adultery, which is probably a true tradition, he is represented as writing upon the ground.

Four times the Gospels mention that Jesus looked up to heaven and uttered words of command or prayer. Eight times he looked upon certain people for homiletical ends. These movements of the eye were very impressive, the eye being a great aid to the speaker. The eye of Jesus reached the heart, ran through the conscience, and stirred the man to action. With righteous and justifiable anger he often looked upon the crowds, who could not escape his withering censure. The Apostle Peter went forth from the place of Judgment to weep bitter tears of repentance and remorse, because the eye of his accused Master turned to him when the rooster recalled the prophecy of Peter's denial and Jesus' concern for him.

Movements of grief and emotion were made by Jesus. He sighed at signs of unbelief, shuddered at the thought of his own betrayal and crucifixion, and wept at the grave of Lazarus. A large place in the homiletics of Jesus was filled by these movements of his body in harmony with his own emotions and to give proper emphasis to his message. Jesus made all life to contribute to his ministry.

( End of Chapter Eleven – The Personal-Delivery Element of His Preaching )