

Why Preach?

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A considerable number of you expect to preach tomorrow. What for? It will cost some labor and anxiety on your own part and some trouble to the audience which you expect to come and hear you; and what for? On your own part, what is it for? Just to fill an appointment? Well, that is very important. If a man has an appointment he ought to fill it, especially if he is a preacher. I have felt this duty pressed upon me all my life as a preacher. I recollect that I had an appointment once thirty miles from home and I expected to reach the place on horseback. When Saturday morning arrived the thermometer registered eighteen degrees below zero. Then the question arose whether I ought to risk being frozen by going to that appointment. But I mounted my horse and went. When I was within a half-mile or so of the village I met with a number of brethren who had been gathering ice for their ice houses. They told me that they were not looking for me. I answered, "Whenever I have an appointment, you look for me." That has been the rule of my life, and I mention it so that it may help any of you who have been a little careless. It is very important to always be prompt in filling your appointments.

But is that all? Is that the only reason you have for expecting to preach tomorrow? If so, for what purpose did you make that appointment? What did you expect to accomplish? [A]nd what do you now expect to accomplish by filling that appointment? "Well," perhaps some one will say, "I expect to be a preacher; I expect preaching to be my life work and I want to be practicing on it all I can." But if that is all, why not save trouble and time by practicing in your room? Get as large a mirror as you can and practice before the mirror. You can see then whether your hair is combed and parted just right; you can see if your necktie is on straight; you can watch your gesticulations and see if your hands are in just the right position, and if they go right. And so on. Why not practice before the mirror? Some preachers do that. It is actually the truth that some preachers do that. Or you might do the way brother Jones did. He had an appointment with a church, a country church. He went out on Saturday and put up with a brother. Along in the evening a negro girl was sent to the spring for a bucket of water. She came running in and said "Mister, Mister, there is a crazy man out there in the pasture!" They thought it might be some one who had escaped from the asylum. So the whole family, dogs and all, went running out to the pasture. When they got there they found brother

Jones practicing his sermon among the trees. Now I don't know but what that is as good a way to practice on the people.

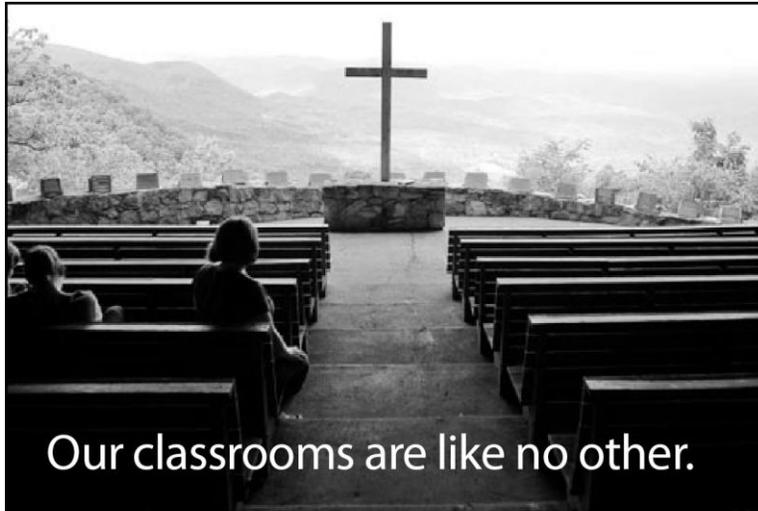
Perhaps some one will say, "I expect to make preaching my life work and I want to be at it." Why do you expect to make preaching your life work? What is that for? Is it in order that you may have an easy time in life? If that is the case then you are a lazy fellow. And as soon as you get into the work and the people find out that you are in that work just to have an easy time they will not ask you to come and preach for them any more. You say your purpose is to have an easy time in life. An easy time in what way? Not to have to plow corn and dig potatoes? To ride about in a carriage driven by the best people in the community, and wherever you go to have chicken pie for dinner? If that is your purpose, as soon as the people find it out they will not kill any more chickens for you. They will set you down to corn bread and bacon and beans.

Well, what is it for? In order that you may get rich? There is not a man in the country green enough to think that is the way to get rich. And if there was a man thinking that he was going to be a preacher in order to get rich, he is too big a fool to be a preacher. And as soon as the people find out that that is even one of your motives for preaching that will be the end of your preaching. There is not a man, woman or child in the country who wants to hear a preacher who is preaching for the money, and that one of his chief aims.

Well, what is it for? That you may become a popular man in your community? You notice that good preachers are popular men. Respectable men love them and nice good woman love them, and everybody is ready to welcome him into their homes and to give him the hand of welcome anywhere. If you are preaching for popularity, you may think you can keep people from finding it out. Well, you can't keep people from finding it out, and as soon as they do you will be the most unpopular man in the community.

Well, what is it for? The apostle Paul gave the purpose of the work of the preacher when he wrote to Timothy. He said, "By so doing you [w]ill save both yourself and them that hear you.["] How save himself? Because when a man has reached the conclusion, no matter how it came into his mind, that it is his duty to preach and make that his business he will be lost if he does not do it. Just as neglect of duty in any other matter will bring down the wrath of God in the day of judgment. If there is any of you who really and conscientiously believes that God wants you to preach the gospel, do it at the peril of your soul. This means that Timothy and every other man that preaches will save himself and every other man who believes. What business is it of mine to save other people if I can only save myself? If you are a

good swimmer and should find yourself out in the water by the side of a sinking steamer where people are going down all around you and you should boldly swim to shore without trying to help anybody, they ought to tumble you back in the ocean when you get there, for you could have saved somebody and you did not. And here we are in the great sea of the world. There are thousands going down. We see them every day. If the preacher does not save some of them, I do not think it is possible for him to be saved himself. What would men and angels think of a man going home to heaven who has been a preacher and has not brought one single soul with him? I think that if you were to take a vote on it all men and angels would vote to send him back. They would say, "He is not fit for our country." Now if that is your purpose in preaching, to "Save yourself and them that hear you," it is a worthy one. Now you are all ready to say that there is no other purpose equal to it. I think that if I should be so fortunate as to find myself in heaven and look around and realize that I am here at last, that I have been able to pass and have obtained the grace of God in the forgiveness of my sins, and here I am in heaven. Now that would be heaven to me. But if, while I am congratulating myself, some christian whom I knew in the world should come up to me and greet me and say, "The fact that I am here in heaven today is due to you. It is what I heard from what you preached, from the example that you set before me that turned me away from my sins to my savior." Now that would be a higher heaven than the other. And if in addition to that, while I am receiving the congratulations of that brother, the Lord should pass by... and pronounce a blessing upon me, that would be the highest heaven of all. Preach, then, tomorrow and every time you preach so that you may save both yourselves and them that hear you. Keep these thoughts in mind.



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