

When a Man Stands up to Preach  
By  
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*“Make full proof of thy ministry” (II Timothy 4:5)*

Standing like lone sentinels on duty, moving like servants among society, is that strange, odd group of marked men known as ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. How they came to hold that honored position and why they toiled with such passionate persistence can only be answered in the immortal words that Jesus read in the synagogue in Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor.”

The call to preach is not occasioned by heredity, environment, training, social and economic advantages or disadvantages. It is born in the heart of God. A man is selected to this timeless task in the council chambers of the eternal Trinity. The call is transmitted to the soul of the subject, not by the presbytery, the ordaining council or by the laying on of hands, but by the mighty Holy Ghost from the throne room of God. Thus, the minister of the Gospel, above all citizens, holds a most peculiar relationship to society.

The power, progress, and potential of the church of Jesus Christ depends more than anything else on the man who stands behind the sacred desk. The moral standards, the social behavior, and the spiritual pulse of society are conditioned and regulated by the man in the pulpit and his message.

The work of the minister is more multifaceted than any other profession on earth and his experiences are more multifarious than any other. He is an administrator, head of an organization. He is a shepherd, tending and feeding his sheep. He is a priest,

officiating in all kinds of ceremonies at the altar of worship. He is a moral, religious leader, standard-bearer in matters of moral values and spiritual worth.

All of these functions of his office, important as they may be, are secondary to his one high calling as a man who speaks for God. He is the prophet of the Lord, one who speaks for another. He is a truth teller; therefore, he must be a truth seeker. He must dig the gold from the hidden treasure vaults of the Bible. He must mine it, coin it, and sell it to men and women everywhere.

Like Moses he must go to the mountain fastness and hear God's voice, see God's glory, talk with him face to face, and come forth to tell the people the Word of God. He is an ambassador from the courts of Heaven to the courts of Earth. His one passionate appeal, first, last, and always, is for men to be reconciled to God.

You ministers are constantly feeding the souls of your flock. You are forever telling other folks what they are supposed to do, how they are to support the church and treat their fellowmen. You have heard yourself preach so much until you may feel that you have said about all there is to say. Somebody needs to tell you a thing or two. That's why we have camp meeting. See if you can take it.

Some preachers feel about their preaching about like the old professor I had at Coker College. He was droning on and on in his monotone one day and most of us were about asleep. He suddenly raised his voice and said, "The sweetest music I have ever heard is the sound of my own voice falling on my ears."

Ministers in this day are called upon to do a thousand things. Social problems, industrial problems, and domestic problems are forever being thrust upon them. Emphasis is being placed on administration and keeping the status quo. He spends more

time on meeting the budget than on mastering the art of preaching. Ministers are trying to compensate for their weak, powerless preaching by engaging in scores of activities in the church and community.

The man with a powerful message makes all the difference in the world. Dr. R.C. Campbell said that there are two kinds of preachers: one who had to find something to say and one who has something that must be said. Are you anointed? Is your soul aflame? Is the call of God like fire shut up in your bones?

The man with a message makes the difference. When a man stands up in the pulpit, he ought to expound the scriptures in tones that fall on human hearts like flakes of fire. Ministers today run in every direction, exploiting every possible means to interest their people. But nothing can ever take the place of a man in the pulpit with a throbbing heart – that alone can hear the hurt of dying men.

Ever since that far off day when that tall, stately imposing messenger from the courts of Egypt stood in the hot sands of the slave camps of Goshen, the problems of spiritual leadership have plagued the path of the preacher. Moses was God's selected deliverer. He was prepared for the job. Trained in all the wisdom of Egypt – medicine, science, logic, philosophy, athletics – he did not understand how God by his hand would deliver them.

The children of Israel asked, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Who sent you? Where are your credentials? By what authority do you speak?" Moses had no answer. Instead, he fled in two directions: from the people and from Pharaoh. They asked Jesus the same questions. And he answered in power and authority after his forty day fast

in the wilderness. And they will ask you the same questions. It will take more than a minister's license, more than an ordination certificate, to make you a preacher.

Moses, after forty years in the wilderness, finally found the answer. He had met the great I AM and could say with conviction, "I AM sent me." The history of the Old Testament is punctuated with messages from prophets and preachers. It is like a long night with bright flares flaming in the darkness whenever and wherever a man stood up to preach. An angel took a live coal of fire from the altar and touched Isaiah's lips and for sixty years his messages were like a thousand forest fires in the night.

We have heard so many people say to our committee of division of labor, "We have a good man for a pastor, but he just can't preach." One of the most discouraging and insufferable activities to endure is a man in the pulpit who cannot preach. Other things being equal, there is one reason a man cannot preach. He is too lazy to pray and prepare.

There were only two bright spots in a thousand years of antediluvian darkness – Enoch and Noah. It was blackest night during King Ahab's reign, but Elijah stood up to preach and light broke out upon the land. When Malachi's voice was silenced, there were four hundred years of darkness. Then, like bugle call to wake the dead, a voice was heard on the banks of the Jordan. John stood up to preach and a flame stabbed into the night.

For two thousand years it has been that God has ordained to save the world through the foolishness of preaching. The Christian church began in a blaze of glory – the glory of one sermon by one man on the Day of Pentecost. For the next three hundred years, the world was ablaze with the disciples of Jesus who went everywhere preaching the Gospel like firebrands from another world. When martyrdom silenced their burning

lips and eloquent tongues, there followed nine hundred years of midnight gloom. Then a man stood up to preach and day began breaking everywhere.

Luther, Swingli, Calvin, Knox and men in pulpits around the world were ablaze with fire – a fire that warmed the chilled hearts of a cold world. The Church of England foundered in complacency, self-righteousness, and pharisaical piety until a man stood up to preach. John Wesley had his heart strangely warmed, and with tongue and heart aflame, he preached and a daystar arose in the east. In America men stood up above the din and roar of materialism and greed to preach: Jonathan Edwards, Dwight L. Moody, Finney and others. Their voices pierced the sky like a shaft of sunlight shining through storm-laden clouds.

All of these were but token burst of daylight forecasting the day when the latter rain would fall and plowboys, loom fixers, and coal miners would be filled with the Holy Ghost. With their hearts on fire and their tongues aflame, speaking in a language they had never learned, men would stand up to preach: J. H. King, Dan T. Muse, J. B. Ellis, F. J. Lee, G. F. Taylor, R. G. Spurling and the list goes on and on.

Now, this is our day, men. The devil would rather you do anything else than preach. Preaching is the highest calling on earth, and it costs more to be a successful preacher than anything else. I think the requirements for being a preacher in my church are too low. Men get in too easy. If a fellow can testify really loud, he can get a license to preach. You can do less and know less and be a preacher than any other profession. Some preachers gripe about getting sixty dollars a week, a parsonage, and utilities. If these same preachers worked at most anything else and did no more than they do at preaching, they would starve.

Church growth is normal. If a church does not grow under your ministry, there is something wrong. If every preacher had to dig a church out of the rough, we would only have God-called men in the ministry. Only God-called men could stand the pressure. Only God-called men can endure the Ezekiel experience of preaching to dry bones. God asked him, "Ezekiel, can these bones live?" He answered, "Only you know, Lord." God commanded that he preach when it didn't make any sense to preach. There was no one to preach to but a valley full of dry bones. But preach he did, and there was a moving, a noise caused by the bones coming together.

This is lot like church building. Many times you start out preaching to what seems like dry bones. But preaching gets people moving. Preaching sets people on fire. Preaching gives life. Preaching solves problems. Preaching shows us that dry bones can live. Add your name to the long list of preachers who have labored down through the generations. Be a preacher who makes a difference. Don't give in to laziness. Don't give up because the bones are dry. Accept the clarion call to preach as never before. Do your duty and serve your generation as faithfully as those who have gone before you served their generations.