Perhaps the first thought that grips the conscientious minister when he wakes on Monday morning is this - Sunday will soon be here. It will come whether I am prepared or unprepared. It will come whether I am energetic or lazy. When it comes scores, perhaps hundreds, of busy and hard-pressed people are going to come to the house of God to hear me preach. For this reason I ought to have something to say that is vital and worth-while. As Paul puts it, "I ought to study to show myself a sound workman without cause to feel ashamed."

Now, often enough the most earnest of us fail to measure up. Some times we get home with a sickening feeling that the hungry sheep are not fed. If our failure was due to the infirmities of the flesh, if we feel after we have done our prayerful and earnest best, then there is some excuse. But if we fail because of procrastination, because we seek it easy, because we presumed on our ability to prepare the sermon quickly, then we are without excuse, both before God and man. It is a frightening thing to make a deliberate failure, whether our congregation is made up of three hundred or of three thousand. How, then, shall we set about the preparation of the sermon?

The first step is to decide upon a theme. The earlier we do this, the better. Blessed is the minister that knows where he is going as soon as he wakes up each Monday morning. Of course, if we know sooner than this, it is better still. Because this is the case, it is well to select our text ahead of time. Increasingly I have preached to my people by series. Such preaching has many advantages. I must call especial attention to two.
...at times seem to fail when we feel we have a right to expect victory, known as the principle of nearer battle. When we have every reason to expect defeat, for instance, the experience comes to cement many young preachers, the lessons of the Word being,

...never the less that the sermon just preached was the very best. Not such a victory as readily from a more humble soul. The

...is easy to see why this is true, for the most

...it is necessary when the party is

...the enemy is coming again, and that you will never be defeated. Be not

...you did not prepare last week and

...what you did. Of course you realize

...that preparation is unnecessary for your

...brothers, but you are different. They do

...must possess your gifts, they produce, and

...must look at them. Denial, but not that with

...your abilities you can contrast the

...laws of nature and spiritual progress. Even

...men of influence and fame from the thrones

...of logicians. But be not deceived, other things being equal, you are going to win in proportion to the

...how then, shall we prepare the sermon?
the other day, "You are getting on famously. You have a million dollar personality, and you are riding it. But you are not laying up any store for the future. You are not earnestly working at the job of preaching. One of these days that winsome personality is going to slip from under you, and leave you on foot. Furthermore, you are going to find yourself letting empty buckets into empty wells and drawing nothing up. It is tragic to fail for lack of preparation, it is even more tragic when we seem to succeed without it. In this address I want to discuss with you the preparation of the sermon. How are we to go about it?

I

The first hurdle we have to take is the selection of a theme. That, sometimes, is very difficult. It is especially difficult for those of our denomination because for us the sky is the limit. There are some churches who follow the church year, therefore, their ministers know from Sunday to Sunday just what their theme is going to be. This doubtless saves them a lot of worry and a lot of lost motion. We have to select our themse.

Sometimes we are helped by the needs of our local situation. Sometimes we are helped by some topic that is timely, though possibly not timeless. Always we have the resources of New York and Nashville. But even then our choice is not always easy.

In fact, some ministers spend so much of their time deciding what they are going to preach about that when they reach their decision, it is too late to prepare the sermon. It seems a capricious thing that the landlord in Jesus' parable of the laborers of the vineyard paid the men who had worked but one hour as much as he paid those who had worked for twelve. But we can understand the reasonableness and especially the kindliness of his conduct when we realize that these men who worked in the vineyard for only one hour had not been loafing in the shade for the other eleven hours. They had been working just as hard as those who had borne the burden and the heat.
of the day. Not only so, but they had worked under conditions far less satisfactory than the twelve-hour laborers had worked. Those men who were in the vineyard worked with a sense of security. They were sure they were going to have something with which to feed themselves and those dependent upon them at the close of the day. Those others who spent eleven hours seeking for a job were working feverishly and anxiously with the dread that they should come to the close of the day with nothing to show for their labors and rated as failures. Many a minister has but one hour to put on his sermon because he has spent eleven hours seeking for his theme.

However, increasingly I have preached to my people by series. Preaching by series has many advantages. To begin with it has the very decided advantage of the minister knowing just his destination when he wakes on Monday morning.

It is perfectly marvelous how what we see, what we experience, what we read contributes to our theme if we have in mind what we are going to preach on the following Sunday. I believe there is almost nothing that a man knows that cannot be made to pay tribute to his preaching if he broods over his subject long enough. Blessed, therefore, is the man who makes an early start in the preparation of his sermon. If there is to be any loafing rather than having something adequate at the end of the week than at the beginning. Then, seeking out of my own experience, I never know when I can prepare a sermon. There are sometimes that I cannot prepare one at all. For this reason I seek to give myself plenty of time.

Some years ago a minister invited me to lunch with him. In the course of the conversation he asked, "When do you begin preparing your sermons?"
"When do you?" I replied. He said "I try to get round to mine at least by Friday morning." I wondered what he had been doing the other four days. I said, "Well, I differ somewhat from you. If I do not have mine entirely finished by Friday noon, I will not preach it. I will preach an old sermon. I break ponies sometimes, but I never try to break one before the congregation. When I try to ride before my congregation, I know that I have a gentle Dobbin that I know how to handle."

Then preaching by series has the additional advantage that it will save the minister from riding a hobby. It will save him from preaching only on those themes that are congenial and easy to himself, while neglecting other themes that his congregation need to have discussed. Some years ago when I set out to preach a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments, I discovered to my amazement that I had not preached a sermon on one single one of the commandments during the whole twenty-five years of my ministry.

I was also amazed at the richness of the material in these ten rules for living. They have no more been altered with the passing of the centuries than the law of gravity has been altered.

In the course of a series of sermons on the Lord's Prayer, I found most of the petitions very congenial, but there was one that gave me no end of trouble. I should never have preached on it if I had not come to it in a series, and that was the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread."

And yet, when I had preached the sermon, it was my conviction that it was the best sermon of the series, and I have an idea it was also the conviction of my hearers. In preaching, therefore, by series, the preacher has time to discuss some subjects that at first were not congenial, but that you find very congenial to yourself and very congenial and helpful to your hearer. Compelling to use more various themes in serial sermons.

Now, these series may be vastly varied. They are as numberless, almost, as the flowers of the spring. I think, generally speaking, they
ought not to be too long. To announce twenty subjects at once, is rather to swamp the interest of the prospective hearer. Five to ten, sermons on certain type of Bible character is always gripping and remember that in the Bible you have a book that holds the mirror up to nature as no other book ever written. Here are men that are vital. Here are men that if you prick them to this day they will bleed. They are as vivid as your next door neighbor and sometimes far more interesting. Given a chance they will walk right into your pulpit and laugh and sing and sob with you, and also preach for you. This type of preaching is always fresh and always interesting. It comes right out of life. It is always up to date because the heart of humanity is the same through the ages, ever pulsating to the same great needs, the same great loves and longings. Preaching, therefore, from Bible characters is at once interesting and helpful. So often these men say for us truths that we would hesitate to say, but that we can announce with conviction because they have already spoken them both by their lips and by their lives.

In more than one of my churches I have given book reviews of the Bible for my Wednesday evening address. Now, to count a congregation is somewhat like weighing a fish, it always reduces it to shamefully low terms. Yet I have seen by actual count right at six hundred people cut to hear a discussion of a book review of the Bible. I started in with the book of Genesis and undertook to review each book just as I would have done if the book had been fresh from the press, and I wanted to tell my people what it is in my conviction that a sermon can be of value including it was about. Sermons on books of the Bible are always fascinating and will always hold the attention of the congregation.

And let me urge you young gentlemen in selecting your themes, not to neglect the Old Testament. Now, I am not saying that the old Testament is equal to the New,
cover to cover. If you take that position you have run past Jesus, and are looking back at him. Some of the Old Testament he rejected. Some of it he corrected. Some of it he used. Some of it he found the very bread of life to his soul. Some of it he found to be the sword of the Spirit with which he fought his battles against the tempter. But as I read it what amazes me most is not the crudity of its stories, what amazes me as almost knowledge of God. Amazes me as almost no other miracle in the Bible and out of it is how much those great old saints knew of God, even before Jesus came. Here, for instance, is this amazing hymn book of the Jews. After all these years it is the greatest book of devotional literature in existence. In it we find reflected almost every mood of the human soul. If you are lonely and sick for God you will find somebody who can understand and share your loneliness. If you are rejoicing in the blessedness of his presence, you will find somebody who can shout and sing with you. Among its songs is one that after all the centuries is still the most popular song ever written. It has won its way into more hearts, it has put its arms around more grief-burdened shoulders than any other song in the Bible or out of it. Some years ago I went to visit an old grandmother who was passing to where beyond these voices there is peace. When I arrived the daughter met me at the door and said, "We are glad you came, but Mother won't know you. She hasn't recognized any of us all day. But I'd be glad if you would go in and sit at her bedside a moment. I know she would desire it were conscious."

Therefore, I went in and took my place at the bedside and watched her as she swung like a pendulum between life and death. Then it came into my heart to make the experiment, and so I leaned down and read the song to which I refer, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want," and as I read those deathless words, the thin lips smiled a little, and the head nodded a wee bit, and when she could no longer recognize the voice of her own child,
she could still recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd that came in the
gloaming to gather his lamb to his bosom. So accurate a picture is this
of God that if we may believe the 10th of St. John, Jesus himself
virtually said, "I sat for that reason, I am the Good Shepherd who
giveth his life for the sheep." Do not, therefore, if you, throw away
the wealth of preaching material in the Old Testament.

Now, when I am not preaching by series, of course I have to find a text.

How do I go about it?

There was a time when I said to myself, "Go to, now. I must preach
next Sunday. Therefore, I must find a text." But so far as I know, in
all my ministry, I have never found a text when I was searching for one.

Now, then, have I found them? I have found them in this way, by devotional
reading of the word of God.

For many years now it has been my experience to read devotionally each
morning a lesson from the Old and from the New Testaments. In reading these
lessons, I try to forget that I am a minister and to remember only that I
am a needy human soul, dependent upon God, needing the water of life and
the bread of life, needing his Word to understand me. And as I thus read
the Word for myself, when I come to a passage that speaks home to my own
heart

need with special conviction and helpfulness, then I take heart to believe
that this same passage might speak helpfully to my people.

It is thus that I have found my text. It has led me to preach on texts that I
profoundly believe. It has led me further to preach on great texts. It became the fashion a
little more than a generation ago among some ministers to preach on queer
texts. They delighted to take a text that was a thorough crumble and

manufacture crutches for it in the presence of the congregation. They picked
I suppose I began to use this method because it was the method in vogue when I entered the ministry. I have continued to use it through the years because of a very profound conviction that Bible centered preaching is at once the most helpful and the least taxing. I have known some excellent ministers who seemed to me to make scant use of the Bible. They first prepared their sermon, and then they found a text to suit the sermon, in which case the text became little more than a pretext. Now in my opinion that such preaching is more taxing than Bible centered preaching, and I believe, it is less helpful. When the Egyptians were compelled to make so many brick with the straw they thought they were having a pretty hard time, but by and by when Pharaoh lost his temper and compelled them to make brick without straw, they found themselves in sorrier straits still. Even so, the minister prepared his sermon without the help of the Bible seems to me to be making bricks without straw. What a tragedy it is to turn away from this wealth of material and there is nothing else like it to be as a spider and weave your sermon out of your own brain instead of getting it out of this book that contains the wealth of the ages. As a textbook I contend that there is nothing that approximates the Bible in value. If you want help to do your best possible preaching, and at the same time your Bible will become in your life a source of most fascinating preaching, and your most helpful preaching, I believe you will find that help in the Bible.
a dead text and showed the congregation how they could make it live. Such preaching may be ingenious but it is not vastly helpful. Not even a magician can get a rabbit out of a thimble. If your text is a triviality you may depend upon it that your sermon will also be trivial. No man can speak grandly about something that doesn't matter.

Instead of doing this, I have gone to the opposite extreme. I have tried to select great texts, helpful texts, strong, brawny, muscular texts. I want a text that I will not have to help but that will carry me. I want a text that I will not have to help but that will help me. I want a text that if things get hard I can flee to and find as rivers of water and as the shadow of a rock in a weary land.

Therefore, select a great text, my young brethren. If you do that, if the people don't get much out of the sermon, they will still have a strong word from God to take to their hearts and their homes.

Now, having decided upon your theme, the next step is the developing of that theme.

How are we to go about that? Speaking out of my own experience, when I have decided upon a text I read and reread the text and the context. As I read it and reread it, I seek to open every door of my mind and heart to that text. I let it say everything to me that it can. I listen not only to what it says directly, but to what it suggests. I also listen to every story of which it reminds me. As it suggests these things to me, I jot them down so that nobody else could read them and often times I cannot read them myself.

Having thus listened to the text and jotted down what it had to say to me, I then read, or at least that used to be my custom, everything that I can find on the subject. Those of you who keep a filing case will be able
after you have made your notes to go to your filling case. I cannot speak with fullness of the advantage of that as I do not keep one. I have noticed that the man who writes down something striking that he has heard, usually writes it down in order to dismiss it from his mind. The man that keeps it in memory and broods over it, will have a greater chance of making it his own. But I used to read everything on the subject that I could find. This means that I read sermons. I still do. I read the sermons of any man who has a message for me. Now, there are excellent preachers who do not have much to say to me. No man has a universal appeal. The fact that a certain able minister does not ring my bell does not mean that I am criticizing him. I am only criticizing myself. I used to wade through a book that everybody said was good whether it was doing anything for me or not. I have stopped wasting my time in that direction. If a man doesn’t say something to me in the first few chapters, then I am going to give him a rest.

This brings me to the question of reading sermons. When I was quite a young minister a fine old presiding elder spent a large part of one evening warning me against ever reading another man’s sermon. He said if I did so I would lose my originality. Now, I took his advice with a grain of salt because I had it in the back of my mind that if it were wrong to read another man’s sermons, it would be still more wrong to hear another. This would be the case because it would then have the sermon plus the man’s personality. Then I think he was altogether wrong as to the meaning of originality.

What is it to be original? It is not to think of something that nobody else ever thought of or to say something that nobody else ever said. If you say something next Sunday that was never said before the chances are a thousand to one that you are wrong. Originality is not
saying something new or strange or bizarre. It is taking the old truth and so reminting it in your own mill and so hammering it out on the anvil of your own soul that it becomes new to you and will be new to the one who hears you. This does not shut out the privilege of borrowing by any means. The greatest borrower that ever lived, almost, was Shakespeare. And yet nobody will deny his originality.

III

Now, having gathered your material, you come to the next step, the one that is supremely important, and that is the organization of the material that you have gathered. I think it was Edmund Burke who said, "Reading and much reading is good, but the power of infinitely classifying and using the matter read is better." Whoever said it, it is profoundly true. To try to preach a sermon without your material organized would be as futile as for a coach to expect to win a football game with a squad that had never been trained.

Yet we have all heard sermons like that. The language was beautiful, the tone of voice pleasing, the thoughts impressive. Yet as you listened, you could not but realize that the middle might have been at the beginning and the beginning might have been at the end. What was wrong? The sermon was not organized. It is, therefore, no good matter, but the material is, therefore, no good. This brings us to what I conceive to be the matter of fundamental importance, that is, to have a simple, logical and concise outline. A sermon ought to start, travel and arrive. I know there are those who argue against an outline. No less an authority than John Arthur Gossett argues against an outline in a series of addresses on preaching. Of course, he had an outline to this address against an outline. If he had not, it would have been like Helmhöldt - without a beginning or end of days.
The man who has no outline is likely to go in circles. I do not care how fast your car may be and how abundant is your supply of gasoline, if you do not have a definite goal, then all your traveling will be to no purpose.

An outline, therefore, is more than a luxury, it is an absolute necessity.

It is possible to have a jelly fish without any skeleton, but you cannot have a man without a skeleton. No more can you have a sermon without a skeleton.

It is not always necessary to let the people see the wheels go round. But it is necessary that they go round and it is necessary that you have a concise outline. If you do not, the people cannot possibly remember what you said and you yourself cannot remember. Everyone of us has heard pleasing sermons but when the minister had finished if anybody had asked us what he said, you would have said, "I do not know." Furthermore, if you had asked him "what did you say?" he would have had to have given approximately the same answer. If, on the other hand, the minister has a simple and concise outline, his people can get what he says and can remember at least a part of it. Not only so, but the minister himself can remember it. There are some of us that have found it very difficult to speak without a manuscript or without extensive notes. Now it is my conviction that any man who will make a simple, logical, concise outline can preach without notes. He can not only remember each sentence, he cannot help remembering it. A good outline fairly tugs at our memories. It demands that we listen to it and keep it in mind. For instance, some years ago I understood to preach on the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. It gave me no end of trouble. I think I made at least fifty different outlines. By and by it came to me like an inspiration - the final outline. Now it was final for me, it might not have been final for you at all.

One of the thrills of creating a sermon is that feeling that comes when you know that you have arrived so far as you are personally concerned. Here was...
the outline to which I had come. This parable, I said, is a three-fold contrast. First, it is a contrast between the two men who went to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a Publican. This Pharisee was a pillar in church and state. Jesus had much to say in condemnation of the Pharisee, but he also had much to say for himself. He was endless leagues ahead of this Publican who came to share the privileges of the sanctuary on that distant day.

The other man was a Publican. He wore the livery of a foreign power. While the Pharisee was at the top of the ladder, he was at the bottom. While the Pharisee was at the front of the procession, this Publican was at the rear of the procession. He represented the worst in the society of his day. He had no good word to say for himself.

The second contrast was a contrast in their prayers. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus for himself, "God, I think thee that I am not as other men." You can see that he had a good eye on himself, a bad eye on his brother, and no eye on the Lord at all. The Publican, on the other hand, did not dare lift up so much as his eyes to Heaven, but smote upon his breast saying,"God, be merciful unto me, a sinner".

The third contrast was the contrast in the results of their praying. What did his prayer do for the Pharisee? It did nothing for him. When the service was over he went away just as hard, cold, and lifeless as he had been before. No eager soul touched him on the elbow and asked him for the secret of his radiance and beauty. He had none. He went away just as he came.

The Publican, on the other hand, went away justified. That means that he went away pardoned, that he went away a new creation in Christ Jesus. Now, that three-fold contrast says, it seems to me, what the parable said, and it is not only easy to remember it, it is next to impossible to forget it.

Now, there are those who argue against three divisions in a sermon as something mechanical and as robbing them of variety. It is my conviction that
the number of parts that a sermon has has nothing to do with its variety. Few greater preachers have ever lived than Frederick W. Robinson, yet nearly every one of his sermons is divided into two parts. But he said so much in those two parts that if you dare preach from one of his texts you better not read him because you will have to say what he says. He simply leaves nothing else to be said. Whether, therefore, your sermon has two, three or five parts has nothing to do with its variety.

Now, it is rather remarkable how many sermons have three natural divisions. When I was away at school my old pastor used to begin almost every sermon by saying, "My text falls naturally into three parts." Of course, the number of parts didn't interest me much as a youngster. What did interest me was that they nearly always fell. But you are different from me and I am different from you. And yet we have the same number of parts, the same outline; we have the same number of bones. The number of parts, therefore, that your sermon has is not the significant matter. This is what is significant - that it must be a simple, logical, concise outline.

There are many texts that almost outline themselves. Take this great work from Paul. "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." In this word, you see, Paul is pointing out the roadway to certainty. He is telling us how he came to be sure of God through Christ. How did he do it? He indicates three steps.

First, I believe. Second, I acted on my belief and committed myself to Jesus Christ. Third, as a result of that believing and committal, I came to know. Now, that was the way Paul came to certainty. It is the way any man can come to certainty in any age. It is simply another way of saying what Jesus said, "If any man is willing to do his will, he shall know." If, therefore, you are planning to preach a good sermon, never give over till you make
a satisfactory, or at least a partially satisfactory, outline.

Now, having made the outline, having done this most difficult and most important part of the sermon preparation, I come to the fourth step which is filling in. Having made the outline, I proceed to preach the sermon to myself. I do not mean by this that I proclaim it aloud so that the neighbors will think I am crazy. I simply walk up and down my study and say it over to myself in an inaudible voice. Having done this, I say it over again, and I keep on till I can see every step of it. I can see down that sermon as one can look down a hallway.

Then follows the next step. Having preached the sermon to myself until I am thoroughly familiar with it, then I write it. I used to peck my sermons out on an Oliver typewriter. In recent years I have dictated them to a stenographer. But I always prepare the sermon before I write it. There are other ministers far better who take the other way round. They write the sermon first. But I think in preaching the sermon first and preaching it with a congregation in my eye, the sermon will sound spoken instead of sounding written. There is a difference between what is spoken and what is written. It is my conviction that a sermon ought to sound written.

Having thus prepared and written the sermon, I lay it aside. Sometimes I read it over before I preach it. Sometimes I do not. This means that I never memorize a sermon. The man who makes a habit of memorizing his sermons will find himself hard pressed for time because that is a tedious task. Also he is likely to fall into the habit of declaiming or reciting rather than speaking from his heart. I rather bear in mind my outline, then I speak the words given to me. Having that type of memory, many of the things I say are just as I have written them down. Yet there is no effort to remember them.
and notes in a manuscript would be of no greater help to me than an extra hand.

Now, young gentlemen, I am not commending this method to you at all. I am simply telling you what I have found helpful to myself across a ministry of forty years. But I do close with this urgent word - Do your utmost to let God see that you at least are a sound workman with no need to be ashamed of the way you handle the word of truth.
I
Choosing a Theme
1. Some prefer a year ahead, not 2
2. Some prefer 2 years ahead, not 1
3. Some prefer more in three ways
   A. By a Philadelphia reader, 2
   B. By a Boston reader
   C. By a Buffalo reader
   D. By a New York reader
   E. By a Buffalo reader
   F. By a New York reader

II
The Season
1. Read and test +
2. Do not become discouraged, or be discouraged

III
The Third End School:
1. Make the team a success
2. Make them the team
3. Have some time to prepare

IV
A
1. Start early
2. Write it down, do it, and do it
3. Write it down, do it, and do it
4. Write it down, do it, and do it
5. Write it down, do it, and do it
6. Write it down, do it, and do it
7. Write it down, do it, and do it
THE SERMON

When we open the gospels we come upon excited crowds who are listening to a preacher with intense interest. Mark tells us that the common people heard this preacher gladly. By this he does not mean that the illiterate, that the under-privileged, that the handicapped heard him gladly. He means rather that the mass of the people heard him with thrilling eagerness. Little children listened to him with keen interest, as did youths in life's green spring. Handicapped men in the middle passage of the mid-years perhaps heard him gladly, as did old bodies who were coming close to the sunset of the evening star. Men whose minds were of the young heard him gladly, as did scholarly doctors of the law such as Nicodemus.

Why was this the case? It was not the case simply because Jesus was divine. Numbers of those who heard him had no faint conception of his unique divinity. They heard him, in part at least, for the same reasons that they hear you and me, if they really hear us. It is not my purpose to discuss at length the method of Jesus, but I do think it would be wise for us to glance at that method as a guidance for ourselves. The business of preaching is a thrilling and difficult business. Were we to live one thousand years we should still have much to learn about it. At this hour I want to speak to you on what I think a sermon ought to be.

I

What, then, are we to expect of a sermon? What goal are we seeking? If we have no sense of our destination, how shall we decide upon how to get there? "To the ship bound for no harbor, no wind can be favorable." Many a sermon fails to arrive simply because the preacher had no conception of where he was going when he set out. Every sermon ought to start, travel and arrive.
Having arrive, it ought to stop. When you set out for home after this meeting, you are not going to cease to travel simply because you have put in a certain number of minutes or of hours. You are going to stop because you have reached your destination. A sermon ought to quit not simply because the preacher has used up thirty minutes, but because he has reached the goal that he set out to reach. Many ministers fail to quit on time because they did not know where they were going when they set out.

Some years ago it was my painful privilege to hear a scholarly minister who could have sung with zest that old song, "I Don't Know Where I'm Going But I'm On My Way". After driving for some twenty minutes, he came to a full stop to offer an alibi as a substitute for a sermon. "Pardon me, my brethren", he said, "I have an intense toothache and find it very difficult to deliver my message." Then, instead of quitting, he seemed to discover a hitching post some ten minutes away and to say to himself, "I will drive to that. Maybe I will encounter an idea on the way." But his road was especially clear of traffic that morning and he failed to make contact with an idea. Therefore, he repeated his apology, informing us once more of his toothache, then discovered another hitching post another ten minutes away and drove for that. At last, he quit. He still had the toothache. We had the sermon. I thought we were the worst off of the two because he doubtless had his tooth pulled but the sermon is with us to this day. Blessed, therefore, is the preacher who knows his destination. Blessed the congregation who has the privilege of traveling with such a minister.

I used to meet an old farmer back in Tennessee. I never found this gentleman going anywhere in particular. When I would say, "Sam,
where are you off to this morning?", the answer was, "I am just knocking about." It is perfectly safe to say that no good sermon was ever preached by the minister who was "just knocking about." Not only must a sermon have a definite goal, but it must be interesting... This, I take it, is fundamental.

Of course, a sermon ought to be true. It ought to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ. But its truth will go for nothing if spoken in such a way as not to win a hearing. It is the first business of the minister in preaching to prepare the people to grip and hold their attention. Without this, the truest sermon ever preached goes for nothing.

Now to hold the attention of a congregation is not always easy. We are speaking to about the most difficult congregations the world has ever known. In the days of our fathers, the coming of the circuit rider in the community was about the most exciting event of the passing days. His appearance awakened interest in their unexciting life. But those to whom we preach have had about all the thrills. They have received much of their education from the movies. They have thus been accustomed to get a maximum of entertainment with a minimum of attention. It is not always easy to hold the attention of those thus educated.

Now, it is useless to answer as we sometimes do, "Rolks ought not to be that way." I shall not argue that with you. My only answer is "But they are that way." If I had caught a case of smallpox and my physician were to come to see me and say, "You ought not to have smallpox, you ought to have chicken pox," I would have to answer, "But I do have smallpox. Therefore, you have got to conduct yourself accordingly." We preach to congregations whose attention is not easy to hold.

I think it would surprise many of you younger preachers to know how few
people come to church, generally speaking, just to hear the sermon. Often they come for a variety of other reasons - to meet their friends; they come from custom and habit; they come because they think it is their duty to come. If we grip their attention, if they really listen to us with interest, they will often be astonished. How many times have I had a listener to say to me, "I actually enjoyed the sermon," by which he meant, "I did not intend to enjoy it, I expected to be bored as usual. But you astonished me by making me listen."

And let me say by way of parenthesis that there is nothing wicked in the fact that some struggling soul enjoys a sermon. I read an article in the Advocate several months ago headed, "Sermons Not to be Enjoyed". Well, if that is the goal of a sermon, too many of us reach it. But why should not a sermon be enjoyed? Did not the angel declare that he had come to "bring glad tidings of great joy which should be to all people"? Is not the very central meaning of the Gospel good news? Why, then, should we hear it with wry faces? Why should we accept it as if we are taking a peculiarly ill-tasting drug instead of going to a royal wedding feast?

Therefore, I haunt you with this big essential. Your sermon must be interesting. If it is not, then your congregation is not going to listen. If your congregation is not listening, then you are wasting both your time and theirs. Not only so, but you are doing a positive harm. You are inoculating your congregation with preaching so that it will be more difficult for any sermon to take on them in the future. The more eagerly the congregation listens this Sunday, the more eagerly it will listen next Sunday. The more indifferent its response today, the more indifferent next Sunday.
There are those who suppose that the easiest congregation to which to preach is the one that has been accustomed to dead and lifeless sermons, while the difficult congregation is the one that has been accustomed to listen to sermons that are vital and thrilling and interesting. But the opposite is the truth. I held two meetings in the same city some months ago. One of these churches had a live and gripping minister. The other had one who laid little stress upon the preaching, but he was an excellent church manager. It was thrilling to preach to the congregation of the one that was alive. It was difficult to preach to the congregation of the one who was dead.

We who preach have many shortcomings. We are guilty of many sins. I should like to confess my own before I confess yours. But one of our most common and hurtful sins is that of plain dullness. So persistently have we fallen into this deadly evil that listening to preaching, instead of being the most thrilling of human experiences, has often become the most boring. When our fellows wish to describe the very climax of dullness they say, "As dull as a sermon." However true and full of gospel a sermon may be, if it is so dull that nobody will listen, it not only does no good but does positive harm.

III

How, then, can we make our sermons interesting? Of course, many factors enter into this. There are vastly different types of preachers. Some personalities are more gifted in personal magnetism than others. Some are far more pleasing than others; far more gifted than others. Yet I think there is a road to interest for every minister who will be willing to pay the price. I am going to dare offer three positive suggestions:

1. If I am to be interesting, then I must be interested. First, I
must be interested in what I am saying. God pity the preacher who has lost interest in his own message. Believe it or not, it is easy to do this. We sometimes lose interest because we lose the freshness and vitality of our own religious experiences. The wonder and the glory of our first meeting with our Lord has been allowed to fade into the light of commonplace. Many hard tragedies may happen to the preacher but none more deadly than to reach the place where his own religious experience is no more than a memory. To the man who has ceased to marvel at the richness of God's grace in his own life, preaching is likely to be dead.

Then we may lose interest because we are mouthing over the same old sermons that we preached years ago. Now, everybody ought to preach old sermons. It helps to develop fluency and ease. The only sermon that is not worth repeating is the sermon that was not worth preaching in the first place. Yet a minister pays a heavy penalty for ceasing to prepare his sermons. Think for one, is that he loses his capacity to prepare. Every minister ought to keep these words constantly before his eyes: "Remember Lot's wife. Having once stopped, she could not go on."

Every good sermon has in it an element of surprise. If no hearer ever feels like nudging his neighbor to say, "That is true", then your sermon is likely to be dead. If the wonder and the glow dies within your own heart, it will not awaken in the hearts of your hearers. The minister who comes Sunday by Sunday before his congregation shouting with Paul in the depths of his own soul this exclamation of amazement, "To me is this grace given that I might preach the unsearchable riches of Christ", that man, vitally interested in his own message, will be interesting to others.

But if you have lost interest, then do not expect it from those who hear you. I went some months ago to hear a man speak to a group of college
professors and a few "what nots". I was one of the "what nots". The speaker fixed his eyes on the floor and conducted a monologue. If he had the slightest interest in what he was saying, if he had the slightest interest in the people to whom he was saying it, it was impossible for me to detect it. Since he looked at nobody, they did not with any interest look or listen to him.

This brings us to the second requirement: if the sermon is to be interesting, and that is — he must not only be interested in his sermon, but interested in folks. This I will have occasion to say again — no sermon is an end in itself. It is a means to an end. It is that something with which he is seeking to win men to his Master and to build them up in their holy faith. The interest of the preacher in my personality awakens my interest in him and in what he is saying. Here the words of Jesus are true, "The measure you give is the measure you get." If you are interested in nobody, then the chances are that nobody will be interested in you.

2. If we are to hold the interest of our congregations, we must deal with matters that are vital to them. One secret of the spell that Jesus cast over his hearers was that he talked about things that really mattered. That is true of all real preaching. I love to proclaim this gospel of ours because I know that when I proclaim it I am talking about something that matters the now, that will matter tomorrow, and that will matter throughout/eternal tomorrow. I know that I can take my message and set it up beside all the sky scrapers, even all the majestic mountains, and that it will be doing business there when these have been dust for ages.

Some months ago I went to hear a gentleman speak to a civic group. He announced his subject, which was peculiarly trivial, then he began his address by saying that "it does not matter what I say on this subject". He was eminently correct. Since he was wise enough to say that such was the case,
I wonder why he said it at all. What is the use of saying anything that you know in advance is not worth saying? If you do not believe in the worthfulness of your sermon, then for Heaven's sake, don't preach it. It is worthwhile to take time to display the unsearchable riches of Christ, but why waste the time of busy people by displaying the cheap googaws of the market place that are not worth having?

A few years ago it was fashionable to select queer texts that could not stand on their own feet and to prop them up with some ornamental crutches of your own making. Personally, I have never been captivated by that type of preaching. The older I grow the more I come to the conviction that it is wise to select a solid, meaningful text. I seek to select a text that has something to say for itself; that can stand on its own feet. Then, I have found that it props me up. Indeed, many times it helps me to walk and not be weary, and to run and not faint. What a wickedness to preach a sermon that if your hearers should take you seriously, would not leave them any the richer.

3. Not only must we be interested in what we are saying and those to whom we are saying it, but we must speak with simplicity. If you hold the interest of your hearer, he must understand you. The time is long since past when the people are going to habitually come to church to puzzle their minds over what under the sun you are talking about. I used to have a friend who spoke in a pseudo-sententious jargon. One day a brother minister took his life in his hands and questioned; "Why don't you quit using that scientific language and speak English?" He answered indignantly, "I am not going to compromise my literary style." Now that was at once wicked and silly. If you are out to sacrifice style instead of to save people, go to it. But even then it would be well to be sure that your style

Churchill
is worth serving.

A friend said to me years ago with considerable satisfaction, "My message is to the intelligently elite." Well, perhaps so, but the chances are very great that there will not be any giraffes of that kind in your congregation. Even if such is the case, the more cultured your hearers, the more they will appreciate simplicity and crystal clearness. It has been my conviction through the years that anything that I can see clearly, I can make you see. If I cannot make you see it, the chances are very great that I am befuddled in my own mind.

Bear in mind always that preaching is to be undertaken to that end - it must be simple. If you think your hearers know very much about religion you are mistaken. The man who speaks today must speak not simply so a college man can understand him. He must speak in such a fashion that the unlettered cannot help but understand him. Every man who comes to hear us, who is hungry for the bread of life, has a right to have that bread put within reach of his hand. Cultivate the fine grace of clearness and simplicity.

As an aid to this, do not be afraid to illustrate your sermon. Even the greatest of all preachers has an example in this. "He spake many things to them in parables and without a parable spake he not unto them." Now and then a friend will say to me, "I remember a sermon I heard you preach five years, ten years, twenty years ago." Seldom will he say, "You used this argument." In almost every instance he will say, "You told this story." A story is the universal language of humanity. Don't be afraid to tell a good story, but see to it that it fits the sermon instead of fitting the sermon to the story.

Some time ago I saw an announcement where a gentleman wanted a good popcorn stand about which to build a theater. Sometimes we preachers want an
illustration about which to build a sermon. Of course, there are stories around which sermons could be built and should be, but generally speaking, the story ought to light up the face of the sermon instead of the sermon lighting up the face of the story. But generally speaking, people are not interested in abstract truth. They are forever interested in human experience. The sermon that is preached by a minister who is very interested in his own message and in his own people, who speaks with simplicity and who illuminates his sermon with vital human experiences, will not fail in gaining and holding the attention of his people.

Finally, let me say in this matter of being interesting, I think it best for the minister to know beyond a peradventure whether he is holding the attention of his people or not. How can we know? Personally, I watch my congregation just as a salesmen watches his customer. If I see that they are not looking in my direction any more but down their noses, I know I have lost them. Unless I am very dull, I will shift gear and win their attention in some fashion, because I know there are few greater sins than talking right on when nobody is listening. Even the most enthusiastic hunter loses interest in the yelp of a hound that he knows lost the scent. Here is one advantage of preaching without notes. The preacher can watch his congregation and sense their interest or lack of it. The man who cannot tell whether his people are listening or not lacks the essential element of a successful preacher.
Every sermon should be positive in construction.

This does not mean that we are never to rebuke nor condemn. Jeremiah recognized as part of his call that he must pull down and destroy. But all pulling down is not only futile but worse, unless we build something in its place. Paul puts it in these wise words: "Let everything be done with a view to building."

Even when we denounce and tear down, if we are to do the slightest good, we must follow this by positive building.

This is a word that is needed especially by most young ministers. It is so easy to denounce. It is quite thrilling and spectacular to pull down. Such conduct on the part of the minister draws commendation from certain of his hearers. These commend him for his courage, yet after indulging in this practice in some measure myself, after listening to it from certain of my brethren, I have become convinced that it takes less brains and less heart to denounce than to do almost anything else in the world. A monkey with a match can destroy more in an hour than one excellent builder can construct in a year.

But the supreme tragedy of negative and denunciatory preaching is that it does little permanent good. It is futile to denounce any evil unless you have something positive to put in its place. Even if it were possible for you and me to pull up all the tares in a wheat field, we would not thereby guarantee one single grain of wheat. No amount of negative can make a positive. It is not an absence of weeds that make a wheat field. No more does the destruction of thorns and briars guarantee a garden. If mere negatives made a saint, then it would be possible to make a Saint Paul out of a wax figure in a show window.

The only preaching that gets permanent results is positive preaching. When I was a small boy I induced a playmate who was still younger than I to throw away his china dolls. I made him feel how utterly shameful it was for
a great he-man like him to be playing with dolls. So he threw them away. But his mother rebuked me a few days later for my conduct. She said that when I had gone her boy went out and crawled through the grass tearfully searching for the dolls that he had thrown away. This was quite natural because when he had thrown away the dolls, I didn't offer him a substitute. I only left his hands empty. Since nature abhors a vacuum, he went back to find what he had thrown away. Were I to knock at your study door clad in rags some winter's day, it would be easy for you to denounce me for appearing in such unseemly costume. You might even tear my rage from me in angry protest. But the more you tried it, the greater would be my determination to hold on to them, poor as they might be, they were better than nothing. But if you were to take the positive way and offer me a lovely warm suit that was new, then you wouldn't have to tear off my rags. I would throw them away myself because you had given me something better.

The first time I ever saw the ocean was at Wrightsville Beach in North Carolina. I caught a street car and on my journey we crossed the wide Sound. It was by far the largest body of water that I had ever seen. I looked at it with intense interest, thinking I was viewing the ocean. Then a stranger touched me on the shoulder and said, "This is not the ocean. This is only the Sound." Had he gone no further, I should have answered, "Maybe it isn't the ocean but it is the most wonderful body of water I have ever seen." But as soon as he had reminded me that this was not the ocean, he pointed out the window to where the white caps were breaking into gold under the rays of the setting sun. Therefore, it was not necessary for him to compel me to quit looking at the Sound. I quit because I had found something more thrilling.
How was it that Silas Marner was won from his love of gold? You remember how through a great and shattering sorrow he had allowed himself to harden into a miser. But by and by when an amazing miracle happened to him, he was cured of his miserliness. How did it come about? "Somebody stole his gold," you answer. No, that did not work the change at all. He loved his gold just as much, even more after it was gone than he did before. What cured him was this. One night he came home to see something that sparkled in the firelight as his gold used to do. When he hurried forward to run his fingers through his golden hoard and hear its music once more, he found that it wasn't gold at all but the silken tresses of a little girl. Little by little little Effie crept into his heart and filled it so full of a warm, human love that there was no longer room for his love of gold.

This is the only strategy that will win in our personal lives. Paul, in writing to those red blooded Galatians who were finding the Christian life so difficult that some of them were looking over their shoulders wondering if they had not better retreat, gave this wise direction: "This I say, work in the spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." This also is the strategy that wins in our preaching. "Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good."

Let us beware, then, of a ministry of denunciation, of mere fault-finding. The only real foe of sickness is health; the only conquering enemy of darkness is light; the only sure way to conquer evil is to throw against it the invincible tide of good. Hawthorne tells of a bride of all but faultless beauty. Her one small defect, which to some eyes enhanced her beauty rather than diminished it, was a slight birth mark. But her husband was bent on curing this insignificant defect. But in his effort to cure, as the birthmark faded, the bride herself died. It is our business to build. We can only do this by preaching constructively and positively.
Preaching should be comforting and encouraging. - Barnabas

By this I am not saying that we are not to take account of the evils of our day. We are not to be complacent pagans, to see nothing but good. We are not to be self-hypnotized Columbus; mouthing over that platitude, "Everything in every way is getting better and better." We are not even to sing with Browning "God's in His Heaven, All's right with the world."

What then are we to do? We are to face the facts. Not simply the beautiful facts or the ugly facts, but all the facts. When we do this we will realize that no individual, that no situation is entirely bad. Whenever the minister paints a picture that is black and only black, he has been untrue to the facts. Jesus recognized that there were different kinds of soil, some was hard, some stony, some thorny. But there was also some good ground that brought forth thirty, sixty and one hundred fold.

Every age has its evils, its abuses, its ghastliness and destructive suspicions. To seek to ignore these is not only futile but wicked. But here is a fact that we must always bear in mind. However dark and desperate the situation, always over against that situation stands the Almighty God for whom nothing is too hard and who is able to do exceedingly abundant above all that we ask or think.

Because this is true no man has a right to preach a discouraging sermon. Whenever I send my people home thumping along on four flat tires, I have not truly preached the Gospel. I heard a really excellent minister some time ago speak on the present world outlook. He spoke intelligently and well. But the picture he painted was entirely black. He enumerated our liabilities and nothing else. Not a single asset was indicated. He especially seemed utterly to have forgotten that sublime declaration of faith, "The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." Therefore, his sermon was not only
not helpful, but hurtful. I think he was guilty before God.

Let us, then, listen again to the words of the prophet, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God." That is a part of our purpose.

"The Lord God hath given me the tongue of him that is good that I might know how to speak the word to him that is weary." There are a great many weary fellows with us to-night today. We never meet for worship but that some of them are present. At times they have come eagerly and expectantly. At other times they have come with little expectation, wondering rather dubiously if God's prophet might have a word for their need. If we merely bark their shins afresh, we have sinned against them and against God. Every sermon should be comforting and encouraging, however frankly it faces our numerous foes.

When we turn the pages of God's Book, we see how the great preachers have comforted their people through centuries not by denunciation of the evils that threaten them, but by pointing out how the might and eagerness of our Lord to help them. When the dauntless writer of Regelaion faced the stark impossibilities of his day and sought to nerve his people for the battle, he did not do so by pointing out the weakness of Rome, but the omnipotence of God. When Paul saw two hundred and seventy-five men who were fortunate enough to be his fellow travelers, he did not do so by denying their dangers, by shutting his eyes to the raging sea and the wrecking vessel. He faced all the ugly facts with this encouraging word: "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for there stood by me this might the angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve. Saying, Fear not, Paul, for thou must be brought before Caesar, and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee."

Here, then, is a source of courage for every age. When the twelve spies went to spy out the Promised Land, ten of them who had become so frightened taken up with their difficulties that they lost sight of God altogether, had
nothing encouraging to say. In fact, their message took the heart out of folks. But two had seen their difficulties in the light of God. Therefore, while Joshua and Caleb did not deny the presence of gigantic difficulties, they saw these difficulties in the light of God. Therefore, they had an encouraging word. They declared that they could surely win in spite of difficulties. Not only so but that these seeming disadvantages would become their advantages, that they would be bread for them, that all this opposition could be made to work for their good. We are to be ministers of comfort and encouragement.

IV

Finally, a sermon should reach a conclusion. Every sermon ought to start, travel and arrive. But in arriving, it should call for a verdict. It has been my custom throughout the years, having displayed my wares, to give to those who had taken their time to inspect them, to get what they so desired.

Now, if the sermon is to have a definite goal, the minister must have a clear view of that goal before he sets out. One reason that some ministers find it difficult to quit is because they did not know where they were going when they set out. Every one of us has heard ministers who proclaimed by their very first sentence they uttered "I don't know where I am going but I am on my way," that soon came to bark after they had lost all sense of the direction that the game had taken.

Some years ago I heard a man of more than average ability ramble about in this fashion for some twenty-five or thirty minutes. Then he said, "Brethren, excuse me, I have a bad toothache." But it was easy to see the workings of his mind. He seemed to say, "I haven't said anything yet." Therefore, when he saw what he hoped might be a hitching post some fifteen minutes away, he drove to that, only to find that he was no further forward than he had been before.

But instead of stopping short, he tried it again and drove some ten or fifteen minutes further, announcing each time that he had a bad toothache. At
last he quit in the dense wilderness, still with the toothache. He was in a bad way but we of the congregation were worse off still. No doubt he had his tooth pulled but that sermon is with me like a thorn in the flesh to this day.

Let me urge, then, this necessity - to make a sermon be in some sense a finished product. If this is the case, then the minister will quit not simply because he has used up a time, but because he has reached his destination. At the close of this service it is my purpose to return to my hotel. I do not intend to stop and spend the night at any place I might reach by journeying twenty to thirty minutes. I intend to keep traveling until I get to my room, even if it takes me thirty-one minutes.

In saying this I am not urging long sermons. We have all got countless listeners to say to us, "You quit too soon." Well, perhaps so, but I have yet to see one single hearer in my congregation burst into tears because I quit too soon. But how much time a sermon consumes is not the matter of greatest significance. This is what signifies - that you have set yourself a definite goal and that you have arrived at that goal. You have done it with such clearness that your hearers can tell you have arrived. Therefore, they do not say, "So what? Instead you say, "this is the good news that I bring you. Will you accept? Will you accept it now?"

It is the minister's privilege to speak thus intelligently and expectantly. Having so spoken, he calls for a verdict. Whether that verdict is to be uttered secretly or openly, he is due this when he feels that he has spoken with some success. He is due this also when he feels that he has made a shameful failure. Every minister knows that some of his best results have been obtained by sermons that he felt were far below par. Just as some meager results have come from what he felt was an excellent sermon. When you have done your best and have failed, remember
the prayer of Spurgeon, "Lord, thou canst do anything. Thou canst make something out of nothing. Therefore, bless this sermon."

The Sermon
I must win full attention
1. must see end in itself - no must thee planning - to get action - to set thing
   to three listen
2. Attention must be tested for granted
3. Same comes to know - some do not
4. So be sure there is no to - out
5. One we went to the floor
6. How - atmosphere - looking, especially
7. Of young people
4. Expect endurance and help
8. Old stuff - judo an unexpected people
THE SERMON

"The common people heard him gladly." Mark 12-37

To open the gospel of Mark is to find ourselves elbowed by eager crowds. The ground fairly trembles under our feet as we go with the multitudes to listen to the preaching of Jesus. Mark tells us that the common people heard him gladly. By this, of course, he does not mean that the underprivileged, that the intellectually handicapped heard him gladly. He rather means that he was heard gladly by all classes of people. He was heard gladly by little children, by youths in life's green spring. He was heard gladly by those in the stern stress of the middle passage, and by wise old gray beards who were doing the toilsome journey of the last mile. It is not my purpose to preach from this text, but it does tell us that Jesus attained that for which every minister ought to strive.

It is evident that he won and held the attention of the people in his congregations. He cast a veritable spell over those who were privileged to listen to him. As we study his method, we get a glimpse of what a sermon ought to be. Happy is the minister that has a clear view of his goal. If we do not know where we are going, we are not likely to arrive. Furthermore, if we should arrive, we might not even recognize the fact. To the ship bound for no harbor no wind can possibly be favorable. Therefore, I am going to undertake to tell you what in my opinion a sermon ought to be. Naturally, there is room for wide difference of opinion here. Remember, this is my view.

I

The first essential of a sermon is that it be interesting.
1. This is the case in the first place because a sermon must be interesting in order to win and hold the attention of the hearers. It is well for us preachers to realize at once that interest and attention must be won. We can no longer assume that people come to church just to hear us preach. They come for a variety of reasons - some from habit, some to meet their friends, some from a sense of duty, some to worship. Naturally, if we have been with our people long enough for them to know us and to trust us, they also come to hear us preach. But that is by no means universal.

In proof of this we can all recall such compliments as this: "I actually enjoyed your sermon." In so saying the hearer is implying that he did not intend to enjoy the sermon, in fact, he did not even intend to listen to it. He intended to be bored for a season and then go home feeling as pious as he could under the circumstances. But instead, the minister held him up and compelled his attention. Generally speaking, we get just as much attention as we compel. I think it is never wise to assume that our folks are going to listen to us whether we are interesting or whether are dull.

2. A sermon must be interesting enough to win and hold attention or it will do no good. This is the case because the sermon is not an end in itself. It may be in the mind of the minister a very beautiful and finished product, but if it fails to interest it is dead waste, however beautiful it may be. The purpose of the sermon is to get action on the part of the hearer. Before we can get people to act with us, they must think with us. Before we induce them to think with us, they must hear what we have to say. Therefore, to fail to get attention is to fail in preaching.

This is the case, however fundamental and true the sermon may be.
It may be as fundamental as the Decalogue and as true as the Sermon on the Mount, but if it fails to win attention, we are wasting our own time as well as that of our congregation. No sermon, however beautiful and profound, is of any value if it fails to interest the one who is supposed to hear it.

3. Not only does a sermon fail if it is not interesting enough to win and hold attention, but it does positive harm. To talk right on when nobody is listening is to train people in the tragic art of inattention. It is so to inoculate the congregation with preaching that the real thing will not take on them. Every sermon that we sit through without hearing makes us more immune from hearing at all. The better we listen on this Sunday, the better we are likely to listen next Sunday.

In proof of this, it is only necessary for you as ministers to check yourself on what type of congregation we find the easier, the one who has a live, interesting pastor or one who is constantly dull. Some years ago I held a week of services in two churches of the same city. The one had as minister an excellent church manager who preached as a side line. The other had a minister who put the main emphasis upon preaching. It was a thrill to preach to the congregation of the minister whose own people were accustomed to hear him gladly. But I seldom stood before the congregation of the other minister without being moved to exclaim in my own heart: "Can these dry bones live?" Let us bear in mind, then, that we cannot take the attention of our congregations for granted.

We get about as much attention as we compel. It is our business to see to it that our people hear us. Do not dismiss the matter
a writer in a certain religious journal said, "Sermons are not to be enjoyed". Of course, the primary purpose of a sermon is not entertainment, but if the goal of a sermon is an utter absence of thrills, if we reach our highest heights by dullness, then the less we prepare both ourselves and our sermons, the more likely we are to arrive. Of course, this is not the case. Drab dullness is, therefore, a sin. It is to fail in right doing. It is to do positive harm.

II

How, then, can we hope to be interesting?

1. The first step in being interesting is to be interested. First, we ought to be interested in what we are saying. Blessed is the preacher that enjoys his own preaching. In order to do this there must be a bit of freshness and newness. In other words, the man who preaches the same old sermons year after year will lose interest in them. This is not to say that all sermons is not to be repeated. We ought to preach old sermons. Such practice develops fluency and ease. But to preach no other kind ends in dullness and disaster. It was Jesus who said "Remember Lot's wife". The preacher who makes a temporary pause of a few months or years in his sermon preparation is likely to find that he has petrified. The penalty we pay for failing to preach new sermons is that we lose our capacity to prepare.

Then, there ought to be newness and freshness about our sermons, not simply because they have been recently prepared, but because they have come out of vital and glowing experience. It is my conviction that every good sermon has in it the element of surprise. If that surprise gladdens the heart of the hearers it must first gladden the heart of the preacher himself. Blessed is the man who is constantly thrilled
with the wonders of redeeming grace, who shouts with Paul in glad amazement, "To me is this grace given that I might preach the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Not only must the minister be interested in what he is saying, but he must be interested in those to whom he is saying it. The more he is interested, the better he is likely to preach. That is the reason, I take it, that most of us can preach better in our own pulpits than anywhere else. We know something of the needs, of the follies, of the failures of those to whom we preach. We appreciate their lovableness and find possibilities. For this reason, we feel, as another has put it, like taking hold of the very tree of life and shaking down its leaves for their feeding and its fruit for their feeding.

We ought so far as possible to express that interest in looking at them. I discovered early, that my people looked at me very much in proportion that I looked at them. Through the years I have watched my congregation somewhat as a salesman would watch a prospective customer. This is hard for the preacher to do who is the bond slave of a manuscript. I am not here arguing the real merits of preaching with or without such help. There are those who use manuscripts who are highly successful, but I doubt if there are not more who would be more successful if they put their manuscripts aside and looked at their congregation.

It is only thus, it seems to me, that the minister can be perfectly sure that he has the attention of his people. If he fixes his eyes in the northeast corner of the sanctuary or if he
keeps them glued to the manuscript, he may talk right on when he has lost his congregation altogether. I think most anything is better than this. Personally, if I find my congregation slipping from me, unless I am very dull I will shift gear. In fact, I will do something shocking rather than leave them to go their way while I go some. If I have to forsake my text for the moment in order to stay with my congregation, then I let the text go.

2. see 4.
THE SERMON

What ought a sermon to be? Naturally, there is room for a variety of opinions on this important question. I suppose if we were privileged to live and preach for a whole century, we should still have much to learn. Now, as a fellow student with you and not as one who has arrived, I want to consider with you some of my convictions as to what a sermon should be. It is highly important that every minister should have some conception of the goal to which he is striving. Indeed, if he does not, he is likely to reach a worthwhile goal, or even to recognize it should he reach it. To the ship bound for no harbor, no wind can possibly be favorable. Speaking generally, then, it is my conviction that a sermon should have these characteristics.

The sermon ought to be interesting. This is the case because no sermon is an end in itself. It is always a means to an end. This truth seems self-evident, yet I think we are all prone to forget it. It is often easy for me to feel quite complacent about a sermon that I thought good whether it accomplished any worthwhile results or not. To look on preaching as an end in itself is to sacrifice be as the fisherman who ____ to his own net. Such conduct is at once silly and idolatrous.

Since the sermon is not an end in itself, since its purpose is to get your hearers to act with you in accordance with your message that you bring. It is absolutely essential that you win and hold their attention. Before our hearers act with us, they must think with us. In order to induce them to think with us, we must compel them to listen to us. It is, therefore, of first and fundamental importance that a sermon be interesting enough to win and hold attention.

This is not to forget that the sermon ought to be true. Certainly it ought. Yet having it to be true is not enough. I heard a minister say with
unction some time ago, after a sermon that was as dead as the mummy of Ramses III. "I cleared my skirts." Well, I do not think he had for that was not his business. His business was to get his message across to his congregation. My sermon may be as fundamental as the De\textsuperscript{\textregistered}alogue and as true as the Sermon on the Mount, but if nobody is listening to me I am wasting the time, both of myself and of my congregation.

Not only are we failing to do any good when we preach sermons to which nobody listens, but we are doing positive harm. We are training our people in the dangerous art of inattention. We are so inoculating them with our dull sermons that even a real message is not likely to be taken seriously.

Generally speaking, the greater the interest of the hearer today, the greater his interest tomorrow. The less his interest today, the less will be his interest tomorrow.

We are prone to forget this. Often we have a conviction that it is the people who are accustomed to hear gripping preaching who are hard to interest, while those accustomed to drab dullness are easy, but the opposite is the case. Some months ago I held a week's services in two churches in the same city. The pastor of one of these churches was an excellent church manager, but an add\textsuperscript{\textregistered}al preacher. The other put his major \textsuperscript{\textregistered}mphasis upon preaching. Where did I have the easier time? With the congregation with the live minister, by all means. Almost every time I stood before the congregation of the other, I felt like saying, "Can these dry bones live?"

Some months ago there was an article in one of our church papers entitled "Sermons Not to be Enjoyed". Of course, the primary purpose of a sermon is not entertainment. Yet neither is its primary purpose to be endured. Why should a sermon be enjoyed? At the birth of Jesus the Judean hills blazed with the glory of another world. Did not the angel
declare that he had come to bring glad tidings of great joy? Is not the very meaning of the Gospel good news? Why, then, should we hear it with utter dullness or with wry faces of those who were taking an especially ill-tasting medicine? I maintain that a sermon ought to be enjoyed; that this article to which I refer is a poor apology for dullness. If merely to fail to bring any enjoyment to our hearers is the goal of our preaching, then the dullest and laziest of us can attain that goal every Sunday of the year.

The first essential, then, of a sermon is that it win and hold attention. To fail to do this is to fail to do any good. People will never act with us unless they think with us. To fail to do this is not only to do no good, but it is to do positive harm. It is to kill expectancy in the hearts of our congregation. It is to compel them to come listlessly into God's House, dogged by the dismal conviction that nothing thrilling is going to take place. As a minister I have been guilty of many a sin and shortcoming, but there are few sins that I can commit that are more deadly than the sin of downright dullness.

II

How, then, may the minister win and hold the attention of his congregation? Of course, there are many factors that enter into this. There are the gifts and the personality of the minister. Some are far more gifted and far more magnetic than others. Some, therefore, find the task easier than others. But since being interesting as a minister means far more than merely being clever and attractive, I believe that this is a goal that every true minister of the gospel may reach in some measure. How, then, shall we attain?

1. I think it is well for us to bear in mind as we prepare our sermons and as we enter the pulpit that the interest and attention of our people is something that must be won. We cannot afford to take their interest for easy granted. We cannot afford to go on the assumption that all those who come to
church come to hear us preach. Of course, if we have preached to the congregation long enough to win their confidence, this will be increasingly the case. But, generally speaking, it is not the case.

People come to church for varied reasons. Some come to meet their friends. Others come as a matter of habit. And, mark you, it is a good habit. But they were trained to go to church in their young and tender years. Others still come as a matter of duty. That, too, is a fine motive. Everybody who comes to church makes it easier for others to come and everybody who stays away makes it a bit harder for others to come. Then some come to hear the message. But that many others do not is evidenced by this word that most every minister has heard. Some member of the congregation will say with real surprise, "Why, I actually enjoyed that." What he implies is that "I came with the definite expectation of being bored. But you held me up and made me listen because I found it interesting. It is well to bear in mind, therefore, that if we grip and hold the attention of our people, we must win it.

In winning this attention we have both hindrances and helps. We are handicapped by the fact that many of our congregation have come with little expectation. Then we are speaking to a movie educated audience. They have been accustomed to receive a maximum of thrills with a minimum of effort. Therefore, it is not easy to interest them. I know it seems that it ought not to be that way. But they are that way, nonetheless. There is little use for the physician to tell his patient who has small pox that he ought to have chicken pox instead. The fact that our congregations have had all the thrills adds to our difficulties.

But along with this handicap is a great help. Ours is one of the most days perilous and fear-filled days in all human history. The people who come to hear us preach are not sure of themselves any more. This is not to say that they are greatly troubled over their sins, but they are longing for
something that will meet their deep needs, that will give them a sense of security. If the word of the prodigal "I have sinned" leaves them cold, his other word, "I perish with hunger" strikes a responsive chord. The face of humanity today is one of gaunt wistfulness. If, therefore, you are appalled by the fact that you are facing a crowd that is fed up, you ought to be heartened by the further fact that this crowd is desperately hungry for the bread of life, though it need not always know that for which it hungers.

2. Since it is the minister's business to grip and hold the attention of his people, it is highly important that he know whether he is doing this or not. There are a few unfortunate ministers who cannot sense an atmosphere. They cannot tell whether their people are with them or against them. I have known such ministers to come to the end of the year and find to their amazement that their people wanted them to move. The fact that they were amazed is indication of one reason that they desired them to go - they could not sense an atmosphere. If you cannot tell in some measure what your people are thinking, whether they are with you or not, then you are not likely to hold their attention or to preach with much success.

Sometimes we fail to know whether we are holding attention or not because we do not look at our congregation. We fix our gaze upon the northeast corner of the building and merely recite a piece. Sometimes we are so taken up with our manuscript that we do not have a chance to look at the congregation. I am not here discussing the merits or demerits of manuscript preaching. While confessing that it has some advantages, however, in my opinion, it has far greater disadvantages, one of which is this: that the reader cannot look his congregation in the face.

Speaking out of my own experience, I have tried across the years to
look my congregation in the eye, somewhat as a salesman would look at his prospective customer. If these hearers do not look back at you, the chances are that you have lost them. Watch your people, therefore, especially watch your boys and girls. If the boys and girls of your congregation are not listening, the chances are that the adults are not either. They are only enduring. Any sermon that is a ten or twelve year old boy or girl cannot get something out of is likely being wasted upon the adults as well.

If I see that I have lost the attention of my people, then unless I am very dull, I shift gear. In fact, I will do something shocking rather than trudge right on when I am going in one direction and my congregation in another. Realizing then, that attention must be won and that you ought to know when you have won it.

3. A third step in making a sermon interesting is to be interested. First the minister must be interested in his own sermon. Blessed is the man that thrills to his own preaching. Every good sermon, in my opinion, has in it an element of surprise. That element of surprise is likely to be lacking if the minister gives himself to the lazy luxury of preaching sermons that have grown old to him. This is not to say that a minister ought never to repeat a sermon. He certainly ought. Such practice develops fluency and ease. The only sermon not worth repeating is the one that was not worth preaching the first time. But the minister who ceases to prepare new sermons and preaches only old, will lose interest in them.

Not only so, but he pays a second terrible penalty. To cease to prepare new sermons is to lose one's capacity to prepare them. It was Jesus who said, "Remember Lot's wife." She stopped temporarily as she fled, but her pause became permanent. Many a man who puts off preparation of new sermons from week to week finds himself mentally and spiritually petrified.
Not only ought the minister to be interested in his own sermon because it has about it a certain intellectual newness, but above all else he is to be interested because he is speaking out of his own experience of the thrilling grace of God. This does not mean that I am not to preach more than I experience. But it does mean that if I preach thus, I know something of the thrill and of the certainties of which I speak. One source of the element of surprise in the best preaching is what Jesus Christ himself has done for the preacher. No man can be uninteresting who can

..should, with Paul this holy word: "To me is this grace given that I might preach the unsearchable riches of Christ." If your sermons affirming your experience with God have grown old, then your preaching has lost its interest to you and will have little interest for your congregation.

Not only must the preacher be interested in his sermon, but he must be interested in those whose attention he is seeking to grip and hold. It is hard for me to resist any man when I feel that he has a keen interest in me. One reason the mass of people heard Jesus gladly was the fact that they felt perfectly sure that he cared. He was interested in them personally. He was not simply interested in their souls, he was interested in themselves. My interest in others will awaken their interest in me.

This is the reason, I think, that most of us find it easier to preach in our own churches than anywhere else. We have come to know and to care for the people that have honored us with their presence and are turning their eager faces toward us. We know that this man is fighting a great temptation, that that woman has suffered with her heart's blood. We know that this young man is standing at the forks of the road. There is no greater thrill than that which comes to the minister as he thus faces his own people. Truly, in the language of another, it makes him eager to "lay hold of the tree of life and shake down both its fruits and its leaves for their feeding and their healing."
Some years ago I heard two men, widely different in background, in ability, in culture. One of these was speaking to a group of college professors and "what nots". I was one of the "what nots". He looked at the floor and conducted a monologue. If he was the slightest bit interested in what he was saying, he gave no indication of it. We echoed him back. Our interest was as dead as his.

Then I heard another minister. He did not even use good English. He had grown up in the wildest days of the West and had had no opportunity for a formal education. But in spite of his bad English, he was quite intellectual. Better still, he was beautifully Christian. Therefore, in spite of the fact that he always said "I seen" when he ought to have said "I saw", in spite of many a crudity, many a blunder, he grapples us to him with hooks of steel and made us both to laugh and to sob and to repent. He was interested in his own message and interested in us to whom he was speaking.

4. If we are to be interesting, we must speak about things that really matter. Here again we get an insight into the spell which Jesus cast over men. He talked to them about the eternal hungers and thirsts of the soul. He talked to them of those values that last. He talked to them about God, about the worth of the soul, about those eternal verities that live forever. That is one of the glories of preaching. I know that I have that to offer which will satisfy today and forever. I know I have a message that you can stand beside your government buildings, your majestic mountains, and it will be doing business there when they have been gone for centuries.

Now, it is a sin to bow before a hungry hearted congregation and offer them stones instead of bread. I heard a minister announce his subject to a group to which he was to speak. The subject was the very climax of trivility. Then he added the further word, "It does not matter what I say about this subject." That was one statement, I think, with which his audience was in
entire agreement. But if what I say does not matter and if I am convinced of that before I say it, then for me to say it is the height of silliness, even of positive wickedness. We are to speak, then, about things that matter, that matter to the folks that are listening to us at that moment. A few years ago it was the custom for certain ministers to seek to quicken lagging interest by selecting queer texts that could not stand on their own feet, then they proceeded to edify the congregation by fashioning beautiful crutches to hold up their flabby texts. It is wiser to take the opposite course. I find it increasingly helpful to select brawny texts that are able to stand upon their own feet. With a text like that I do not have to prop it up. It props me up. When I find myself slipping, I flee to it for refuge. Not only so, but sometimes it so lays hold of my own heart that even I can for the moment mount up on the wings of an eagle; run and not be weary; walk and not faint. If you do not believe in the worth of your own gospel, you are not apt to preach it with interest.

5. Not only must we speak of things that matter if we would be interesting, but we must speak of them with a note of authority. Here I am not thinking about the authority of the letter. We are to speak of the truths that we bring with authority because in some measure, at least, we have hammered them out on the anvils of our own soul. Let me remind you once more of the secret of the spell of Jesus. His was the spell of the man who knew. Everybody that heard him felt that it was true of him what he said to Nicodemus, "We spake that which we do know and testify that which we have seen." There is a fascination about a man who can bring freshness and authenticity of God. He may have many a lack but if there is reality in what he says, he grips us.
Had I encountered that woman of bad reputation who met Jesus at the well, I would certainly have discouraged her as she set out to the village to tell her fellow villagers about her great discovery. The very street boys knew her past. They knew that she had come to that very hour as through the foetid filth of a moral swamp. Yet when she told her story, it stands in the records many believe because of the saying of the woman. I do not know just why it is, but the hearers can sense whether the preacher knows what he is talking about or not. There is that, therefore, in the message of a man who really knows God which makes his word to have authority.

6. Finally, if we are to be interesting, we must speak with simplicity and cleanliness. We need to bear in mind always that preaching to be interesting must be understood. We must not speak simply so an intelligent and ardent listener can understand, but so the listless cannot help but understand us. Therefore, we need to cultivate constantly the fine grace of simplicity.

Now, sometimes forget this. A good many years ago a minister said to me with considerable satisfaction, "My message is to the intellectually elite." Well, so was that of Jesus and so must be yours and mind, but it must be also to those who do not belong to this class. Not many of those giraffes come to the average church. Even when they do, of all the people who will appreciate simplicity, the intellectually elite will appreciate it the most. Remember anybody can muddy the water. It is my strong conviction that anything that I may see clearly, I can make you see. If I can't, the chances are that I am mentally muddy myself.

I used to have a friend who has since passed into the world of clearer understanding. He had an amazing fondness for big words. In fact, he would
never use a word of four syllables if he could find one of five. One day he
was describing a scene where a certain man was thrust through the side with
a sword. Instead of telling us about it in everyday language, he declared: His
antagonist smote him in the midriff of his quivering viscera." It would have
been laughable if it had not been so pathetic.

I am thinking of another with a vast fondness for pseudo scientific terms.
One day a brother minister took his life in his hands and said to him, "Dr. Blank,
why don't you drop that pseudo scientific jargon and speak English?" the minister
was indignant. He declared, "I am not going to compromise my literary style."
Now, it strikes me that position is both silly and wicked. It seems as if he were
more bent on saving his style than serving his people. Before we give our main
attention to the saving of a style, we ought to be convinced that it is
worth saving.

Winston Churchill tells the story of a lad who was playing along the wharf
in an English village one bitter cold day. The little chap lost his footing and
fell into the water. A sailor, at the risk of his own life, plunged into the
heavy water. He rescued the little chap and gave him back to his frantic mother.

The next day the sailor on going down the village street saw this mother
coming toward him, leading her boy by the hand. He was a bit afraid of a scene
and would have ducked down the alley, but there was none to duck down. But when he and the mother had come face to face, she
did not fall on his neck. Instead, she said with indignation, "Where is Jimmy's
cap?" The sailor answered modestly, "I wasn't after Jimmy's cap. I was after
of their Jimmy." I have known a few ministers who seemed to spend more/time trying to
save Jimmy's cap.

Here, then, is summed up what I am convinced a sermon ought to be. It ought
to be interesting. If not, they fail to hear us.
Failing to hear us, we will fail to do them any good. Not only so, but we are doing them positive harm. Our sermons, therefore, must be interesting.

To this end we must realize that attention must not be taken for granted. We must see to it that we have it. We can win it if we are interested, if we speak about things that matter with a note of authority. We can have it if we do this with clearness and simplicity.
Finally that on the surface, one of those broad shouldered masculine texts that I have been recommending to you. The truth is that this word finally is word that has been much abused. It has had all its teeth pulled. It has a decided appearance of anemia. So much is this the case that one cynic has defined the optimist as the man who reaches for his hat when the preacher says finally. But this word implies that we have reached our destination and that having reached that destination, we ought to act accordingly. It suggests three facts about a sermon I think that every minister would do well to bear in mind.

I

Every sermon ought to have a definite destination. A lovely friend of mine told me that when he had returned home from a service some Sundays ago where the sermon had been more of a wandering in the wilderness than a pilgrim's progress, his small boy asked him a question. This was the soul searching question that this lad put to his father: "Daddy," he said, "what were you trying to get us to do?" This boy, being devoted to his father, admiring his father, naturally wanted to do what his father desired, but somehow he didn't know what that something was. Therefore, he came with this searching question - "What were you trying to get us to do?"

Now, that is a question with which every minister ought to search his own soul as he prepares himself and as he prepares his sermon. What am I going to try to get my people to do through this particular message? On what definite errand am I going with this sermon for my King? If they take me seriously, what am I to expect them to do? If we are hazy about this matter the chances are altogether against our preaching a good sermon. To the ship that is bound for no harbor, no wind can possibly be favorable. On the other hand, if the ship knows exactly to what harbor it is going, it can often use winds that are even adverse.
One weakness of my preaching has been its lack of definiteness. When I entered the ministry I hardly thought such definiteness was a necessity. Now that I have learned of its necessity, it is hard to put it into practice. I am sure of this, however, that if you have a good sermon, and a friend were to ask you as you are preparing to mount your pulpit, "What are you going to tell the people today?" you could put your answer in a single sentence. If I cannot tell in a single sentence what I am going to undertake to get my people to do, the chances are very great that I am shooting at the side of the barn instead of at a definite target.

As this sense of definiteness is needed by the minister in the preparation of his sermon, it is an absolute necessity for the right edification of the hearer. This boy would have been glad to have done his will of his father and to have put the sermon into practice had he only known what his father was after. But not knowing, the practice of the sermon was impossible. If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare for battle? Even when our people know exactly what we are after, we sometimes fail to move them, but if they do not know the chances are that we will be sure to fail.

That does not mean that a sermon lacking in definiteness accomplishes nothing at all. Our gracious Lord has a way of using our bungling efforts in spite of the fact that they are bungling. Frederick W. Norwood tells of preaching a sermon on a certain occasion and of receiving a letter the following week from a gentleman who was much impressed by the sermon, saying that as a result of hearing him, he had quit using tobacco. This took the good minister by surprise since he was a devoted user of the weed and looked upon it as a great luxury.

Even if I am very definite in my direction, even if I have a clear view of the target at which I am shooting, I might miss. If I do not even see the target or if I am shooting at nothing in particular, then the chances of
my missing it are overwhelmingly great. I know of only one example in all the Bible where a man hit the target when he was not aiming at it, that was that nameless soldier who liquidated Ahab. It was a good shot, all right, but the soldier deserves no special credit for it because he was only drawing a bow at a venture.

I can imagine if I had spoken to this soldier as he adjusted his arrow to the string and said, "What are you shooting at this time?" he would have smiled and have said, "O, nothing in particular, I was sent out here to shoot and so I am shooting." And he drew his bow at a venture, aiming at nothing in particular, and when he struck Ahab at the joint of the harness Ahab was greatly surprised, but he was not any more surprised than the soldier who had happened to hit his mark. But not many battles have been won in that fashion. Not many marks have been hit in that fashion. Other things being equal I would have said that if Ahab didn't get killed till a soldier of this caliber killed him, he would have lived so long that he would have made Methuselah himself look like a babe in arms.

Now supposing I was preaching a sermon on this text: "Now, therefore are we all here present in the sight of God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." This service is a part of the record of a successful service that took place many centuries ago. Four factors entered into the success of the service. First, there was the congregation. Second, the minister. Third, the sermon, and Fourth, the results. Having discussed that these four factors, I end by showing/these same factors ought to be with us today, that we, too, can make our service successful by using the same resources which with which these of the long ago brought victory in their service. Therefore, if you were to ask me as I set out to preach this sermon at what target I was shooting, I could give, at least in that particular, a definite answer. Thus I think every good sermon has a definite
goal.

II

Not only ought we to have a definite goal in our preaching, but we ought to drive towards that goal and towards it only.

1. We ought to travel. A sermon ought to move. Dr. Bluf has a way of telling his students that if a sparrow were to come into the sanctuary where you were preaching next Sunday, the chances are that the sparrow would attract more attention than you. This he would do not because he was larger or more noisy, he would attract more attention because he would be moving while perchance you would not be moving.

A sermon, then, ought to move. There is a fascination in going somewhere. There was a genuine appeal in the invitation that was extended to Jethrow even though he rejected it. "We are journeying into a land of which the Lord hath said, 'I will give it you. Come thou with us and we will do thee good." We like to move on and out. We love the lure of far horizons. We delight in the joy of going on. And the preacher who indicates by his first few sentences that he is headed towards a definite goal, that he is going somewhere, is likely to lure some hearer to go along with him.

But while movement is necessary, it is not enough. We must go in a definite direction. If the preacher is moving in a fashion that the hearer is convinced that his theme song is, "I don't know where I'm going but I'm on my way", the temptation to follow him is not likely to be irresistible.

I used to know an old chap as a boy who was a farmer of sorts but a loafer of greater sorts. I used to meet him on one country road or another again and again. Never once, so far as I remember, did I find him going anywhere in particular. I would almost always ask him where he was going just to get his answer and the answer invariably was this - "I am just knocking about." Now as a boy I used to look at the encircling hills about our father's farm and wonder what lay beyond them. I longed to see the big outer world, but
though I felt the lure of far horizons I never have felt the slightest inclination to follow this friend who was just knocking about. There is nothing very exciting or very thrilling or very appealing about that, and when as a minister in the pulpit I begin knocking about, then the chances are my congregation will knock about somewhere else but not following me.

Nothing, therefore, will take the place of definiteness of direction.

Some years ago Mrs. Chappell and I were touring the New England States. We came one afternoon, about two o'clock, to the Wayside Inn. We decided that we would visit this historic old building and we spent an hour or more looking it over. Then we resumed our journey. But in the course of the journey, we lost our sense of direction. We lost our way, and we drove and we drove and we drove until about ten o'clock that night we saw a light in the distance. Driving to that we discovered that it was in front of an inn. Then we decided further that since it was late, we had better stop for the night. And when we went in to stop for the night we discovered that the particular inn at which we had arrived was the Wayside. We had been travelling very diligently for some seven or eight hours and we had only reached the place where we had set out. And I am just wondering how many times I have taken a whole thirty minutes just to get back to the same place from which I set out in my sermon. Now every minister of experience knows how easy it is to be lured from your goal. There are so many interesting detours. There is such a delightful story that you have heard that though it does not illustrate any point in your sermon, yet it is hard to refrain from telling it. In our preaching it is well to make this text of Paul's our very own, "This one thing I do. I am going to drive straight to the goal that I have set for myself and allow nothing to turn me aside.

Not only do we often turn aside to matters that do not count, but we lose sight of our goal altogether. Even in the process of preaching the change sermon we sometimes the goal and end with a different goal from that
that we had in mind when we set out. Some years ago, I am told, that a vessel set out from the city of New Orleans loaded with a cargo of ___.

The goal of that journey was to deliver a cargo of hams and bacon to a certain firm in the city of Memphis. The vessel had scarcely gotten well under way when it was when it was (machine repeats) the captain of the ___he could stand this and so he ordered his fireman and engineer to put on full steam ahead. This they did but the rival was still out in the distance. Then the firemen looked at that mean and wondered if a good slab of bacon and a ham or two might not increase the heat, and therefore the steam. And so he tried it out with good results. The backward boat began to accumulate speed. By and by it overtook its rival. At last it reached the dock in Memphis with flying colors, having won the race. But it had burned up its cargo on the way. In other words it had set out with one goal, the goal of delivering the goods, and had changed its purpose altogether. Therefore, I urge upon you and upon myself to keep in mind what you have set out to do. If you do this, partial failure will be fairly sure, but if you do not do it, complete failure is surer still. Keep in mind what you are there to do. Keep the lad's question constantly before you, that is, "what were you trying to get us to do?"

III

Not only ought a sermon to have a definite goal, and ought it travel towards it, but it ought to arrive. And having thus arrived, it ought to quit.

I live about two miles from my church. When the services are over on Sunday morning and or Sunday evening, I drive home in my car. But what tells me when I am to stop? It is my arrival at my destination and not my watch. If I find that I am a little slower than usual I do not drive three or four times around the block and then drive into my garage, Neither do I, if I find myself a bit ahead of time, park five or six blocks down the street.
and walk home. When I stop is determined by my arrival at my destination. It ought to be your arrival and not the clock that tells you when to stop preaching. When you thus have a definite goal to stop will be as natural as to stop when you reach home. By this I do not mean that you are to be indifferent to time. I think it is the preacher's business to go over the road and know just how long it will take him to reach his goal. If he finds that it will take him over thirty minutes, he ought to move his goal a little closer to him. It is amazing how much we can say in thirty minutes if we really study our sermon. I am convinced that any minister who is preaching to the same congregation two to three times a week never ought to go over thirty minutes.

This is the case for many reasons. Among others there are those in your congregation who live at boarding houses. If they do not get home about the noon hour, the chances are that they will have to eat cold dinner, or possibly miss their dinner altogether. And so worldly are your people, so utterly secular that if it becomes a choice of missing the sermon or missing the dinner, some of them might actually miss your sermon.

Then there are others who have certain standing engagements. When I was leaving Oklahoma City after a pastorate of five years, a physician said to me, "I have been coming to hear you preach for five years." He was not such an excellent churchman. I do not know that he ever told me that he enjoyed a sermon. But he said, "I have been coming to hear you preach for five years. It so happens that I have an engagement every Sunday afternoon with a brother physician that I must keep and I want to say that you have not put me out three minutes in these five years." Now the difference between that physician attending my service and not attending it was whether he could depend upon me to get him out on time. I believe it is good religion and good sense, young gentlemen, to make it as easy as possible for folks to
come to hear us preach.

Of course, we will have in our congregation those patient and choice souls who will say to us at the close of some sermon, "The only objection I had to that sermon was that it was too brief. You quit too soon." I am thankful for all these lovely souls. I wish that their number were greatly multiplied. Yet I have always taken these gracious words with a considerable amount of salt. This is the case because after preaching for all these years I do not know that I have ever seen more than six people burst into tears at the same time in the same service because I quit too soon. Now, the reason some ministers find it so hard to quit is because they did not know where they were going when they set out. When Noah sent his dove out from the ark, the dove had no fixed destination. It had good wings, it flew well, but by and by there was nothing for the poor bird to do but to come back to the very window from which it had set out no telling how many hours ago. It did not know its destination, therefore, it found no place on which to rest its feet. I have seen quite a few ministers get in the same condition as Noah's dove.

And by a strange perversity, the very time we need a definite goal most is the time that we are least likely to find it. It is easy for the minister to stop when he has got on well, when he knows that he has delivered himself. But there are those desperate times when he knows that he has not got on well. I read some time ago of an idiot who spent all his time spinning tops, and the wise writer said that he had an idea that there were days when the tops did not spin well and when the idiot went home with a sense of failure. Well, every minister knows those miserable hours when his top simply will not spin. It is then often times that he finds it hardest to quit trying. The very time when a goal would stand us in most good stead is the time when some of us miss it.
I had an illustration of this some years ago. I heard a man preach, and an excellent man he was, but he was under a heavy handicap and indicated it from the beginning. There was a lack of definiteness about his preaching. And so, after rambling for some fifteen or twenty minutes, he came out with the difficulty. He said, "Pardon me, brethren, but I have a bad toothache." But you could see the wheels go round. He realized that he had not said anything up to date, that he had got exactly nowhere. Therefore, he saw a goal post down the way and decided he would flutter towards that. And so he did, to find that disappointing and deceptive. Then he said a second time, "Pardon me, my brethren, but I have a bad case of toothache."

But even then, he would not stop. He seemed to be saying to himself "I haven't said a thing yet and I hate to quit and leave the whole situation blank. I didn't know where I was trying to go and I still don't know. But down yonder ten minutes away looks like another favorable stopping place." And so he went to that. And the last he said to us was this, "Pardon me, my brethren, but I have a bad case of toothache." And with that he quit, he still having the toothache and we the sermon, and we being the worse off of the two.

Now and then a plane will come to its destination to find that it cannot land because the lights are out or because of some other difficulty. Under those circumstances it can do one of two things, it can go to the next station or it can cruise about a bit until things are put right. But it cannot cruise about indefinitely or it will crack up. Now and then when the preacher cannot land, he can cruise about for a little while but he cannot keep it up long or he will crack up and in so doing he is liable to crack up some of his congregation. Have, then, a definite goal. Drive towards it, and when you reach it, quit.
But bear this in mind - when you say "Finally, brethren", while it is to put a period to your sermon, it is not to put a period to the influence and the power of your sermon on those who have heard it. Every sermon ought to call for action. Every minister ought to preach for a verdict. When my train reached the station the other night, the conductor so announced, and in announcing, he called on me to act. This call need not always be for an open decision then and there but it certainly ought always to be a decision then and there in the hearts of the hearers.

Now, it is often difficult for the minister either to call or to expect anything of a sermon that he feels has been a bit of a failure. But I have discovered this, that sometimes God has used mightily an effort of mine that seemed to me very futile, and sometimes when I have felt that I have won, I didn't win so much after all. Bear in mind that fine clean prayer of Spurgeon. He had finished or had had to stop without finishing, feeling that he had accomplished nothing. Therefore, he prayed this fine prayer; "Lord, thou art almighty, thou canst do anything, thou canst make something out of nothing, therefore, bless this sermon."

1. Phil
2. Acts
3. Sam. Rev
"Prophesy upon these bones and say unto them, 0 ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." (Ezekiel 37:4)

About the year 597 B.C. the city of Jerusalem fell to the invading armies of Babylon. Then thousands of her choicest citizens were at once carried away into exile. They were settled on the banks of the canal Chebar just east of Babylon. Among these war casualties was a prophet priest by the name of Ezekiel. He must have been a fairly young man at this time. He was a man of ability. He was destined to influence his people as few men in all their eventful history. He is often described as the father of Judaism. He had a timely word for his day and for your day and mine.

Now while making this tearful trek with his fellow-exiles into a foreign land he no doubt passed through a valley where a battle had been fought. The slain on both sides had been many. The battle over, it would seem that the armies were too tired or too hard pressed or too indifferent to bury their own dead. The forces of nature, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field had had their say with these dead bodies. Their bones were now whitening upon the earth. As far as the eye could see the scene stretched in ghastly ugliness. This experience left an impression on the sensitive mind of Ezekiel that was never erased.

Five years later he was called to be a minister to his fellow-exiles. He was by no means eager for his task. He tells us frankly that he went in bitterness of spirit. His was not an appointment to be coveted. But when under divine pressure he faced his congregation so pathetic was their
plight that they reminded him at once of the valley of death through which he had passed on his way from Jerusalem. The situation looked utterly hopeless both to the prophet and to his fellows. They said of themselves: "Our bones are dry. Our hope is dead."

But there is this significant and heartening fact. Even though the situation looked desperate to the prophet and even though the people were depressed to the point of despair, there was one who would not give them up. Though man was at the end of his resources this one had not exhausted his resources. The one who still hoped was God. He was the one whom Isaiah had in mind when he said: "He shall not fail nor be discouraged." You and I have been discouraged many times. The book of our life story is kept open by blighted flowers of opportunity that have become failures. But there is always something else that God can do. He believed that there was a way out even for people so shadowed and broken as to remind one of dry bones. He even believes that there is hope for a world as torn and scared and desperate as our world today.

I

Now when God set about the task for bringing a remedy to this desperate city he did it through human instrumentality. "I will build my church," Jesus declared centuries later. How does he build it? He builds it out of faulty human beings such as we are. He builds it also through human hands. If anything worth while is to be done in our generation for the saving of this world we are the ones under God who are going to have to do it.

What did God tell his prophet to do? How is Ezekiel under divine guidance to usher in a new day? There are many useful expedients that the prophet must pass over. For instance, God did not command his prophet to organize these dry bones. Organization is good. In union there is strength,
But if we only organize death, death becomes stronger instead of weaker. While organization is important it is not primary. Therefore, Ezekiel's first call was not to organize.

Neither did God command Ezekiel to polish these bones. A polished bone left to itself will rot just as quickly as one that is unpolished. There was a day when millions thought that all that was needed for the building of an ideal world was that everybody have an education. But we have learned that education that is secular as is most of our education today is not of necessity a blessing at all. It may be an unmeasured curse. The most cultivated nation of our generation would have served her own interest far better and have been a far less curse to the world if it had been a nation of savages, even cannibals.

No more did God command his prophet to build a new social order where every man would be guaranteed a job with adequate pay and a comfortable home. These things are needful if the kingdom of God ever comes in our world. They will doubtless be included, but they are certainly not the abundant life of which Jesus spoke. There are those who lived abundantly without them. There were saints even in Caesar's household. There are those who lived in dire spiritual poverty with them. It is possible to be well clothed, well fed, well housed, well educated, and well rotted all at the same time.

What then, I repeat, did God tell his prophet to do? The answer is one to make the cynic laugh out loud. He told him to preach. How impotent and futile that sounds. What to the man of the world seems of lesser consequence than a sermon. Surely preaching has fallen into disrepute in many circles. If something is inexpressibly boring we speak of it as being as dry as a sermon. Certainly in the popular mind preaching is a bit below par at this hour.

Yet over against that it might be well to remember that God has always thought well of preaching. He has never been able to get on adequately
without the preacher. Preaching and salvation are related in the Bible as cause and effect. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. But how shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed, and how shall they believe on whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher." Strange as it may seem it has blessed God through the years by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

II

Now it strikes me that it might be well for us both ministers and laymen to recover something of God's appreciation of preaching. Of course, there is a sense in which all of us preach. But even in preaching from the pulpit the layman plays his part as truly as does the minister. Preaching is in a high sense a cooperative task. We need to recover this appreciation because the work of preaching for the minister is central and that central something threatens to be side-tracked.

1. The modern minister tends to side-track the ministry, because he is a man of so many duties. There is no other man in the community from whom so much is expected. When a committee waited on one of our southern bishops and gave him the qualifications that they sought in their new minister his face suddenly brightened. "Oh," he said, "I know just the man. I am not sure that he is available but if you can get him I think he might suit you. His name is St. Paul."

The present-day minister is expected to be a good organizer. He must know how to run the machinery of the church. He must be a good financier. He must be a good pastor and a good preacher. He must be a fine director of religious education. Sometimes he needs to be a choir director and in many instances a first class janitor. In addition he must be a citizen of his community, speaking at every possible banquet on every possible subject.

Naturally many ministers have little time to prepare for preaching.
But the congregation who thus expects its pastor to be a man of all work is seeking its own spiritual impoverishment. The minister who allows himself thus to become cumbered of much serving needs to reread the wise decision of a group of ministers who made this high resolve under the leadership of the spirit: "Seek ye out among you seven men whom we may appoint under this business but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word." We have a generation of the best church managers ever known. But our preaching has suffered because of this attainment.

2. Then we tend to side-track preaching because it is so difficult. Sooner or later many ministers discover that they cannot do everything. Having reached that discovery they decide on the particular task upon which they will major. Since we are all constitutionally lazy we often choose the task that is easiest or most congenial instead of the one that is most important. The man who selects the easy task never majors on preaching. Preaching is difficult and exacting. I know it is a thrill but when rightly done it is about the most costly work in which a man can engage. Some side-track preaching because it is so costly.

3. Then there are those who side-track preaching because they have allowed the prophet to be pushed aside by the priest. This is due at least in part to our new emphasis on worship. Now worship is of supreme importance. While I believe with all my heart in the importance of worship I mistrust some of the roads by which we seek to attain this goal. I have witnessed worship programs that left me very cold. There are those who seem to think that all that is necessary in order to worship is to put out the lights and bring in one or two smoking candles. They go on the assumption that God is not light as the New Testament says but rather twilight. But even if this helps anybody I have no objection.

But there are those who in emphasizing the worship have drawn a line between a worship service and a sermon. This I think is dead wrong. If the service is to have any unity the two belong together. In fact, the
worship service is to reach its climax through the sermon. I have been helped by the great hymns, those stairways of the spirit on which the souls of the saints through the years have climbed toward God. I have been helped in my worship through the prayers, that is if they were not too long. It is the finest of fine arts for a minister to be able so to voice the penitence and the aspiration of his most backward and of his most forward people in such a fashion as that his congregation may say amen in their hearts but if he keeps on until everybody is weary he has done more harm than good.

But while I have been helped by the so-called worship part of the service I have been helped most often by the sermon. When I have cried out in penitance, "God be merciful unto me, a sinner," when I have felt with glad and holy awe, "Surely God is in this place," it has generally been when some minister has spoken as if his lips had just been freshly touched with a live coal from off God's own altar. On the other hand, even if the worship service had been effective it is hard to keep helpfulness from being if the minister follows with an ill-prepared and half-baked sermon. Therefore, at the risk of seeming entirely behind the time I still believe that while the minister's work is many-sided, his supreme work, his central task, is preaching.

III

Now the preacher, to be effective, must have certain equipment. I pass over educational qualifications, personality, etc., that are so obvious. How was this prophet equipped for effective preaching?

1. He was in touch with God. In his own words, "The hand of the Lord was upon me." Certainly God never expected the minister to carry on merely in the energy of the flesh. When the minister stands up to preach he is to have the help of a mighty ally. It is his privilege to say humbly yet gladly what Jesus said when he spoke in his own home church: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath annointed me to preach." Speaking
thus in the power of God and in the consciousness of his presence, preaching becomes about the most thrilling experience in my opinion that a human being can know.

2. He was in touch with men. That was his fundamental. If we lose our touch with folks we are very likely to lose our touch with God also. Before Ezekiel preached a single sermon to these shadowed and broken people he went and sat down among them. He looked out on life through their eyes, he bled through their wounds, he wept through their tears, he staggered under the weight of their burden. Thus he was able to preach as one who had an understanding heart.

Did you ever notice how some ministers who were once vital seem to lose their touch of tenderness when they get out of the pastorate. The metallic seems to creep in their voices. What is the matter? They have lost touch with folks. Every man ought to do some pastoral visiting if not for the sake of those whom he seeks to help then for his own sake. No man can keep life and vitality in his preaching who loses his touch with people. God has to have a man in the pulpit who knows how people are born, how they live, how they stumble, and fall, how they bark their shins and break their hearts, how they laugh and love and repent. However much the minister may know if he does not know folks then he is likely to become so dead that an ordinary mummy in comparison with him would dance like Fred Astaire.

3. This preacher preached constructively and with authority. He did not begin by telling what he did not believe. He was too wise to try so to add a bunch of ciphers as to make a unit. He spoke positively. He spoke with authority. "Hear the word of the Lord," he proclaimed. His authority was not that of the . The truth that he brought he knew to be God given. In the fellowship of God he would hammer it out on the anvil of his own soul.

4. Finally he spoke hopefully, expectantly. He had come to the place
where he counted on God to bring about changed beyond the power of man. His was not an easy optimism. When God said, "Can these bones live," Ezekiel did not give a flippant, "Yes, Hallelujah," He rather seems to have felt, "Looking at the bones, I would say no. But looking at God, I would say that the impossible may yet be possible." He looked at his difficulties in the light of God. Seeing God he came to have a greater sense of the divine than he had of the visible impossibilities that confronted him. That makes a vast difference. Those ten spies saw the giant so clearly that they had no eye for God at all. Caleb and Joshua on the other hand had such a sense of God that they saw in the giant's assets rather than liabilities. "They will be bread for us," they declared. It is only a firm faith in God that will enable a minister to preach effectively today.

Years ago I went to be pastor in a little Texas town where the church was torn to shreds by internal strife. I undertook a revival. Knowing the difficulty of the situation I invited a consecrated layman to come and stay in my home. Not to sing or to preach, but to pray. When the services went on day after day and there was not so much as a stir among the dry bones, my friend seemed to grow increasingly radiant. "The situation is impossible," said a friend one day. But this man of prayer answered, "You would not say so if you knew my Lord as I know him." Then one night this saint whispered in my ear: "This is the night. Something is going to happen." And something did that changed that valley of death into life and beauty.

IV

What happened when Ezekiel preached?

There was a noise. It is encouraging even to get a notice among the dead. Then there was organization under the divine hand. Then the breath of God came and this valley of death was changed into a parade ground for the army of the King. This I know is the language of symbol and parable,
yet through the years similar results have taken place as men have preached who were in touch with God and in touch with man.

On the day of Pentecost the service did not reach its climax with the coming of the rushing wind or with the appearance of tongues of fire upon the heads of the worshippers. The service reached its climax when a man stood up and so spoke in the power of the spirit that three thousand were added unto the Lord.

When the church had grown complacent, when it had ceased to be aggressive and was trying to stand a siege, the sun set and the night came on. We call that night the Dark Ages. It lasted for nearly a thousand years. How did a new day dawn? A certain man named Martin Luther stood up and preached.

When England suffering from a terrible reaction from Puritanism, when the rottenness of the court had percolated down through the lower strata of society until a nation seemed on the verge of moral collapse, how was that valley of death transformed? An Oxford don felt his heart strangely warmed. With that hot heart beating in his bosom, he mounted his horse and set out on a preaching tour that carried him through a century. As he preached the icicles fell from the eaves of the houses. The winter-striped trees put on their verdant foliage. The flowers bloomed, the birds sang and the heart stood up in the glad consciousness that God had come. He was right who said, "Every great age of the Church has been a great age of preaching. When the light goes out in the pulpit it goes out around the world.