

## Chapter Eighteen

### The Power of His Preaching

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Jesus was a preacher with spiritual dynamics. His preaching was in power, insistent for attention, directive for conduct, and creative of character. The pulpit today seeks a dynamic that guarantees the reception of the message and meets the desire of the pew for a man with power. Jesus was thus gifted.

#### I. The Power of Personal Magnetism

1. Accessibility.—Jesus was not a hermit. He did not reserve his ministry to the favored few to whom interviews might be granted for social, civil, or religious considerations. He walked the lowly path of men.

“Where the many toil together, there am I among my own;  
Where the tired workman sleeps, there am I with him alone.”

—Van Dyke, *The Tiling of Felix*

He entered the hut of the poor and the palace of the rich, preached in both synagogues and the Temple, and touched elbows with saint and sinner. He was accessible to all men with their manifold varieties of life and varied calls upon his favor. He was under the public eye almost constantly, seasons for quiet meditation and prayer being occasional and difficult to secure.

Personal magnetism was contributed through this contact with men. Because of this openness of approach to him, the people felt that they shared his life, their burdens could be placed on him, and their frailties and sins known and forgiven. The pressure of the hand, the look of the eye, and the physical nearness condition personal magnetism, since one is rarely moved by the distant person with whom there have been no face-to-face relations. The recluse may win reverence, regard, and even awe, but he will never through his personality attract men to himself. The man among men stirs the affections that bind, quickens the imagination to nobler visions of truth, and incites men to heroic action. Jesus had this dynamic of personal magnetism. The door of his heart was always open to the guest.

2. Graciousness.—The *churl* (an impolite and mean-spirited person) is never magnetic. The man of gracious bearing and considerate deeds has the power to attract men, to mold them to his aims, and to make disciples. Whether or not we can think of Jesus with smiles and laughter, the records show that he was gracious and gentle, friendly and magnetic.

Sent of the Father to teach men the way of goodness, and commissioned to a personal evangelism of love and sacrifice, Jesus put into his ministry the attractive graciousness that was prophetic of his later ability to draw all men to himself. He gave attention to every occasion with a compassionate regard for the needy ones who might come at inappropriate times and bring work to the tired Preacher. His evangel of salvation, mediated through his own life as a ransom for sin, was

declared with magnetism that gave it power to reach the hearts of men while it indicated the greatness of the Preacher.

3. The personal equation.—The personal equation may not be definitely defined, but it lies behind preaching. The intangible, molding, spiritual, and personal element of character must be added to any formal analysis of magnetism. What the preacher is will determine the power of his ministry. The power of personality is stronger and more enduring than that of word or deed. The memory may slip its hold upon these externals, but the life will continue its influence. Accessibility and graciousness must be accompanied by the personal equation to secure magnetism. In many ways this third is the most important trait. Jesus had the dynamic soul. He was essentially magnetic. He was the heart's magnetic pole.

## II. The Power of Delivery

1. Voice.—Jesus' voice of authority contributed to his power. His delivery was confident and authoritative, because in his inner life there were no misgivings about doctrine and law convictions. His vocation required his voice of power. Apology and conciliation do not create the impression of power. In his delivery Jesus compelled notice even by his tone.

2. Courage.—The Man of Galilee was a man of courage. His correct judgment of men and crises gave him unerring insight into dangers which he could avert or meet while his enemies sought to entrap him in word or deed. His woes against entrenched wickedness and Pharisaical hypocrisy showed his fearlessness. He was not abashed at the notice of the governor, who would *fain* (gladly) have killed him. To Herod he sent this message: "Go and say to that fox, Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I am perfected."

He would not soften his call for personal repentance and piety, by which men might appropriate the benefits of the Messianic kingdom, even though this high ideal of religion might enrage the religious formalists and lead them to attempt to create popular opposition to himself. Courageous and careless of personal dangers, he delivered his Father's message. If his truths attacked the social and religious vices of his day, the duty of readjustment should be for the offended classes, since he could not alter his criticisms. There is no intimation in the Gospels that he ever shrank from the bitter hatred and influential power of his foes, whose wrath could go so far as to cause them to gnash their teeth and to plot violence. His undaunted soul faced them with calmness, without retraction of statements, and without a lowered eye.

The same courage that stood before his enemies turned to his disciples and friends to accuse them of false, temporal views of the kingdom. He charged his apostolate with narrowness and lack of faith; he condemned their unseemly strife for preeminence in the coming kingdom, and indicated defects and lapses in service even in his favorites. His was the power of a courageous delivery. The coward can have but an incidental control over an audience. Men delight to respond to the oratory of a great soul, in his own life victorious and manly.

3. Directness.—This is a valuable element of delivery. Jesus preferred the short way to the heart; he would not ramble. His method of direct application was intended to reach the audience and differed materially from that of his contemporaries, who lacked in originality and immediateness. The intense enmity, the penitent confessions, and the joyful fellowship of new converts testified variously to the power of Jesus' direct appeal. He distributed to each individual his portion. Such preaching could not escape power and efficiency.

### III. The Power of Adaption

1. To opportunity.—The orator's opportunity came to Jesus naturally. He knew when and what to speak. The preacher must seek the right moment for his message. The book may await the mood of the reader, but the public speaker must discern his opportunity, which may pass quickly and beyond recall. He must read the signs of the times.

Jesus adapted himself to the shifting occasions. A storm could furnish him the time to reprove his faithless disciples; criticism of himself for keeping company with sinners gave him opportunity to deliver the three parables that show the value of even one lost man; he could condemn the avarice of the traitorous treasurer of the apostles while giving the prophecy of Mary's endless memorial for her gift of precious ointment. His words of warning, rebukes, promises, and instruction in discipleship were always appropriate. There was never discord between occasion and his plans. He did not misplace his energy.

2. To supreme needs.—The soul's supreme needs were fitly met by Jesus' preaching. He adapted his ministry to the real issues of life. The primacy of the spiritual life was declared in his command, "Seek first the kingdom of God." He could easily have suggested an economic program, have become a social reformer upon lines of external improvement in environments, have preached a crusade against tyranny in government, and have set himself up as the judge to settle private disputes; but, however worthy these might have been, he preferred to limit his course to a ministry to the supreme needs of men, which are resident not in outward conditions, civil welfare, or legal morality, but in spiritual obedience to the sovereignty of God in each act and thought of the inner life. He could move men to discipleship upon this centralizing theme and purpose.

The balances would not evenly stand with a lost soul and the whole world in either side. Jesus chose the greater value and preached his gospel of individual worth and salvation. His adaption was accurate, hence powerful.

3. To variety of characters.—The audiences of Jesus gave him a great variety of characters, increasing thereby the chance for failure to adapt the preaching to the individual needs. All sorts and conditions of men gathered to hear him. The fundamentals of nature obtain in all people, but the variety of individual expression is almost proportionate to the number of people. But Jesus knew how to meet each case upon its own merits. The proud and impenitent, the poor in spirit and worldly goods, the penitent sinner, and the earnest disciple all grouped around Jesus for his direction. Errors of judgment and treatment did not mar his ministry. He did not lose power through mistakes.

#### IV. The Power of Kingship

1. Messianic consciousness.—Behind his public ministry lay the Kingship of Jesus. He knew himself to be the promised Messiah. This Messianic consciousness was personal and definite, giving form and power to his plans of work. The early periods of his ministry did not show any wavering of this idea, though he did not give the same prominence to his Messianic vocation then as later.

His incarnation as the Son of God and the Son of man gave him this absolute assurance of his Messiahship, denials of which are made by scholars who seek to eliminate the miraculous from the life and work of Jesus. His own heart was filled with the idea of reigning over the hearts of men as their King, not with hopes of personal glory alone but of help toward their salvation. Jesus' preaching reflected this inner confidence that he only among men had the right to indicate the duty of all others.

2. Messianic attestation.—Every credential to Jesus' ministry increased his power. Confirmation of his Messiahship brought enlarged influence over men. God gave abundant evidence of his approval to his Anointed through the heavenly voice at the baptism, the transfiguration, the sinless character, the miracles, and the other proofs of Jesus' divinity. The attested Messiah became the powerful Preacher.

3. Messianic recognition.—The threefold gift of Kingship—the Messianic consciousness, the Messianic attestation, and the Messianic recognition—gave to the preaching of Jesus the power of complete authority. As recognition of his Messiahship grew his power enlarged, for his followers became enthusiastic in telling others the glad tidings.

#### V. The Power of Miracles

1. Physico-spiritual.—The power of the miracles of Jesus was physico-spiritual. From him went forth energy to heal the sick, the cure being effective without the special attention of Jesus, as in the case of the woman with the issue of blood. Both physical and spiritual infirmities felt his power, which may not be fully analyzed, but which may be observed in its results. The word dynamics is a good designation of his miracles. Therapeutics have furnished methods, but the final reasons for miracle power are yet to be discovered.

2. Homiletical.—Miracles afforded Jesus the opportunity to speak with more power. Men were attracted to him and impressed by this extraordinary accessory of preaching. The worker of miracles appeared larger and more competent to direct thought than a preacher without this gift. All nature had given him obedience, and human nature easily fell under the same spell of this dynamic personality.

#### VI. The Power of Thought

1. Depth.—Jesus was a profound thinker. Eternal in its significance, in content revealing the needs of life, and burdened with the salvation of a lost world, the thought of Jesus dealt in fundamentals of thought and reached depths which the human mind could not fathom. He did not deal in trivial and surface truths. He uncovered to the earnest thinker the spiritual verities that lie deep down in the fulness of divine wisdom. Only a thoughtful message could hold the attention of

the scholars of all times. Jesus is yet the subject of investigation, and his words have not lost their charm and power.

2. Penetration.—The thought of Jesus penetrated the superficialities and religious cant of his day and came to the real issues of life. Beneath the cold formalism and burdensome ceremonialism his message reached to vivify the heart and life. There was no condition of sin and suffering that he could not touch, no anguish that he could not relieve, no despair that he could not turn to hope, and no callous heart that he could not soften.

3. Completeness.—The message of Jesus was complete, revisions and additions being needless. His thought was symmetrical and full. All departments of human knowledge did not enter his plan, but upon religion he gave all the light that men would need in his time. He laid the foundation for a larger revelation when men should be able to receive it, after his own ministry should open their minds to God's new method of worship. Speaking to the basal experiences of men and knowing their natures, Jesus delivered a comprehensive and final message. His principles for religious worship and service may apply to every possible occasion known to men.

## VII. The Power of the Holy Spirit

1. Birth of Jesus.—The birth of Jesus was mediated through the Holy Spirit. The reverent student must confess to great mystery here and should appreciate the holy reticence with which the Gospels record the event. The angel Gabriel gave the wondering Mary this message: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God." Another brief record is: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Spirit."

The doctrine of the Virgin Birth is here declared. Matthew and Luke evidently intended to teach that the birth of Jesus was due to the power of the Holy Spirit, unmediated by the ordinary processes of fatherhood. Questions of physiology and psychology relative to this event have not had satisfactory statement, nor does the present widespread discussion of the doctrine give indication of their final settlement. Acceptance of the mystery and the miracle seems the better course. The method of the event, the limitations of deity, and the exaltation of womanhood may call for continued wonder, but these will not hinder belief in the real and engaging fact that Jesus was the Son of God in a way that no other person has been or could be. The Holy Spirit entered into such relations with the Virgin Mary as to exert a physical, spiritual, and formative force over the inception of the earthly life of Jesus.

This power of the Holy Spirit in his birth gave to Jesus' preaching the element of strength and divinity. Since fatherhood transmits nature and partial likeness even in earthly generation, Jesus bore the impress of the character of the Spirit of God, whose personal effects would linger beyond the conception and prenatal life of the Son and stretch out to the end of his days. Child of the generating Spirit of God,

Jesus translated his Sonship into terms of human salvation and brotherhood. His homiletics received the direction of his person, fathered and characterized by the Spirit for his earthly life.

2. Experience of Jesus.—In word and symbol John the Baptist testified concerning the Mighty One who should be so great that he himself would not be worthy to unloose his sandals: "He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire." "The same is he that baptizes in the Holy Spirit." The ministry of Jesus was to give direction to the Spirit's operations. The baptism of the Holy Spirit, whatever its nature and significance might be to Christian experience, would be under the command of Jesus, whose power lay partly, then, in his right and ability to baptize in the Spirit.

The Spirit's descent upon Jesus at his baptism had a real value in his preaching. The Father attested his favor toward the Son in this way. If the public did not behold this symbol of the Spirit, Jesus and John the Baptist saw and heard, and through them the public learned the story. Care must be had not to rob this event of its meaning and help in the experience of the Son, conscious of his Sonship but needing the divine touch and assurance. Knowing this descent upon Jesus, the people would be impressed with his power.

The descent of the Spirit operated in another way to the advantage of Jesus. His incarnation of the eternal Word brought him into certain human limitations. The philosophy of the incarnation has not yet been adequately discovered and described. Efforts to resolve his unified experiences into human and divine facts fail of a true appreciation of his wonderful life. His life entered fully into fellowship with men and so could appropriate the full fellowship of the Spirit. It may not be confidently asserted what, if any, change occurred in his Messianic consciousness with this coming of the Spirit. At the beginning of his public life and work, and in such spectacular form, this descent of the Spirit could not mean less than the assurance to the Son that his ministry would have the constant and dynamic presence of the Spirit. The prophet Isaiah beheld such relations.

The leadership of the Spirit was given completely to Jesus. This leadership is significantly stressed in reference to his temptations just after his baptism; Matthew and Luke use the word "led," while Mark has "drove." Luke further adds that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit." At Aenon John the Baptist testified that God "gives not the Spirit by measure." After the imprisonment of the Forerunner "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee."

These passages show that Jesus fully felt the leadership of the Spirit, who would signify duty, assure success, cheer in disappointment, and establish Jesus' work. He could not have been more fully dowered and empowered for his mission and ministry. He reached to the limit of the Spirit's place in a life, though that life be more than human. The Spirit inspired the thought of Jesus, enlightened the minds of his auditors, and brought to fruition in a full harvest his seeds of truth.

Through the Spirit Jesus cast out demons. When charged with being in league with the prince of demons, Jesus replied: "But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you." The cure of the demoniacs was but a

special feature of his miracle ministry. It would be a just inference to consider that all his miracles were performed through the power of the Spirit.

The Seventy returned to Jesus with their wonderful story of success; they were happy that they had gone far beyond their hopes. Jesus received them graciously. "In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit." Here is a glimpse into his inner life, a heart-throb. The inner life of Jesus, of which joy is typical, felt the power of the Spirit, and so manifested itself in his preaching.

3. Words of Jesus.—The Holy Spirit further indicated his power in the life of Jesus in his words. The Preacher came to offer men the privilege of a new life, whose inception should be illustrated by the ordinary process of life in beginning. In his conversation with Nicodemus and again in the discourse at the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus referred to this new start in spiritual destiny as due to the Spirit. Jesus recognized that his purposes of salvation would be accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit as he might bring home to the individual the preached words.

Twice the Jew charged Jesus with being in league with Beelzebub, Jesus responding with the remark about blasphemy against the Spirit: "Whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come." Such was his estimate of honor that belonged to the Spirit.

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to his disciples when they should be true to their office as witnesses and should be compelled to appear before councils and tribunals. He should be the Comforter and Guide for all the ages to those who would be led into the truth. Great power attached to this promise, for his followers would be filled with comfort and joy in the knowledge that their Preacher had the right so to promise. The dark days of the future would not disquiet them. Jesus had the full empowerment of the Spirit for his preaching.

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