

## Chapter Twenty-three

### The Progress of Method in His Preaching

The progress of method may be observed in the preaching of Jesus. He did not depend upon accidents to give form and method to his ministry. Order and development marked his plans. It did not appear needful to him to sketch his plans for his disciples or the people, but in his own mind the way to be followed was clear even from the beginning of his public work.

This study of progress in methods takes up only incidentally the material of his preaching. Others' speculation as to his method might be interesting but unprofitable; we base our study upon the Gospels as faithful records of the material and methods of Jesus' ministry. A larger array of facts would have given a larger but not truer perspective. The design of his incarnation shaped his plans. The disciples were willing to follow Jesus without insight into the other end of the journey. Jesus knew his way; he was not lost in the wilderness of duties. His goal must be reached though many trials should be the portion of Preacher and disciples.

#### I. Method of Homiletical Presentation

1. Places.—The preaching of Jesus reached the population of both city and rural districts. It has been estimated that there were at least 250 villages in Galilee in his time. These represent the country life, since the modern farm life was not then known. Neither city nor country could lay exclusive claim to his work. The data are not sufficient to permit a comparison of his preaching with regard to the various individual places.

A general plan, however, may be discovered. Jesus' general plan called for the evangelization first of the northern regions of Palestine, with occasional visits to the southern parts. Galilee received the largest attention from him, and from here he made journeys into the *contiguous* (connected or border) sections. Toward the close of his ministry Jesus began to work toward Jerusalem that he might surrender his life in the city of the prophets.

The reason for this remaining so largely away from Judea and especially Jerusalem can easily be found in the extreme antagonism that the religious leaders had for Jesus; it was the part of wisdom to shun the places in which they were most influential, a crisis and a possible calamity thus being avoided. Jesus expected to become a martyr to the truth, but he desired to fix the time and environments of his sacrifice. His ministry must reach certain people before the end should come. It was during the Passion Week that he delivered more of the recorded discourses in Jerusalem than in all the previous time, the ratio being ten to four. The Holy City was the storm-center of opposition; Jesus kept away except for short occasional visits.

2. Discourse material.—Using the Diagram of Progress of Method (see below), valuable deductions may be made. The columns show the periods of Jesus' ministry and the side numbers indicate the times of occurrence of the various items. The discourse material has two currents, the discourses and the fragmentary sayings. It will be seen that the recorded discourses follow this line of wave: the wave begins in Period I with three in number, rises in Period II to four, then in Period III to ten, and in Period IV falls to five, then reaches its maximum in Period V with twenty-one, and falls again in Period VI to eleven, which is higher than the former rise before the crest. Including the last week in the count, the last seven months of his ministry contained 32 of the 54 discourses. The wave of the fragmentary sayings gives the same general results. The wave begins with seven, repeats it, rises to ten, falls to six, rises to nine, ends with thirteen.

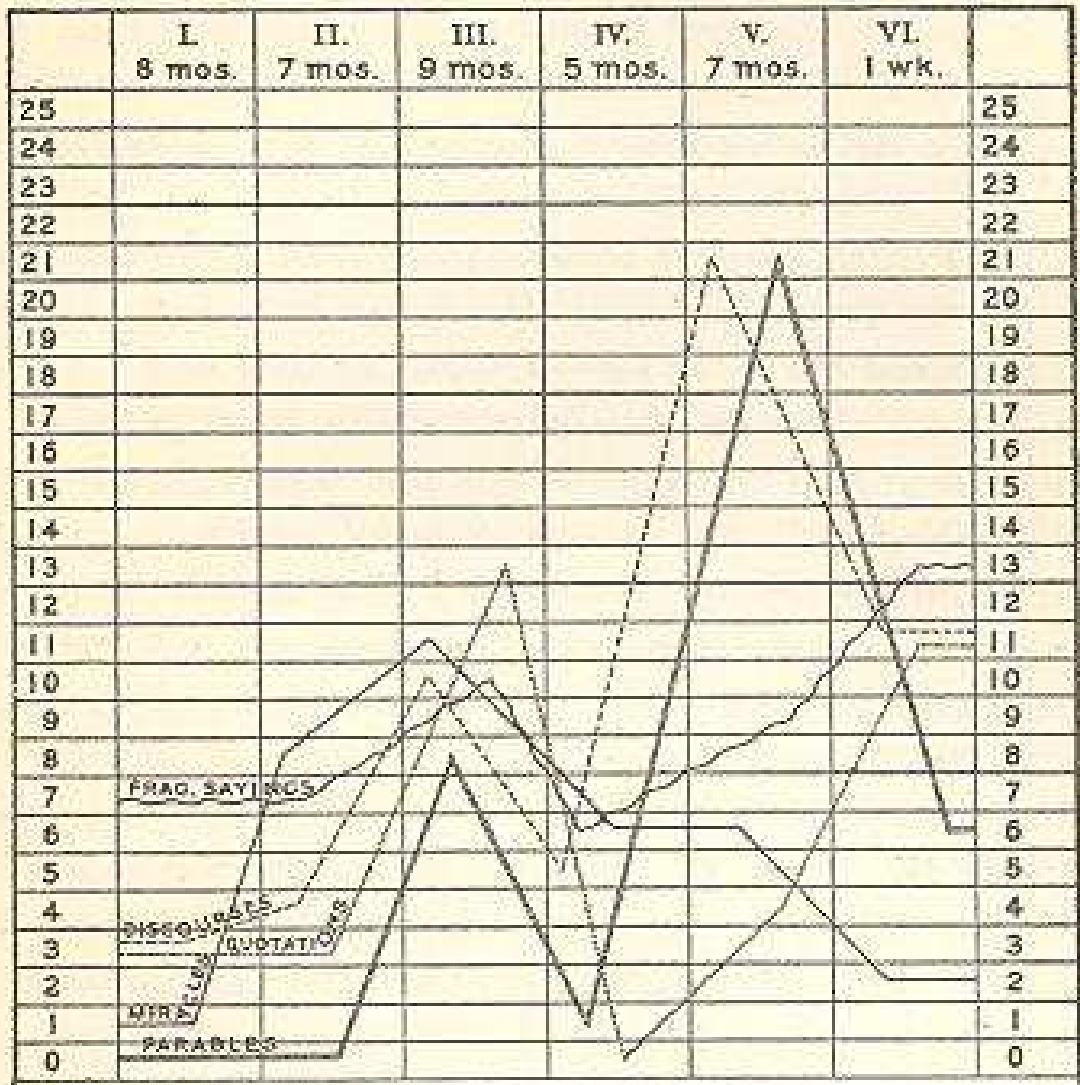
The interpretation of these figures is interesting. For the first 15 months, approximately, the records suggest that the ministry of Jesus was passing through its obscure period. His discourse material for this time would naturally be important, but in comparison with his later deliveries could better be abbreviated. Only seven discourses are recorded for this time. The third period, passed in Galilee, was one of great preaching and activity. After the quiet of the summer of Period IV the Master was extremely busy. His reputation by this time had reached to all parts of the country, his enemies had increased in numbers and hatred, and his following had become great. The disciples had so far appreciated his ministry as to be able to receive more definite instruction regarding the kingdom. With one exception the records give an increasing number of the discourses delivered in each period.

The progress of his message in interest and importance may here be indicated. Special regard would attach to his words, for he had aroused the country; Jesus was moving toward his end and felt the pressure of the shortness of the time to give full preparation to his followers.

3. (Scripture) Quotations.—The wave for the direct quotations from the Old Testament begins with three, repeats it, rises to thirteen, falls to zero, rises to four, ends with eleven. Almost half of the entire list of quotations fall within the third period. One-third of them were used in the Passion Week. These two periods were crises in his ministry, and Jesus turned toward the sacred literature to attest his right to speak upon religion; he dealt with the basis of the current faith. He felt the need to give his disciples the correct view of their sacred writings. About half of the quotations came within the last seven months, including the last week of his life.

4. Parables.—The parable wave runs thus: Periods I and II none, eight in Period III, one in Period IV, 21 in Period V, six in Period VI. The time element in the rise and use of the parable helps to indicate its purpose. It will be seen that no recorded parable occurs for, approximately, the first 15 months of Jesus' ministry. By combining into one Periods V and VI, in time the last seven months, it will be observed that with the exception of one parable in period IV, the entire ministry of parables was embraced in two Periods: III, V-VI. It will further appear that these two periods show the intense opposition from the religious leaders, Period III

## DIAGRAM OF PROGRESS OF METHOD



The ministry of Jesus is divided into the following periods:

- I. From Passover 27 A. D. to December 27 A. D.
- II. From December 27 A. D. to Early Summer 28 A. D.
- III. From Early Summer 28 A. D. to Passover 29 A. D.
- IV. From Passover 29 A. D. to Autumn 29 A. D.
- V. From Autumn 29 A. D. to Spring 30 A. D.
- VI. During Passover 30 A. D.

The Diagram indicates:

1. Discourses.
2. Fragmentary Sayings.
3. Direct Quotations.
4. Parables.
5. Miracles.

giving the opposition as it had so far gained power to show itself and Periods V-VI giving the final culmination and success in the death of Jesus.

The parable, then, in its historical inception came as a polemical expedient. It was not his initial form of preaching. Seven of the recorded discourses are in the periods before that in which the parables begin. His enemies forced Jesus to adopt this form of instruction. If he had openly declared the full import of his message regarding the kingdom of heaven, the leaders would have precipitated his death prematurely, or at least have so largely obstructed his work as to disturb his plans. The parable gave Jesus the opportunity to condemn his enemies, who caught some of his hidden meaning and knew that he criticized them, and to instruct his disciples, who could better appreciate the veiled truths and could seek personal help from the Preacher.

All the parables did not have the immediate polemical occasion for delivery. The pedagogical combined with the polemical purpose to give the parable a permanent place in Jesus' ministry after its first use. During the last seven months of his life Jesus spoke 27 parables of our records, six being in the Last Week. In this period focalized the hatreds and plans of his foes. But the greater Preacher could not put aside his work until his own will ordered the day.

5. Miracles.—The miracle wave runs thus: one in period I, eight in Period II, eleven in Period III, six in Period IV, six in period V, two in Period VI. The miracle was used as an accessory to preaching. Only one miracle is recorded for the first eight months of his ministry. The crest of the wave comes in the third period with eleven in number. Thence there is decline to the end, but, if Periods V and VI be united, there is a slight rise for the last seven months. It is worthy of notice that the greatest number occurred in the period of opposition—III. Six out of the nine general references to his habit of working miracles also fall in this period. Jesus desired to call attention not to his great power of miracles but to himself and his truth for the soul. Miracles were but contributory. The Master Preacher could attract people without this spectacular aid. He preferred that all should turn their hearts to the spiritual side of his ministry.

6. Summary of diagram.—A few important facts of summary may be noticed in the Diagram of the Progress of Method in Jesus' preaching. The ascending order for beginning is this, parables, miracles, quotations and discourses, and fragmentary sayings. In Period II only miracles and discourses make a rise. Parables alone fail to begin with Period I. Period III contains the high rise for all waves but not the highest for all. Miracles and (Scripture) quotations reach here their crest. This was a time of special activity and struggle against enemies. Period IV is the fall for all the waves; Period V is the period of rise for all but miracles, which remain stationary. All waves end in Period VI, as all but parables had begun in Period I. Parables and discourses reach higher than any others. Without exception all the waves end above their origin in Period I; parables end two lower than their origin in Period III.

## II. Method of Pedagogical Presentation

1. From simple to complex.—The method of pedagogical presentation in Jesus' preaching stressed this dogma of modern education. He passed from the simple to the more difficult statements of his message. He observed great care in unfolding his truths, clear and well-defined in his own mind but hard for his followers to grasp. The Sermon on the Mount is called the Manifesto of the Kingdom, giving a summary of its principles. It should be borne in mind that this sermon was delivered more than a year after his ministry had begun and is listed as eight in the recorded discourses. Seven miracles of healing and two nature miracles had been wrought, and three general references to his custom of miracles precede the Sermon.

Jesus was gradual in his teaching. He did not startle and confuse his followers at first by truths that were altogether beyond their *apprehension* (understanding). He led them to a larger receptive ability. There was a gradual development in his preaching. It was after the Sermon on the Mount that many of his disciples complained at his teaching, since the sternness of his ethics called for high and noble living to which they had been unaccustomed.

When Jesus had about completed his work, having filled his public life with intense activity in many ways, he startled his disciples in his Last Discourse with this statement: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth." Jesus began with the simple and led to the complex truths of his purpose to save men. When he had reached the limit of the understanding of the disciples, he transferred their education to the Holy Spirit.

2. Training the disciples.—The task of evangelization of the world through a small company of men required the utmost care in the selection and preparation of these men. Jesus was progressive in his training. He gathered his men from their vocations to a constant companionship with himself and permitted to them public and private instruction in the principles of his ideas of religion. They saw his miracles and the influence he exerted over forces of nature and over men. He added to their knowledge according to their growing capacity to receive further principles. He even sent them out, when they had reached the point of development where they were equal to such work, on a mission of preaching and healing, conferring upon them the grace that empowered his own life.

They could not have carried on his work if he had committed it to them in the first stages of his public life. Old errors were to be replaced by the new truths, confidence in himself as the Savior was to be created, a consuming zeal for inner righteousness should burn away desire for Pharisaism in piety, and his own lowly service should lift their ideal of greatness from the lordly display to the humility of a servant. Jesus needed time to do this training. He was most careful and deliberate. The duties to be entrusted were too vital to admit of hasty preparation. (Note: Philippians 2:5-8 tells us "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, though existing in the form of God, did not consider his equality with God something to cling to, but emptied himself as he took on the form of a servant and became like human beings. So, recognized in looks as a human being, he

humbled himself and lived obediently to the extreme of [early] death; yes, death by the cross"—Berkeley Translation.)

3. Self-manifestation.—The self-manifestation of Jesus was progressive. He did not declare his Messiahship equally clearly and prominently at all times and places. He permitted his early disciples to believe in and to declare his Messiahship. He thus announced himself to the Samaritan woman, and allowed other citizens of Sychar to accept him as such. A little more than a year later the embassy came from John the Baptist, and Jesus sent back a message that implied his Messiahship. Yet later his request for an expression of opinion about himself led to the confession of Peter near *Cæsarea Philippi* (a northernmost city of safe-haven in Palestine), "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus declared that such knowledge had been God's special revelation to Peter.

But these self-manifestations had been made to his disciples. He had not given large public announcement to his Messianic claim except in his preaching of the kingdom. General emphasis of these claims would have caused the leaders to consummate sooner their growing plans for violence against Jesus. They were restrained by fear of the people, whom Jesus had moved to partisanship but whom the leaders might stir up over questions of prejudice and lower ideals of the Messiah.

It was not until his trial that Jesus gave public avowal to his enemies that he was the Messiah. The high priest asked the direct question: "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, 'I am: and you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven'" (Editor's note: a judgment day for the wicked, and *not* the sooner rapture for the kingdom's church). His use of the term 'Son of man' had been a real assertion of his Messiahship, for he put into it his own meaning, which the disciples were appropriating gradually. He waited the opportune time to announce his coming death.

4. Approach to Calvary.—No one but Jesus knew the proper approach to Calvary. He insistently refused to be diverted from his plans. The first year of his ministry was one of comparative obscurity. Only one miracle is recorded for this period. His disciples needed his attention. The second year was one of great favor with the people and growing hatred from the leaders. The subsequent time was filled with intense opposition.

The leaders did not dare to show their severe *enmity* (hostility) at first. At least a year, and probably two years, prior to his death the Jews of Jerusalem had so far increased in hostility to Jesus as to desire and plan his death upon the accusation of blasphemy and desecration of the Sabbath. "The Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath, but also called God his own 'Father', making himself equal with God." Jesus recognized the bearing that such hostility might have upon his work, and remained away from Jerusalem much of the time.

At the Feast of Tabernacles, six months before his death, a plan to seize him miscarried. He was not ready to surrender his life. "They sought therefore to take

him: and no man laid his hand on him, because his hour was not yet come." But when the time had come, he quietly submitted, conscious that his work would succeed and that his death would consummate his mission. The death of Jesus came according to his own adjustment of the time element. His method of approach to Calvary was progressive and personal.

( End of Chapter Twenty-three – The Progress of Method in His Preaching )