

## Chapter Three

### **The Point of Contact in His Preaching**

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The preaching of Jesus was adapted in purpose and method to a social world. Religious truth in new revelations or emphasis should become the instrument of personal benefit in the kingdom of heaven, but the truth should be mediated through one who could enter into fellowship with the sufferings and hopes of men. Isolation from the people would have made Jesus a failure as a preacher. His plans of evangelism led him into all sections of his country. He could accent the worth of the individual because he entered the ordinary relationships of life and touched every degree of culture and social rank. He was gracious in his response to need, whether suggested by individuals, groups, or the crowds. His point of contact illustrates his homiletical genius.

#### I. The Religio-Social Contact

1. Institutional.—Jesus' nationality gave him the initial point of contact in his preaching. He could speak to his own people with the freedom that came from a common inheritance of history and ideals. He listened to the same folklore stories that stirred the imagination of other Hebrew lads, and that had been unified around the name of Jehovah, thereby becoming far superior in purity and conception to the Gentile folklore. The favorite expression of Jesus, "the kingdom of heaven," conserved the best in and added to the Messianic hopes of his nation.

As the heritage of the theocracy, social duties were connected with the religious, for Jehovah had given direction for the Hebrew type of life. Jesus promised to the Twelve the privilege of sitting upon twelve thrones in judgment over the tribes of Israel. His patriotic heart burst forth in grief that Jerusalem should miss her day of opportunity.

He had a reverence for the Law of Moses, though he gave to it a new interpretation and fulfillment. He kept the national feasts, attending in Jerusalem the Passover, the Feast of the Tabernacles, and the Feast of Dedication. He preserved a deep regard for the Hebrew Scriptures and was a regular attendant upon the services of the Temple and the synagogues.

His ministry was limited almost entirely to his own people, the Elect Nation. He did not hesitate, however, to criticize the false practices that had become current. His treatment of the Syrophenician woman indicated this national point of contact: "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Yet he was willing to conquer race prejudice in order to reward a marvelous faith. The record of his failure to convert all Israel also suggests this contact: "He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not."

His humble home at Nazareth brought him into touch with the middle class of society, while his sympathetic heart led him to discover the condition of the poor

and unfortunate, and his royal ancestry justified an interest in those in the higher walks of life. His Hebrew birthright guaranteed him knowledge of religious and social duties even in youth. His public ministry opened at the Cana wedding, social duties giving the initial opportunity for the display of his great personality and power. "This beginning of his signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed on him." *"The modest water, touched with grace divine, confessed its God, and blushed itself to wine."*—author unknown.

Current institutions increased this religio-social point of contact. These had been both products and creators of the Hebrew character, so materially different from the Greek and the Roman types. Jesus shared this inheritance of institutions and their formative influence. To him came noble gifts from the past, for through his veins coursed pure Hebrew blood and in his character localized pure Hebrew ideals. To deny this heritage would be to make the earthly life of Jesus a mere shadow of reality; full Hebrew manhood would not violate the divine Sonship, while it would posit a real incarnation. His humanity and divinity should not be allowed in thought to commit mutual robbery. His full manhood brought him into contact with sin and the infirmities of the body, while his own purity remained unsullied and glorious.

The places and ceremonials of worship gave formal expression to these institutions. Often calling for censure, they supplied Jesus with the occasion, the place, and often the theme of his preaching. The Temple and the synagogues afforded him, a pious Hebrew, the privileges of worship, of preaching, and of mingling with other worshipers. He had full right to the Scriptures, which he interpreted with clearer insight and greater spirituality than the rabbis, while his themes included those of national interest, accented by the doctrine of the divine leadership and by the current misfortunes of the nation. Freedom of the conduct of the synagogue service increased his opportunity to preach to the people.

The Messianic Hope specially gave Jesus contact for preaching. While glorying in her history, in which the purpose of Jehovah had been so evident, Israel looked forward to yet better days, for from her past should emerge forces to mold a nation whose heroes should teach new lessons of heroism and whose renown among other nations should shadow all past glory. Dreams of the pious, visions of seers, longings of the oppressed, and expectations of all classes—intensified and embittered by political serfdom—culminated and localized in the Messianic Hope, which declared belief in the coming Messiah, whom God would anoint to a kingdom of endless limits and days.

Lowered to comprehend a worldly kingdom, sensualized by hopes of regal power and splendor, debased into a desire for revenge against national insults, this Messianic expectation gave to Jesus a fundamental contact for his preaching. He declared that in himself, the Preacher and worker of miracles, Jehovah had redeemed his promises to Israel that the imperial city should be transferred from Jerusalem to the individual heart, and that worldly honor should fade before the glory of the God-man, crowned King of the Soul.

Jesus used this crude, current form of Messianism as a point of contact for his own exalted plan of personal supremacy over human lives in the concrete. Much of his

ministry was concerned with displacing old errors of hope and worship.

2. Experiential.—Jesus preached a gospel for individual experience. He sought a more intimate fellowship with his audience than could be secured from the institutional forms of religion. Religion could not be limited to the external ceremonials, for it must so master the person as to impart righteousness and salvation, thereby ceasing to be confined to the visible and external. Jesus incarnated the truth. He required that men should be more than shams of holiness. His invectives were justly hurled against those who sought to summarize religion in fasting, public prayers and almsgiving, but who missed the impulse of spiritual piety and charity. In contrast with this Pharisaism, Jesus invited aspirants for life into an abundant experience, transforming the will, purifying the affections, spiritualizing life's outlook, and subduing the soul to the divine will. We may sing thus the basal unity of truth:

"Truth is truth in each degree  
Thunder-pealed by God to Nature,  
Whispered by my soul to me." -- Browning, *La Saisiaz*

But truths of personal relations have value for us only as they are experienced. The formal validity of truth may not be impaired by individual rejection, but the loss to the individual is vital. When Jesus declared his offer of freedom, he emphasized appropriated and experiential truths as the foundation of character.

Modern approval of Jesus' idea has come from the study of the psychology of religion. The religious experience has come within the scope of scientific investigation, data being discovered and laws formulated. The spiritual life may reveal itself in results and in some of its processes. This study has doubtless suggested many errors and vagaries as truths, but the basal idea and certain methods remain praiseworthy. The eager student of the religious life may not enter with unholy curiosity the soul's Holy of Holies, and yet the light of the Shekinah of Experience falls without the curtains, and invites attention. Jesus found the ultimate for his preaching in the personal experience, exalted and vitalized by his own presence.

## II. The Intellectual Contact

1. The approach.—Jesus made his preaching intelligible. Even a divine revelation must adapt itself to the mental and spiritual processes of men. Jesus never violated this basic law. His words often fell upon dull ears, but they were capable of being understood. His intellectual approach to his audience was intelligible, intelligent, and adaptable to the capacity of his hearers. He did not intend that his message should have its largest appreciation by its first audiences, for the full meaning of his truths could come only with the Christian



centuries. He often clothed his words in such dress as to hide his meaning from portions of his audience. He knew the power of each mind; his applications were never at fault. Interest would be awakened even though the person did not fully comprehend Jesus' meaning.

He did not consider the social distinctions in his approach to men. His approach to the intellect was incidental, illustrative and full of surprises. He caught the attention of the passerby, the casual visit to the Temple or synagogue gave him his chance to preach, or a stop by the roadside would suggest a parable or an illustration.

Jesus did not error in his judgment of men and their present needs. With his own purpose clearly defined in his own mind he knew just how to reach men, though the student of his methods may sometimes wonder at the method or fail to see it. The intellectual range of his audiences was very great. The ignorant received gracious notice and the learned could not boast of special considerations.

2. The content.—The message of Jesus was a divine revelation. He came to deliver the words of his Father. "The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me." He did not come to teach the physical sciences; his theme was the science of eternal life. His thoughts contained truths beyond the conception of the unaided human mind and others (thoughts) that needed his authority to give them force over men.

His preaching was highly intellectual. His presentation of truths was in recognition of their wonderful relations and depths. His recorded words have created a vast literature for their interpretation and enforcement. The Manifesto of the King, the Sermon on the Mount, outlining the principles of that kingdom which is the personal reign of the Messiah over the individual heart, invites the study of the keenest intellects of the world. His doctrine of God incarnated and revealed in the Son, demands earnest thought to estimate its grandeur, while its correlative doctrine of redemption has had many labored scholarly attempts at explanation and remains best set forth in Jesus' parables of the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep, and the Lost Son. The hunger of the sinful but repentant heart is never tantalized with husks of worthless platitudes. Jesus had something worth preaching.

Heathen longings for fellowship with deity had led to idol making, Greek and Roman mythologies had deified human heroes, Hebrew prophets had been granted occasional theophanies, but Jesus of Nazareth was the first to declare redemption for the sinner through an incarnation of the Father-God, humiliated into human limitations without destruction of infinite holiness and power, and through the Son's sacrifice which would be sufficient for salvation. Human reason cannot go beyond this thought. Jesus made it the commonplace of his preaching. He gave to it the religious rather than the philosophical treatment. His words of wisdom were without conscious effort.

The creed of Jesus was simple and wise. His preaching will ever appeal to the best culture for appreciation, but he did not establish an educational test of faith and fellowship. Contact with himself was granted upon meager knowledge of his

principles. He challenged the best scholarship of his times and he still has power and charm for the scholar, and yet he lowered to its minimum the intellectual condition of accepting the new life, since he came to save the sinner regardless of ignorance and wisdom. He should become the Savior of men without class distinctions.

He did not completely indicate the creed of Christendom, being content to suggest a few essential fundamentals. The individual creed might be crude and chaotic, or well-defined and articulated, but it must contain belief in himself as the Son of God. The "I believe" must include divinity in order to guarantee Saviorhood.

This attitude toward the intellect did not mean that Jesus placed a premium upon ignorance or that he would unduly exalt the religious function of the intellect. The penitent of small culture might enter the kingdom upon the same basis with the most learned.

3. The purpose.—Jesus adopted the normal method of ingress to man's life. The intellect constitutes the first point of contact, without which the other powers of the soul have no control. The emotions can be stirred and the will can be moved only through some intellectual stimulus, unless the mind be disorganized and helpless. Jesus opened the soul's first gate. Symptoms of mental disorder first come to notice in the failure to correlate intellectual data. Jesus did not attempt to secure a reasonless response to his thought. He accepted the basal connection between the intellect and the religious life. Man's trinity of constitution entered fully into Jesus' view of religion. Errors of belief and customs may often be traced to an undue emphasis on one or two of these three elements of religion. The history of dogmas verifies such facts. Jesus kept the balance and poise.

### III. The Emotional Contact

1. Jesus' arousal of emotions.—Jesus' arousal of emotions in his audience was profound in degree and masterly in method. His public ministry was constantly attended by display of emotions. These emotions were created by the attitude, words, and deeds of Jesus. Anger, amazement, joy, sorrow, jealousy, hope, and hatred could be cited in many examples, showing the range and depth of emotions aroused by him. Two examples will indicate the thought. Amazement was a common emotion of his audiences. The Gospels present the shades of this emotion as exhibited on 34 occasions by the use of nine Greek words, rendered amazement, wonder, and marvel. The other example is the emotion of sorrow. Twelve Greek words are used to express his varied fellowship with sorrow, caused or alleviated by himself, the occasions numbering 18.

2. Jesus' design in arousing emotions.—He knew the religious value of emotions. They should not be aroused to gratify the speaker or the participant, but should be incited only to give worth and control to religious problems and duties. Modern religious emotionalism, which lacks the correlate of conduct and which seeks the fact and the applause of sensationalism, would not have found favor with Jesus. He designed the emotions to be directed toward right living. He excited his enemies to anger because of his holy life and wonderful ministry, and from this anger there came real benefits to his kingdom.

Two elements enter into the religious value of emotions. The emotion has its own proper place and worth, and it is also related to the religious aspect of both the intellect and the will. The triple division of Kant finds here its religious expression in Creed, Worship, and Conduct. The presence of each of these will be recognized in every normal religious life, but each may for any particular time or reason predominate in actual experience. *Creed* deals with the intellectual element of religion in beliefs, which may be erroneous, true, chaotic, or orderly. *Worship* is concerned specially with the emotions, which may be individually weak, strong, surface, deep, monotheistic or polytheistic. *Conduct* looks to the art of right living, which demands activity of the will in order that the facts of the intellect and the emotions may be energized. Jesus came that men might know the truth, which is an intellectual process; that they might love God and men, which is an emotional process; and that they might live righteously, which is a volitional process.

#### IV. The Volitional Contact

1. The Tri-unity of life.—For purposes of comparison one may divide the inner life of man into intellect, emotion, and will. The normal life has these in due proportion. Jesus did not specialize one to the improper neglect of the others. To him life was a tri-unity.

2. The law of obedience.—The law of obedience in the preaching of Jesus was self-surrender. The finite, individual will finds its fulfillment and highest end in perfect submission to the infinite will of God. Submission is a real basal principle of religion. Without coercion Jesus *constrained* (compelled or forced towards a course of action) men to submit to his will and leadership. He declined to enter into discussions about freedom, but promised to his disciples that he, the Son, would give them true freedom. The follower of Jesus by obedience would increase his knowledge of the truth, while the test of discipleship would be found in this attitude of surrender. The presence of the Trinity would be assured for the future to the obedient disciples.



The experience of Gethsemane was epochal for Jesus, and suggests that each soul, tempted and assailed by Satan, may have the supreme victory in affirming, "Not my will, but Thine, be done." The human will is thus taken up into the divine, but there is no infraction of human rights of choice and responsibility, but a *greater* freedom and nobility of character.

3. The finality of contact.—The will must be energized in order to complete the religious experience. Enlightened by the intellect with the message of truth, stimulated and evoked into action by the emotions with motives, the will consummates the religious experience. Creed without correction would develop into cold, harsh, and lifeless intellectualism;

emotion would degenerate into attenuated emotionalism; volition would run into formalism and externalism in conduct. Coordinate in real experience and mutually dependent in action, these three elements suggest that the final appeal to activity must be made to the will. Enthroned in the will of the individual, Jesus directs the religious beliefs, stirs the sentiments, and guides to right conduct. His preaching never failed to consider these factors of religious experience. He had contact with his audiences through each of these. He gave men his own revelations of truth to compel intellectual acceptance; he created in men love for God and men, and gave men the willingness to follow him and to overcome the power of Satan. *"Our wills are ours, we know not why, Our wills are ours to make them Thine."*—author unknown.

( End of Chapter Three – The Point of Contact in His Preaching )