

The Christian Ministry

by Newman Hall

The Christian ministry is a divine vocation that requires true conversion, a desire to make known the truth to others, and the possession of natural gifts.

Scripture: Isaiah 6:8, Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2 Timothy 4:2, James 3:1

Topics: "Christian Ministry", "Vocation Calling"

Description

Newman Hall addresses theological students, emphasizing the divine call to the ministry as a vocation, not a profession driven by worldly motives, but by a pure desire to serve God and save souls. He highlights the importance of true conversion, earnest desire to share the truth, appropriate actions reflecting the call, possession of natural gifts, and the counsel of wise friends as elements of a divine call. Hall stresses the need for diligent preparation during college, focusing on mental proficiency, cultivation of mental powers, and personal piety, while urging students to keep in practice as evangelists. He advises against elaborate sermons, encourages simplicity in preaching the gospel, and emphasizes the immediate impact of sermons on the hearers' hearts, urging students to make saving truths understood and felt by all.

Transcript

By Newman Hall, addressed to the theological students at Andover, Yale, Princeton, and the Union Seminary, 1867.

Dear Brethren. You are looking forward to the most responsible, yet most honorable and delightful of all occupations. Having myself been engaged in the Christian ministry upwards of twenty-five years, I can truly say that there is no social position, no kind of work, for which I would exchange it. Whatever the emoluments, whatever the honors, which may allure in other directions, he who, with pure motives and an ordinary degree of efficiency, enters on this service will never regret the step he has taken. The work itself, and its own appropriate results, apart from all worldly considerations, will be a sufficient reward, and enough to satisfy the largest ambition. In other spheres of activity, however lawful and honorable, you may sometimes feel that the time and toil expended are too great for the end in view, even when that end is attained; much more when expended only for a hope which fails. This can never be so in the ministry. We are always a "sweet savor of Christ." Whether men receive our testimony or not, we are still witnesses for truth, and love, and holiness, and God. It is worth while to acquire the largest stores of learning, to cultivate the mind to the utmost limit, to spend the longest life, and develop the greatest energy of our nature in a work like this. And when we consider the interests at stake, the possible influence which may

be exerted on the present character and future destiny of one immortal soul, who will ever have cause to feel that this is a work on which too much labor can be expended--which is not worthy of the highest powers and the utmost zeal?

In accepting your kind request to address you, I feel I have no right to your consideration, except that arising from the actual experience I have had in the work to which you are looking forward. All that I can say can be said, and has often been said, by your own professors and others; and much; if not all, might occur to your own minds. But I remember well how pleasant and profitable it was to myself, when a student, to listen to those who were actually engaged in the work for which I was then being trained; just as a soldier fresh from the battlefield might interest and stimulate those who were training for the war under teachers far wiser and more learned in the art than he who had thus casually visited them, but who spoke out of the fullness of a heart roused by the scenes he had just witnessed, and the struggles in which he was bearing, however humble, a part! Thus alone do I venture to ask your indulgent attention to a few words of counsel, which it may be well to arrange under these three topics: The call to the ministry, the preparation for it, and the work of it.

I. THE CALL TO THE MINISTRY. The ministry is not a profession, but a vocation. This distinction is most important. A young man enters a profession with a view to his comfort, status, and worldly prosperity. Whether he chooses the law, or medicine, or commerce, or a military life, he is perfectly justified in calculating his chances of advancement, and the probability of securing wealth, position, fame, and at length ease and retirement. If he is disappointed in one profession, he is at liberty to change it for another. No one will blame him for securing in the best way his worldly interests.

But the ministry is a divine vocation, which we enter from a conviction of duty to God, and which, so long as we have capacity to exercise it, we are not at liberty to relinquish, whatever the worldly disadvantages which may be connected with it. If God calls us to do a certain work we must do it because He calls, and not because that work is supposed to be respectable or profitable--because it may bring us fame, or leisure, or the opportunity of indulging a literary taste. To enter the ministry, and then to abandon it, not because there is not ability and opportunity to prosecute it, but because of the obscurity, difficulties, and poverty attending it; or to prosecute it only so long as it supplies us with the temporal comforts we need, and can get nowhere else, and then to give it up when from some unexpected source, wealth pours in upon us, and renders us no longer dependent on our own exertions for the supply of our needs--this conduct shows that the ministry was entered on as a mere profession, and from secular motives.

Far different will it be in the case of one who feels he is called of God, and who says, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." Without this call let no one venture upon this work. Choose any other instead. Disappointment must certainly result. There can be no happiness in it. God's blessing cannot rest on such an intruder upon holy ground. He is committing sacrilege. He is usurping a post to which he has no right. He is engaging to do a work for which he has not the essential qualification. He is injuring the souls of those to whom he professes to minister as the servant of God, but whom he cannot rightly teach and train when he himself is not animated by right motives in undertaking the work.

If, then, any of you are thinking of the ministry as a profession to which you are inclined by such motives as would be quite admissible in other spheres of activity, I beseech you, as you would not incur great guilt, and bring vexation on yourself and injury on others, draw back at once; and though you are here professedly studying for the ministry, seek some other avocation in which you may be both useful and happy; but enter not on this sacred office without a call from God.

What is this call? I shall say nothing that savors of enthusiasm. These are not days when we are to expect a divine revelation, as of old, when prophets were summoned from the pastures and the cornfields to carry the message of God. Still it is not difficult to discover whether or not we are called of God to this ministry. The following are elements of such a call:

First. There must be, of course, true conversion. If a man is not himself a follower of Christ, how can he persuade others to follow? Can the blind lead the blind? Can the dead become instruments of life? Whatever the learning, the eloquence, the degrees of a clergyman, if he is not himself a converted man he is not within the church at all. How, then, can he be a minister of it? He is not one of the people of God. How, then, can he be a teacher and a guide?

Secondly. There should be an earnest desire to make known the truth to others. This desire to be useful to others is an element in all real piety. But in those who are "called" to the ministry, we look for this desire in a very strong and abiding degree. Such a person is anxious to do good. The condition of sinners is a grief to him. He longs to make known Christ to perishing souls.

Thirdly. This desire will be indicated in appropriate actions. The person thus called will be "moved" by the Spirit to do what he can. He will not wait to be invested with the outward signs of office. Unconsciously he will begin his ministry before he thinks it is ministry. His hand will find to do what his heart prompts him to do, and he will do it "with his might." In some way--by tract distribution, by Sabbath-school teaching, by quiet words of comfort or remonstrance to his companions, or to strangers whom he may casually meet--he will indicate this call.

Fourthly. Where it is a call, not simply to usefulness--for all Christians should have this--but to the ministerial office, there will be the possession of the requisite natural gifts. God calls no one to an office for which he is not qualified. The work of the ministry at the present day is not one for which every zealous Christian is fitted. There must be some intellectual power to keep up with the age, and to contend with varied forms of error. There must be some power of speech to arrest attention. A bishop must be "apt to teach." The aptitude required in one actually engaged in the work, is not to be expected in one who is only preparing for it; but there are natural gifts which must exist in order to be cultivated. Many young men, with pure motives, have entered on the ministry and failed, because destitute of those natural faculties of mind and speech which are necessary for the exercise of the ministerial office.

Fifthly. There should be the concurrent testimony of wise friends. Let those who know the candidate well, counsel him faithfully. We are bad judges in our own case, especially when our desires are strongly in favor of a particular course. But if wise, kind, conscientious friends, who have opportunities of judging of the character and the talents of the aspirant to the ministry, consider that, after due training, he might be well qualified for the ministry, then let him take another step in advance. This further step might be taken in response to the act of the church of which he has been a member, sending him, with their sanction, to some school of the prophets; or, in the absence of this, in response to the invitation of the authorities of such school.

Finally. Opportunity to exercise the ministry confirms the call to it. The call of a Christian church to become its pastor, their acknowledgment of the candidate's qualifications--this is the best outward ratification of the inward call of God. All may be summed up under these three essentials--desire, ability, opportunity. A pure desire thus to serve God, the possession of the necessary ability, the opportunity afforded by Providence and in the desire of the church to accept the service offered--these three are a sufficient warrant for the

hope that we are called of God to the ministry. If any of you have reason to doubt that the two former exist in your case, I beseech you to pause before you proceed.

Nothing is more important for your future comfort than a solid assurance you are doing right in undertaking this office. Examine yourselves as to your motives. Are you seeking the ministry because of the ease, or the income, or the popularity, or the status it may give you? Or are you seeking it for the opportunity it will afford of making known Christ, and saving the souls of men? You are not asked to be indifferent altogether to other considerations, but what is it which weighs most with you? Would you accept the ministry for its own sake only? If God gives you a comfortable income, with popularity and social influence, you may receive this thankfully, and use it all for Him. But supposing He does not give it; would you accept the ministry itself as a greater boon than all these adventitious circumstances? Would you rather be a minister of Christ with none of those advantages, than possess all those advantages in some other pursuit?

I well remember how, during many months, my own mind was painfully exercised on this subject. I shared the ambition of youth. I loved mental pursuits. I admired oratory in others. The ministry, as a profession, was most attractive to me. On this account I feared it was not to me a divine vocation. I almost wished that books and oratory had no charm for me, so that I might be certain that my motives were pure. Yet I did earnestly long to be useful, and this was my chief motive. During many months previous to entering college, I earnestly prayed, saying, "If Your presence go not with me, carry me not up hence." And I sought advice from several friends. At length my mind was relieved by this counsel: "If you had no relish for mental pursuits, this would show you were not qualified for a work which requires such pursuits; therefore your natural tastes confirm the evidence of a divine call, if only you desire the ministry chiefly for its true ends, and not because of this congeniality between some of its duties and your mental tastes." And then, when I came to the assurance that although I desired whatever was congenial to natural taste, and pleasing to a youthful ambition, yet that I would rather exercise the ministry in a secluded village, or down in a coal-mine, than enjoy literary leisure, and rank, and fame in any other pursuit, then it was I ventured to go forward.

And so I say to you, Be sure your motives are right and pure--that you seek the ministry for its own sake, and not for its adventitious circumstances; otherwise only vexation, disappointment, and remorse are before you. But if with a pure purpose you wish to devote yourselves to this ministry, and thus far have reason to hope you are called to it by God, then diligently avail yourselves of the advantages of your college life to prepare for the exercise of that ministry hereafter. This leads me to ask you to listen to a few remarks on

II. THE PREPARATION FOR THE MINISTRY. You are at college chiefly for the cultivation of the mind and the acquisition of knowledge. To this, therefore, at present, your energies should be chiefly directed. You may have very little time hereafter for these pursuits. You may be thrown, as I was, very early in your ministry, into the midst of some large population, making incessant demands on your time. God may manifestly give you work to do in the field of your holy warfare, which may disarrange all your plans for the prosecution of a studious life, and for attaining eminence in any branch of learning. The present is your golden opportunity; and on the mental proficiency attained during your college career will greatly depend the mental power you will be able to employ in your subsequent ministry. Do not be diverted, then, by trifles from your present duty. Work hard as students, that you may work efficiently as ministers. And do not too curiously inquire what special advantage this or that study may prove to you in your sacred calling. Leave the selection of those studies to more experienced and better judges. The amount of learning stored up is not so important as the culture of your mental powers, and the habits of attention,

discrimination, reasoning, and perseverance you will acquire. Resolve, then, to be eminent as students.

But do not, meanwhile, forget you are ministers. Some have done this. They have lost sight of the object while cultivating the means. They have become scholars, and ceased to be missionaries; good classics, but bad teachers; eminent mathematicians, but negligent pastors; sound theologians, but dull preachers. Many have entered college warm-hearted and zealous workers for Christ, who have left it cold critics and heartless philosophers. It would have been well for some men that colleges had not existed. In a passion for learning, in ambition for literary degrees, they have gradually lost their first love for Christ. Let it not be so with you. Study hard; but study for the ministry. Study hard; but remember you are here especially as the consecrated servants of Christ.

Therefore, pray hard. Cultivate your personal piety. Do not be tempted to neglect private prayer and the daily devout reading of the Bible. Do not cease to "speak one to another" concerning your personal relations to the Savior and the great work for which you are preparing. There is no necessity that diligence in study should divert your thoughts from the great object of that study, whatever the immediate subject before you. Is it mathematics? Study diligently, that, by clearness of thought and correct reasoning, you may be the better able, hereafter, to explain and defend the gospel. Is it classics? Study diligently, that, by familiarity with the laws of language, you may be the better able to interpret the Scriptures, and to enforce their lessons. Is it metaphysics? Study hard, that you may better know the powers and susceptibilities of the human mind, to influence which for God is to be your great employment. Is it science or history? Study hard, that you may the better illustrate one department of God's government by references to others. Thus will your diligence as students be promotive of your ministerial spirit; not diverting you from your great object, but helping you to keep that object in view. For in every classroom you will be animated by the holy passion of saving souls; feeling that, instrumentally, the more successful you are as students, the more useful you will be when you exercise the powers cultivated in these halls of learning.

I would also suggest that, during your college course, you keep yourselves in practice as evangelists. Every week visit some of the poor and the sick. Conduct cottage meetings. Go together in bands of half a dozen, and hold open-air services, at which each can speak for five or ten minutes. If the opportunity is presented, preach. But do not labor to produce elaborate or eloquent discourses. If you choose, take some great model as a study of style, but do not victimize a congregation by exhibiting your poor imitation in their presence. And do not, while students, spend much time in making sermons. Your present duty is to cultivate your powers, so that you may make good sermons hereafter. Much time spent at college in making sermons is generally wasted, and the sermons themselves useless.

When you preach, be as simple and natural as possible. Let your sermons be the result of feeling and prayer rather than of elaborate composition; and let your topics be the great simple truths of the gospel, rather than any speculative or peculiar theme. You will thus be far better appreciated in your occasional ministrations as students, and your appropriate studies will not be interrupted.

Let me especially recommend you, while at college, to cultivate extemporaneous speech. There are occasions when sermons may be read with advantage. But habitual reading in the pulpit is very prejudicial to impression and usefulness. What effect would political speeches exert on great meetings if they were read? Would a lawyer be likely to get verdicts from juries if he read his appeal for his client? So preaching, to be effective, must, for the most part, be an address spoken, and not a composition read. Some people can be more effective with a manuscript than without, but these cases are very rare. Besides, the time required so to write out sermons as that they shall be legible for pulpit delivery, is very great, and will often

interfere with the pastor's other duties. He is sometimes so unexpectedly occupied with pressing engagements, or so indisposed for the labors of composition, that he cannot prepare his manuscript in time for the service, and thus great anxiety and difficulty may result. But if he is able to express his thoughts extemporaneously, he will be spared much unnecessary toil, will have more time for other departments of ministerial labor, and be more effective as a preacher. This habit should be acquired at college. Discussion classes are useful in this respect. Students might also, in private, cultivate this faculty. Whatever the difficulty, it will yield to persevering effort.

Thus improve to the utmost this season of ministerial training, and as its close draws near, do not be hindered in your present duties by anxious thoughts respecting your future settlement. Leave that to God. Lose none of the advantages, neglect none of the work, of today by taking thought of tomorrow. Up to the last day of college life do well the work of college, and then commit yourself to God as regards your sphere of labor. Make no conditions with Him. Be ready to go wherever it may seem that Providence directs. Do not be ambitious to take an important charge at once. It might crush your energies, by excessive demands on them, before they are matured. You may gain a higher degree eventually by beginning lower than might be within your grasp. Be simply anxious to do the will of God, and He will show you what it is His will that you should do. "Commit your way unto the Lord, and He will direct your steps."

III. THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY. The ministry has many duties, but the chief of all is preaching the gospel. This is God's principal instrument for the conversion of sinners, and the building up of His church. To this your chief attention should be directed. Neglect no other method of usefulness; but, above all, labor and pray that in the pulpit you may be "apt to teach," and "workmen needing not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Do you ask what is the end of preaching. Is it to display your own learning, or genius, or eloquence? You will not think so if you are divinely called to the ministry. What is it but to expound and enforce the truths of the gospel, to lead men to repentance towards God, and to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ? Do not confound theology with Christ. Do not confound the doctrine of justification with the Justifier. It is possible to preach orthodox sermons, from which shall be absent, not indeed the name of Jesus, but Jesus Himself. Let Him be alpha and omega in your addresses. Try to set Him forth, so that your hearers may see, admire, love Him. Often may discourses be heard which are full of sound Christian doctrine; but they are cold, dry, formal, hard, repulsive. It is Jesus Himself who is to subdue the hearts of men.

Never forget that you are ministers of the gospel. You are not merely philosophers, or moralists, but ambassadors of mercy from a God of love; and your great business is to make known that mercy which is revealed to us by Christ, "who died for our sins." Preaching must always be defective when it is not the preaching of the gospel, since this is its very essence. A discourse without Christ may be a good lecture, or essay, or argument, but it cannot be a good sermon; for it is no sermon at all, in the true sense of the term. I do not mean that no topic is to be treated of in the pulpit but the death of Christ for our sins and our justification by faith. Every holy lesson of the Bible is to have its place in a course of pastoral teaching--its true and proportionate place. A truth which is subordinate may become an error by exaggeration, and by undue prominence. But every truth has its claims to attention. Yet every truth must be viewed in relation to the great central truth of salvation by Christ.

Is it said that you cannot always introduce the gospel when you are speaking on the varied truths collateral with it? As well might you say that you cannot study some particular planet of our solar system, and also refer to the sun. The fact is, you cannot properly study any one planet, and leave out some reference to

that central orb which regulates all the motions of that planet, and from which that planet derives all its light. So the great truth of salvation by a crucified Savior is the center of the Christian system, and while there are a multitude of revolving planets, all demanding attention, not one of these can be understood when viewed apart from that great central "Sun of Righteousness."

An anecdote is related of the great Andrew Fuller which illustrates this point. A young minister, who had preached in his presence and was anxious for his approval, asked the learned divine what he thought of his sermon. "It was carefully prepared, well thought out, and well delivered; but, sir, there was no gospel in it." "No, sir," replied the youth; "but then the subject did not lead to it." "Not lead to it?" said Andrew Fuller; "there is not a by-lane in this country that does not lead out into the king's highway."

The gospel must not only be preached, but preached so as to be understood and felt. The effect of a sermon is immediate, or it is nothing. A book is different. You may read a paragraph and not understand it; but you can refer to it again and again, until the meaning becomes clear. Not so with a sermon. If it is not understood and felt as you utter it, your hearers cannot go back to reconsider what you said, nor can you pause while they do this, nor can you repeat what you said. It is idle to pretend that you have prepared something so profound and clever that it requires deep thought and mature meditation properly to appreciate it. A spoken address is for the ear, for the ear at the moment, for conviction at once, for producing assent and emotion at once; and if it fails in this, as a sermon it fails entirely.

Remember of what class of people an ordinary congregation is composed. There may be a few people of eminent genius or learning, a few professional men, accustomed to continued and abstract thought. But the majority are people actively engaged in daily toils, whether as merchants and tradesmen, or in factories, or in the occupations of the house and the family. Many are people unaccustomed to any severe taxing of their intellectual powers. Many are weighed down with trouble. Many are sorrowful women, and many are young children. You have to consider them all. Should not your addresses be such that all may understand them? Suppose you went to preach to a barbarous race; would you speak to them in your own language, because you regard it superior? Of what avail would be an "unknown tongue" as an instrument of instruction? Just so we must speak so as to be understood. This is a primary condition of successful preaching.

Do not misunderstand me. I do not advocate vulgarisms in the pulpit, but I do advocate plainness of speech. Is our English Bible vulgar in its style? Is it not the purest and grandest specimen of the language? Yet how simple it is! so that, however difficult some of its mysteries, the difficulty does not arise from the obscurity of the words, but from the unavoidable profoundness of the theme. People of inferior education and intellect do not desire, are not pleased with, a vulgar style of speech. But an address may be of the very purest and most classic English, and yet perfectly simple, so that the least cultured can understand it.

Moreover, the men of highest culture also will admire sermons of this kind far more than those which are sometimes preached for their special edification. I heard lately of a person who was high in office in this country, and who was one day, contrary to his habit, late in his attendance at a Cabinet council. He said, in explanation, that on his way he had stopped for a minute to listen to a preacher who was at the time exciting much popular attention, though a man of no culture. This statesman said, "I went in just for a minute, but I could not get away; it was the best preaching I ever heard, for it drove me up into the corner of the seat, and made me feel what a sinner I was."

Another case was recently told me. One of your clergymen was interested in the accession to his congregation of a man of great intellect and learning, and at once began to prepare discourses which he thought would be worthy of the learned hearer's attention. After some time this gentleman went off to the ministry of another clergyman of very inferior culture, and whose sermons were remarkable for their simplicity. Surprise being expressed at the change he had made, he said, "O, I was wearied with everlasting arguments and dissertations. I have enough of that sort of thing in my own study. On Sundays I come to church for my heart to be made to feel, not to have my brain taxed."

I can state another fact under my own experience in the old country. It was my privilege to be engaged in the erection of the church at Scarborough. While the pastorate was as yet vacant, the pulpit was occupied by various clergymen "with a view to settlement." The chief supporter of the church was a dear friend and connection of my own--a man of some social rank and considerable mental culture. It seemed as if many of the preachers had imagined that all the congregation were of the same stamp, and that they--at least that he--would be delighted with what is called "intellectual preaching." I know that he was utterly wearied with it. Sunday after Sunday he used to long for some simple, warm utterances of gospel truth, which came from the heart and went to the heart. When my friend came to visit Scarborough, fresh from college, but fresh from communion with his Savior, and evidently determined not to know anything but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, he was at once called to the pastorate, and has had, during many years, one of the most influential and cultured congregations of the denomination to which he belongs, the town of Scarborough being one of our most frequented and fashionable watering-places.

What all men want in church and on Sunday is to have their hearts warmed with the love of God in Christ; to be cheered amid daily troubles; to be fitted for daily duties; to be strengthened against daily temptations. They do not want elaborate essays and profound argumentations. The multitude cannot understand them, and the few do not wish them. It is a grand mistake to preach exclusively for the learned or distinguished few. If a judge or a governor comes to your church, let him come and be addressed as one of the crowd; don't preach at the governor. If a scholar comes, don't give him some learned treatise; he can get this from one of his own books much better done. If a learned professor comes, don't try to show him how much, or how little, you know. Don't you think he knows all about it much better than you? But what you can do is to send him away with fresh feelings, with renewed humility, or faith, or love, or zeal.

When your hearers go away, saying, "What a grand sermon! What an eloquent preacher!" depend upon this, that you have failed. The object of preaching is not to fix attention on the preacher, but on the subject of the preaching; not to lead men to admire the servant, but to adore the Master; not to lead them to say, "What a fine discourse we have had!" but, "What a sinner I am! What a Christ I have! What must I do to be saved? Lord, what will you have me to do?"

I ask you, my brethren, not to suppose, from these remarks, that I recommend carelessness in preaching, or depreciate genius and learning. All I mean is, that the object of preaching should be to make the hearers then and there feel the power of gospel truth; and therefore that your genius and learning should be devoted to this end. Your powers are perverted when they exhibit themselves rather than Christ. Indeed, it often happens that mere smatterers are much more grandiloquent and obscure, and pass with the superficial hearers, as more learned than men of real culture. It is easy to cram big terms into a sentence. Any fool can do this. It is not so easy by plain and simple words to make great truths understood and felt, and old subjects to be ever assuming some new phase.

Cultivate learning, but do not parade it. Employ all your resources of criticism to discover the true meaning of your text, but do not waste precious time in the pulpit by giving the names and conflicting opinions of commentators. Give the results of your study, but not the process. Put forth the burning truths you have arrived at in your meditation, but do not weary your hearers with fencing them on all sides against all the subtle objections which occurred to you as conceivable. Would a man keep up the scaffolding when the house is built, just to show his ingenuity? This would be to hide the house: and thus many preachers hide the Savior.

There is no learning, no genius, no imagination, no logical power, no rhetorical art which may not be consecrated to the great work of preaching. Cultivate every power of thought and speech to the utmost, but let all these powers have this for their chief aim and glory--to make saving truths understood and felt by all people. Was Christ, as a preacher, superficial because "the common people heard Him gladly"? Was He not worthy to be listened to by the learned, because His speech was that of the multitude also, and because His illustrations were drawn from familiar scenes? Abjure, then, the false ideas too prevalent in regard to "Intellectual Preaching." Be as intellectual, and as learned, and as eloquent as possible, but be sure that it becomes inferior intellect, and inferior learning, and inferior eloquence, when it fails in the great object to which it should be devoted.

Do not misunderstand what I say respecting simple preaching. I don't mean that you are to preach without preparation. I don't want to give a pretext for laziness. Read hard--think hard--if you please, write hard. Do your very best; put forth all the powers you possess. But let the object of all this effort be to make truth simple and forcible, so as to be understood and felt by all. I've no patience with indolent preachers, who think anything will do for the pulpit, however dreary, stale, wordy, and then, as an excuse for pouring out such shallow teaching, say it is the simplicity of the gospel! No! Do your very best every time you preach, but let your object be to exalt, not yourself, but the Savior; to save, not your reputation, but men's souls.

The great interests at stake should forbid trifling in the pulpit. Remember you are preaching to dying men. How often there is some one before us listening to the last sermon he will ever hear! Sometimes the hearer of one Sunday is dead on the next, as was the case with a merchant in Boston, who heard me preach the other day on the words, "This day you shall be with Me in paradise," and who was in eternity before the week was ended. But besides such cases, it is constantly happening that people are hearing their last sermon; for before the next Sunday an illness may begin from which they will not recover; or they may thenceforth neglect altogether the house of God. We may always feel that it is very probable there is some one before us whom we have the opportunity for the last time of warning against sin for the last time of directing to Christ for salvation.

Let, then, the value of the immortal soul stimulate us to zeal and fidelity. No work can be more important than to "save a soul from death." It is worth the longest life, the largest powers, the most devoted labors. No other work suggests such motives for diligence. And "the love of Christ constrains us." Let us then "watch for souls as those that must give account," and strive and pray that at the great day, our Lord and Master may pronounce this benediction on us, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

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