

## Poor Preachers

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My subject this morning is Poor Preachers. You will observe at once that the expression is ambiguous. It may mean men who do poor preaching, or it may mean preachers who are poor men. For the former class I have very little respect, because they could all do better preaching if they would. But the latter class includes nearly all preachers. It is true that the Bishop of Durham, of the established church of England, is said to have a fixed income of \$80,000.00 a year; but the average salary of a preacher in the United States is set down as \$583.00 – quite a difference. You remember that when John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Jesus to inquire of him, “Art that thou he that should come, or look we for another?” he replied, “Go and tell what you see.” The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them,” closing up the list with the statement that the gospel is preached to the poor. He could just as truly have added, if he had seen fit, that it was also preached by the poor. He himself was poor in the world’s goods, for you know that on one occasion he said, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man hath nowhere to lay his head.” And the men whom he sent out to preach were all poor men. Peter and John were going up to the temple one day and met a beggar at the Beautiful gate, who was a cripple and who reached his hand for a pittance. Peter said, “Silver and gold have I none,” – not even enough to give a pittance to a poor beggar. But after attracting his attention very forcibly, he said, “Such as I have I give thee.” Then he raised him up and told him to stand up and walk, which he did.

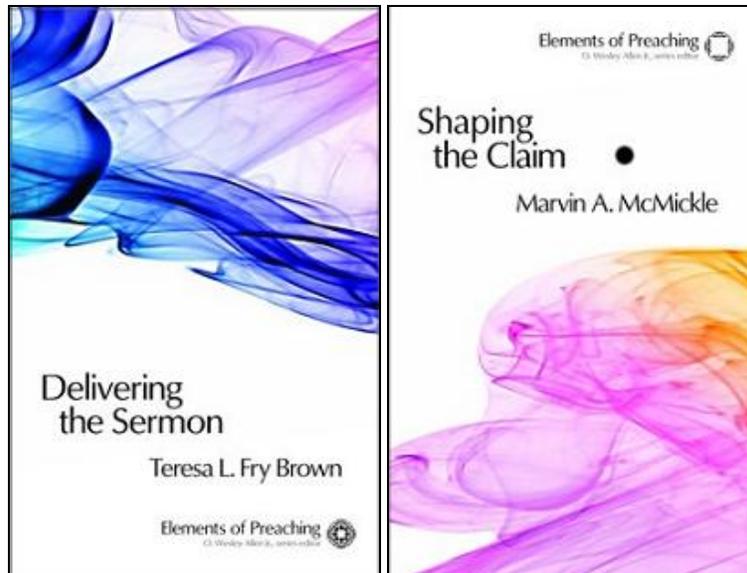
Some twenty-five or thirty years ago when we had about two hundred preachers in the state of Kentucky, I took pains to find out in regard to those whom I did not know personally how many of them were the sons of wealthy men, not millionaires, but such men as pass in rural sections as rich men. Out of all that number there were only two that were rich men’s sons – one in a hundred. That tells the story in regard to Kentucky. On another occasion when the chapel was more largely attended than it is today I called upon all students whose expenses at college were being paid by their parents to stand, and out of nearly a hundred only nine stood up. That showed that not only was the preaching done by the poor, but it was the sons of the poor that

were preparing to be the next generation of preachers. This has been the case all the way back to the beginning. So we can say of this as the Episcopalians so often say in their prayerbook of another subject, "As it was from the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end."

The question has often been raised, whether this is well or ill in the history of preaching, and the position has been taken by a great many writers in this country when contemplating the fact that fewer young men are preparing for the ministry than formerly, that the cause is the prospect of poverty awaiting those who intend to be preachers. Young men, it is said, are not willing to take the risk of poverty, and that keeps them out of the ministry. Now I do not know to what extent this is true, but to the extent that it is true, I regard it as a blessing to the church and to the world rather than a curse. Any young man who declines preparing himself for the ministry for this reason is not fit to enter upon it. And to the extent that the anticipation of poverty keeps men out of the ministry it keeps out those who would be an encumbrance, a dead weight and a disadvantage. They are not fit to go into the pulpit who are controlled by this consideration. This consideration proves a blessing to the church in keeping out of the ministry those who would only be an encumbrance. It also enables the church to gather the best material to make preachers of men who have the spirit that animated the Lord and the apostles, who were not going into the ministry for the purpose of earthly gain or for any kind of selfish consideration, but for the love of Christ and fallen, wretched humanity. If the ministry that we have were made up more largely of men of the latter description the church would be stronger than it is today. And if it could easily cast out of itself all those of the other class, the reduction in numbers would be an increase in power. Sometimes young men at college preparing for the ministry feel the burden of poverty pretty keenly. Rising early in the morning and going out for a two or three mile walk without breakfast to deliver the daily paper, [it] is not an easy task. And a great many other things which students do to work their way are burdensome, and in many instances no doubt become discouraging. Young men with weak wills and less devotion than is desirable faint under it and give up the task. But those who are thus burdened not only have a great many examples and patterns in the New Testament to lift up their hearts, but they are sure at least of the love and respect of God and men, and of the privilege of doing great good in the world. Then let us bear bravely on. We can be like the old woman who was bedridden for many years and yet was always cheerful. When asked how she bore up so well, she said, "Well, you don't know how much comfort I have derived from that blessed passage which reads Grin and bear it." (Laughter). So take the old

woman's text. Whenever you are inclined to discouragement just say to yourself, "Grin and bear it." That will strengthen you. And by this mean you will see, that such a struggle develops character; it strengthens a man's purpose; it makes him more and more dependent upon the Lord; and makes him throw himself more and more on the good providences of God. It is making out of him the very kind of a man that he hopes to be bye and bye, although he did not bargain to go through with it. It is a blessing, then, in keeping out of the pulpit unfit men, and bringing into it men who will be ready to discharge its high obligations.

And do not think that you are alone in these experiences. You will find them wherever you find men preparing for the ministry. I received a letter just the other day from a young man within one year of graduation, who tells me that he has made his own expenses thus far partly by waiting on the table of a dental college, and partly by washing spittoons. And one of the most distinguished preachers of the present day, who occupies the pulpit formerly occupied by Henry Ward Beecher, worked his way through college as the janitor. How many of you would like that place? How many of you would be willing to change places with Will, or George? Many of the greatest and most useful men have come up through great tribulation to the position which they now occupy. Then, go on with your work. Do not give it up. Go on with your studies until you have completed them. Resolve, that, with the help of God, you will never be the man to do poor preaching, but that you will always be a poor man to do the best preaching of which you are capable.



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