

Chapter Fourteen

The Gentleness of His Preaching

Gentleness is the mark of the great soul. Harshness and *churlishness* (mean-spirited, surly) indicate the small nature. A few men of cruelty have received honor from men, but they would have reached larger places in the affections if they had cultivated the art of gentleness. The appreciation of this element in the character of Jesus found expression in the apostolic application of the prophecy:

"A bruised reed shall he not break,
And smoking flax shall he not quench,
Till he send forth judgment into victory."

The homiletical appeal of gentleness is made through persuasion, attraction, and the delicate touches of emotion that defy analysis but that may be noticed and felt.

I. The Gentleness of Compassion

1. Masterful interest.—Jesus' interest in men was a master passion. He could not look unmoved upon the struggling masses of men, most of whom were dominated by the task to secure bread. Social reformers have sometimes simulated an interest in the wretchedness of men because it seemed proper to have such feeling in order to help them, but in this regard Jesus did not practice hypocrisy; he was sincere in his attentions to men. He felt constrained by his high vocation to give men the interest commensurate with their needs. His advent into the world had been in response to the world's need for a Savior, and he never forgot his prime purpose. His compassionate interest in the poor oppressed classes was in great contrast to the course of his contemporaries.

This gentleness of compassion, giving direction to his interest in men, attached to all his deeds. His chief duty was to deliver the evangel of his own sacrificial death until his cross should be prepared, but such a ministry correlated so many forces that Jesus could not neglect to enunciate the principles that govern social, civic, and theologic duties. The pulsating life around him stirred him to compassion and service.

2. Heart of sympathy.—The story of his beneficence is often prefixed by "He was moved with compassion." His heart entered into touch with human suffering. His tears mingled with those of the sisters at the tomb of Lazarus; the trembling woman in the crowd felt this gentleness when she touched his garment. He earned his title of "the Man of Sorrows" by his contact with and his ministry to the distressed people whom other leaders neglected. His own pains of Saviorhood supported this title. He walked the common road with men.

3. Sympathy through temptation.—The temptations of Jesus had their homiletical as well as their soteriological values. The three typical temptations after his

baptism were real struggles of the soul, from which came a better contact with the tempted sinner. His own soul had come victoriously forth from battle, and thereby gained the right to speak to each brother in life's conflicts. He put aside the suggestions of evil; he preferred the path of shame and suffering to that of sin and Satan. By the evidence of his own battles he could appeal to his people for the right to *succor* (to assist and support someone undergoing hardship and distress) them. His brave heart, mindful of the force of suggestive evil and conscious of the power to conquer for others as for self, overflowed with love for the tempted soul. The gentleness of compassion and the compassion of gentleness moved him to give himself for men in a ceaseless endeavor to empower them to gain the victory over self and sin.

II. The Gentleness of Related Miracles

1. The loving physician.—The ministry of healing reveals the character of the Preacher as fully as that of words. The Gospels do not record a single case of rejected requests for healing on the part of Jesus. Pressed with the eager crowds, weary with continued service, criticized by foes, misunderstood by friends, and impelled by his inner ethical necessity toward the Cross, Jesus maintained his gentle patience and lovable disposition. His habitual readiness to answer the cry of distress makes more pronounced his reluctance to help the Syrophœnician mother. (Editor's note: keep in mind that the mother supposedly supervised her daughter's associations, and likely was part of that "possession" having occurred.) With tender words he sought to comfort the household of Jairus—"Weep not." Only a divine graciousness fills his miracles.

2. The Lord of nature.—Jesus evidenced his lordship over nature through his nature miracles, but the glory of lordship does not detract from the glory of gentleness. His audiences might have attempted a philosophy of his mastery of the physical forces, had it not been for their commanding interest in his gentle deeds for them; power is forgotten in the presence of love. (Editor's note: the final incident of the entry into Jerusalem, where Jesus rode "the foal" of an ass, specifies that the young animal had not been ridden on previous occasion. Only one gentle such as Jesus could have achieved this as an accomplishment.)

Disturbed over the Temple-tax, the disciple was sent by his resourceful Master to the near by lake for the fish with the required amount. Shepherdless and drifting, weary and hungry, the multitudes found their wants supplied by him whose lordship over nature could make a small lunch multiply into food for thousands and whose gentle heart was touched by their forlornness. The impulsive Peter, perhaps with some desire for prominence in the unusual act, asked that Jesus might bespeak his passage over the waves; when waning faith and fear would bring the apostle beneath the water, the outstretched hand of his Master came to his relief, the crisis and danger, the presumption and lack of faith, not debarring the gentleness of the Master.

The kingdom of God should become love, joy, righteousness, and peace because of the personal sovereignty of the Messiah, whose life of earthly service and whose institution of the kingdom were characteristically gentle and lovable.

III. The Gentleness of Attitude

1. Toward the friendless.—Jesus became the friend of the friendless. The scribes and Pharisees did not cultivate the acquaintance of the poor and sinful classes; it remained to the Master Preacher to give these people the glad tidings of salvation. His critics found great fault because of his attitude toward these dependents and defectives, but Jesus was not deterred from his gentleness.

2. Toward the sinner.—The current formalism of Pharisaism had practically shut out the sinner from the mercy of God. The rights of the sanctuary were for the holy and unsullied, at least in external proprieties. Jesus made special appeals and invitations to the sinner, outcast and condemned, but thereby only intensified his need of the Friend of Sinners. As to the lost sheep, Jesus had come to these; he granted them forgiveness and a new start in life.

The preacher of any age defines his conception of truth and salvation by his attitude toward the sinner. With Jesus this attitude went beyond a simple statement of possible salvation. He entered into their social life that he might give them his religious life. He accomplished this without oppressing them with his holiness and their sinfulness, and, through his purity was a rebuke to them, they could find in it the assurance of his help for their betterment. He bared to them his heart, saying, "Come unto me," and the tired, sinful and struggling soul responded.

IV. The Gentleness of Chivalry

1. The knight of the lowly.—The age of chivalry championed the cause of the downtrodden. It was an era of heroic response to the appeal of the friendless, when the knight went forth in strong armor to do battle for the weak. The gentleness of Jesus exhibited in his preaching this same spirit of chivalry. He was the Knight of the Lowly. He used neither charger nor spear. He was clad with the omnipotence of the Spirit. His weapons were truth and love.

The selfishness of Pharisaism had paralleled the indifference of Roman heathenism in the abandonment of the unfortunate to the miseries of the desert, the wild beast, and starvation. There was no medicinal care for the sick. The leper was shut out from society and commanded to cry his uncleanness at the approach of any person. The insane must often wander in the deserts or seek the company of the shadows of the tombs. The blind must guide their own blind. The demoniac must suffer the misfortune of accidents and the humiliation of the obsession of an evil spirit.

Jesus answered the need of each of these classes. His chivalric spirit could not endure the sight of unaided misfortune. To him flocked the lepers to be healed with his touch of power and compassion; all defectives and dependents recognized in him their knight and rescuer. It mattered not to him that his critics justified their bitterness toward him by these deeds of gentleness. He was not deterred from them. His knighthood flowered in fragrant acts of mercy.

2. The knight of the sinner.—Jesus outraged the sense of rabbinical propriety by his attitude toward the sinner. The current Pharisaism had closed the door of practical salvation to the sinner. The rights of the sanctuary were for the holy, though the

holiness might penetrate no deeper than the external act. Jesus not only invited and accepted sinners' friendship but even ate with them. Such degradation was without precedent among the religious leaders. The woman of the streets found in him a Knight whose errantry would bring her the boon of divine forgiveness and acceptance. His disciples might be called upon to listen to the sharp arraignment of their Master, but Jesus continued his invitations to the outcast sinner whose very sinfulness made such heavy demands upon the heart of this Peerless Preacher.

3. The knight of womanhood.—The modern position of woman in Christendom is due directly to the influence of Jesus. A comparison of her conditions in America and in India will reflect only honor upon the Knight of Womanhood, whose ministry gathered into discipleship these tender and appreciative listeners. He silenced the wondering disciples, just returned from their purchase of food, by his commanding and unspoken right to transgress the customs of the day; the soul of the sinful woman of Samaria was worth saving through the revelation of the water of life; and to do this traditions might be passed by.

Woman did not fill the place of honor and consideration given her today. She was but the slave of her husband, who claimed Mosaic authority to put her aside at his pleasure. The preaching of Jesus elevated her to man's side and fixed a common standard of ethics for both, in this regard differing both from the practical ideals of his age and this, which permits to the man that which would debar the woman from society.

The home at Bethany, the women upon whom miracles were wrought, the tearful and womanly preparations of his body for the tomb, the eager visitors to his open sepulcher—all these testify to the gentle Knight, who willingly braved the censure of his fellow religious workers in order that he might rescue woman from her



serfdom of ignorance, sin, and inferiority. His lance of truth broke his enemies' lances of error and conceit. The rights of the kingdom could not distinguish between the masculine and the feminine.

V. The Gentleness of Firmness

1. The unaltered purpose.—The gentleness of Jesus in his preaching was untied to his firmness. He was practical in his graciousness. His purpose remained unaltered. The enthusiasm of the multitudes, in whom the wonder of miracles overruled every other thought, would have crowned him king. He had come to redeem God's promise that Israel should receive her king, the Messiah. It would

have been easier for him to accept the short path to the throne, but his plan led him through sufferings and death to the crown.

With a gentleness of firmness he stood true to his plan. His disciples tried to persuade him into a different course, the spokesman Simon Peter declaring that such a plan should not become effective. With firmness and decision he said, "Get you behind me, Satan." His brethren failed to understand him and tried to suggest better plans for Jesus, advising him to go to the feast, when Jesus had other duties, and to cease his wonders, which appeared to them the outcome of a disordered mind. Even his mother could not fully comprehend the necessity for the Cross, which came to her as a spear to the heart. His foes did their best to divert his path. But his high purpose called him. He changed neither for friend nor foe.

2. The selective grace.—Gentle firmness tells the needful truth. The accurate diagnosis of the disease must be followed by the story of the end, the love and gentleness of the family physician making his sad duty imperative. Jesus would not fail to warn men against the wrath of God because of sin. The poor man who had come into the supper without the proper garment felt the firmness of the host, but gentleness and foresight had made preparation for all guests. Unused or misused opportunities bring their own punishment. Jesus was too true to his mission as the Savior to permit his tender heart to pass over the firmer demands upon him. His grace was selective, reaching to the need of each occasion.

Jesus was tender but just in his censures. He spoke severely to the self-righteous Pharisees, but his woes had regard as well to the oppressed sinner whom the leaders had shunned. The impenitent man could not secure the blessings of the kingdom. The disciples were slow to learn the lessons of faith: "O you of little faith." But when the approaching Cross had cast its shadow upon their hearts, and they were oppressed with vague fears, his word of cheer was, "Let not your heart be troubled."

The neglectful Simon was reminded of his lack of courtesy in the matter of water for the distinguished guest, but the poor woman with her tears was praised for her humility and thoughtfulness. The treasurer of the apostles was condemned for his commercial spirit, cloaking his desire for theft, while the self-forgetful Mary, conscious only of the coming death of her Lord, received the promise of the eternal memorial of her sacrifice. Praise and censure were justly distributed.

VI. The Gentleness of Speech

1. Tone.—The voice of Jesus contained infinite tenderness. Firmness, authority, and greatness of message did not rob his speech of its gentle tone. The preacher of power knows the secret of the harmony of tone and message. People were drawn irresistibly to Jesus' preaching and were won by the sweet cadences of his voice. The gentle heart of the Son of God and Son of man, yearning for a lost world to be redeemed through his personal sacrifice and desirous to bring to effective notice such preparation for redemption, could not adopt the habitual strident, cruel, repulsive tones of a monarch, careless of men's misfortunes. He was the Preacher, who joined heart and voice for the task of bringing men to accept the truth.

2. Invitation.—Grace of message reflects itself in graciousness in delivery. Invitations are supposed to be winsome. The preaching of Jesus invited men out of despair into hope, out of depressing sorrow into victorious joy, out of bondage and ruin of sin into the freedom and benefits of children of God, and out of the prospect of Hell into the promise of Heaven. His service was not to be grievous and galling, his companionship was to be inspirational and saving, and his rest was to come to every willing and tired heart. His peace would conquer fear and doubt.

“O tender beseechings of Jesus,
How sweetly they fall on the ear!
O gospel of grace and of kindness,
God’s love and compassion brought near!”—D. W. Whittle, *Jonathan*

3. Imagery.—The imagery of gentleness characterized the preaching of Jesus. From the finer sensibilities came his pictures. The parable of the Lost Son yet remains without equal in all literature for tenderness. The motherly hen with her bustling anxiety to protect her loved ones from the approaching storm, the helpless blind trying to minister to their fellows of the dark, the falling sparrow—these indicate imagery of the heart rather than of cold intellectualism. The shepherd cares not for the trouble and danger and rests not until he can bear the lost lamb in his bosom back to the folded flock.



“But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through
Ere he found his sheep that was lost.
Out in the desert he heard its cry—
Sick and helpless, and ready to die,
Sick and helpless, and ready to die.”—Ira Sankey, song: *The Ninety and Nine*

4. Dispelled shadows.—Jesus chased away the shadows from the heart. His gentle speech drew men to him, for they were sure of his help and kindness, and the ages have not marred the gentle voice, fresh with power as of old. His own heart might be breaking with the burden of salvation, but he must be the “light of the world.” The darkness of sin must vanish. Through the gloom of Calvary fell the gladsome sunshine of Heaven’s forgiveness.

(End of Chapter Fourteen – The Gentleness of His Preaching)