
5

THE PULPIT AND THE PASTORATE

Here I preached again three times on the Lord's day, none saying we wish you not to preach, though many of the hearers did not hear with enjoyment. Some of them left, and never returned; some left, but returned after awhile. Others came to the chapel, who had not been in the habit of attending there previous to my coming. There was sufficient proof that the work of God was going on, for there were those who were glad to hear what I preached, overlooking the infirmities of the foreigner, delighting in the food for their souls, without caring much about the form in which the truth was set before them; and these were not less spiritual than the rest; and there were those who objected decidedly, some, however, manifesting merely the weakness of brethren, and others the bitterness of the opposers of the cross. There was, in addition to this, a great stir, a spirit of inquiry, and a searching of the Scriptures, whether these things were so. And what is more than all, God set his seal upon the work, in converting sinners. Twelve weeks I stood in this same position, whilst the Lord graciously supplied my temporal wants, through two brethren, unasked for. After this time, the whole little church, eighteen in number, unanimously gave me an invitation to become their pastor. My answer to them was, that their invitation did not show me more than I had seen before, that it was the will of God that I should remain with them, yet that for their sakes I could not but rejoice in this invitation, as it was a proof to me that God had blessed them through my instrumentality, in making them thus of one mind. I also expressly stated to the brethren, that I should only stay so long with them, as I saw it clearly to be the will of the Lord; for I had not given up my intention of going from place to place, if the Lord would allow me to do so. The brethren, at the same time, now offered to supply my temporal wants, by giving me £55. a year, which sum was afterwards somewhat increased, on account of the increase of the church. I now had Teignmouth for my residence, but I did not confine my labours to this place; for I preached regularly once a week in Exeter, once a fortnight at Topsham, sometimes at Shaldon, often at Exmouth, sometimes in the above-mentioned villages near Exmouth, regularly once a week at Bishopsteignton, where a part of the church lived, and afterwards repeatedly at Chudleigh, Collumpton, Newton Bushel, and elsewhere.

Müller, George. A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller. Vol. 1. London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1860. Print.

Despite having severed ties with the London Missionary Society, Müller still felt called to follow God to whatever field He called him to. As he waited for further light, Müller seized upon every opportunity to preach God's Word. While spending some time in Teignmouth early in 1830 he had the privilege of preaching in Shaldon for Mr. Henry Craik. Müller first met Mr. Craik a year earlier when he had first come to Teignmouth. Reflecting years later in his autobiography he says that Mr. Craik would go on to be his "*beloved brother, friend, and present fellow-labourer*." These two men would be intimately united for many years in their journey to the Celestial City. There is no doubt that as they travelled this road together they mutually supported and encouraged one another.

In our Western society we tend to focus on individuality, yet the Christian life is a life meant to be lived in community. Whom has God placed in your life that proved to be a beloved brother/sister, friend, and fellow-laborer? In what ways has this person(s) aided in your pilgrimage?

While availing himself of every chance to preach in Teignmouth and the surrounding area, a small church in Teignmouth extended to young Mr. Müller a call to become their pastor. He agreed to shepherd this little flock until he was directed elsewhere by the Great Shepherd of the sheep. His early pastoral ministry was not unlike that of most young pastors. Some grew, some remained stagnate; some left and never came back, some left for a season but later returned; some came and did not come back, some came and stayed.

Many young pastors, frustrated with the lack of "growth" in their ministry resort to any number of "church growth" methods. Change the music or worship style. Start this program or that program. Müller, however, was a much simpler, and as a result, more faithful and effective servant in the Lord's vineyard. Consider this extended excerpt from his autobiography where he describes his approach to sermon preparation and delivery:

That which I now considered the best mode of preparation for the public ministry of the Word, no longer adopted from necessity, on account of want of time, but from deep conviction, and from the experience of God's blessing upon it, both as it regards my own enjoyment, the benefit of the saints, and the conversion of sinners, is as follows:

1. *I do not presume to know myself what is best for the hearers, and I therefore ask the Lord in the first place, that he would graciously be pleased to teach me on what subject I shall speak, or what portion of his word I shall expound. Now sometimes it happens, that previous to my asking him, a subject or passage has been in my mind, on which it has appeared well for me to speak. In that case I ask the Lord, whether I should speak on this subject or passage. If, after prayer, I feel persuaded that I should, I fix upon it, yet so, that I would desire to leave myself open to the Lord to change it, if he please. Frequently, however, it occurs, that I have no*

text or subject in my mind, before I give myself to prayer for the sake of ascertaining the Lord's will concerning it. In this case I wait some time on my knees for an answer, trying to listen to the voice of the Spirit to direct me. If then a passage or subject, whilst I am on my knees, or after I have finished praying for a text, is brought to my mind, I again ask the Lord, and that sometimes repeatedly, especially if, humanly speaking, the subject or text should be a peculiar one, whether it be his will that I should speak on such a subject or passage. If after prayer my mind is peaceful about it, I take this to be the text, but still desire to leave myself open to the Lord for direction, should he please to alter it, or should I have been mistaken. Frequently also, in the third place, it happens, that I not only have no text nor subject on my mind previous to my praying for guidance in this matter, but also I do not obtain one after once, or twice, or more times praying about it. I used formerly at times to be much perplexed, when this was the case, but for more than twenty-four years it has pleased the Lord, in general at least, to keep me in peace about it. What I do is, to go on with my regular reading of the Scriptures, where I left off the last time, praying (whilst I read) for a text, now and then also laying aside my bible for prayer, till I get one. Thus it has happened, that I have had to read five, ten, yea twenty chapters, before it has pleased the Lord to give me a text; yea, many times I have even had to go to the place of meeting without one, and obtained it perhaps only a few minutes before I was going to speak; but I have never lacked the Lord's assistance at the time of preaching, provided I had earnestly sought it in private. The preacher cannot know the particular state of the various individuals who compose the congregation, nor what they require, but the Lord knows it; and if the preacher renounces his own wisdom, he will be assisted by the Lord; but if he will choose in his own wisdom, then let him not be surprised if he should see little benefit result from his labours.

Before I leave this part of the subject, I would just observe one temptation concerning the choice of a text. We may see a subject to be so very full, that it may strike us it would do for some other occasion. For instance, sometimes a text, brought to one's mind for a week-evening meeting, may appear more suitable for the Lord's day, because then there would be a greater number of hearers present. Now, in the first place, we do not know whether the Lord ever will allow us to preach on another Lord's day; and, in the second place, we know not whether that very subject may not be especially suitable for some or many individuals present just that week-evening. Thus I was once tempted, after I had been a short time at Teignmouth, to reserve a subject, which had been just opened to me, for the next Lord's day. But being able, by the grace of God, to overcome the temptation by the above reasons, and preaching about it at once, it pleased the Lord to bless it to the conversion of a sinner, and that too an individual who meant to come but that once more to the chapel, and to whose case the subject was most remarkably suited.

2. Now when the text has been obtained in the above way, whether it be one or two or more verses, or a whole chapter or more, I ask the Lord that he would graciously be pleased to teach me by his Holy Spirit, whilst meditating over it. Within the last twenty-nine years, I have found it the most profitable plan to meditate with my pen in my hand, writing down the outlines, as the Word is opened to me. This I do, not for the sake of committing them to memory, nor as if I meant to say nothing else, but for the sake of clearness, as being a help to see how far I understand the passage. I also find it useful afterwards to refer to what I have thus written. I very seldom use any other help besides the little I understand of the original of the Scriptures, and some good translations in other languages. My chief help is prayer. I have NEVER in my life begun to study one single part of divine truth, without gaining some light about it, when I have been able really to give myself to prayer and meditation over it. But that I have often found a difficult matter, partly on account of the weakness of the flesh, and partly also on account of bodily infirmities and multiplicity of engagements. This I most firmly believe, that no one ought to expect to see much good resulting from his labours in word and doctrine, if he is not much given to prayer and meditation.

3. Having prayed and meditated on the subject or text, I desire to leave myself entirely in the hands of the Lord. I ask him to bring to my mind what I have seen in my room, concerning the subject I am going to speak on, which he generally most kindly does, and often teaches me much additionally, whilst I am preaching.

In connexion with the above, I must, however, state, that it appears to me there is a preparation for the public ministry of the Word, which is even more excellent than the one spoken of. It is this: to live in such constant and real communion with the Lord, and to be so habitually and frequently in meditation over the truth, that without the above effort, so to speak, we have obtained food for others, and know the mind of the Lord as to the subject or the portion of the Word on which we should speak. But this I have only in a small measure experienced, though I desire to be brought into such a state, that habitually “out of my belly may flow rivers of living water.”

That which I have found most beneficial in my experience for the last thirty years in the public ministry of the word, is, expounding the Scriptures, and especially the going now and then through a whole gospel or epistle. This may be done in a two-fold way, either by entering minutely into the bearing of every point occurring in the portion, or by giving the general outlines, and thus leading the hearers to see the meaning and connexion of the whole. The benefits which I have seen resulting from expounding the Scriptures are these: 1. The hearers are thus, with God’s blessing, led to the Scriptures. They find, as it were, a practical use of them in the public meetings. This induces them to bring their bibles, and I have observed that those who at first did not bring them, have afterwards been induced to do so; so that in a short time few, of the believers at least, were in the habit of coming without them. This is no small matter; for every thing, which in our day will lead believers to value the Scriptures, is of importance. 2. The expounding of the Scriptures is in general more beneficial to the hearers than if, on a single verse, or half a verse, or two or three words of a verse, some remarks are made, so that the portion of Scripture is scarcely any thing but a motto for the subject; for few have grace to meditate much over the Word, and thus exposition may not merely be the means of opening to them the Scriptures, but may also create in them a desire to meditate for themselves. 3. The expounding of the Scriptures leaves to the hearers a connecting link, so that the reading over again the portion of the Word, which has been expounded, brings to their remembrance what has been said, and thus, with God’s blessing, leaves a more lasting impression on their minds. This is particularly of importance as it regards the illiterate, who sometimes have neither much strength of memory nor capacity of comprehension. 4. The expounding of large portions of the Word, as the whole of a gospel or an epistle, besides leading the hearer to see the connexion of the whole, has also this particular benefit for the teacher, that it leads him, with God’s blessing, to the consideration of portions of the Word, which otherwise he might not have considered, and keeps him from speaking too much on favourite subjects, and leaning too much to particular parts of truth, which tendency must surely sooner or later injure both himself and his hearers.—Expounding the word of God brings little honour to the preacher from the unenlightened or careless hearer, but it tends much to the benefit of the hearers in general.

Simplicity in expression, whilst the truth is set forth, is, in connexion with what has been said, of the utmost importance. It should be the aim of the teacher to speak so, that children, servants, and people who cannot read, may be able to understand him, so far as the natural mind can comprehend the things of God. It ought also to be remembered, that there is, perhaps, not a single congregation in which there are not persons of the above classes present, and that if they can understand, the well-educated or literary persons will understand likewise; but the reverse does not hold good. It ought further to be remembered, that the expounder of the truth of God speaks for God, for eternity, and that it is not in the least likely that he will benefit the hearers, except he use plainness of speech, which nevertheless needs not to be vulgar or rude. It should also be considered, that if the preacher strive to speak according to the rules of this world, he may please many, particularly those who have a literary taste; but, in the same proportion, he is less likely to become an instrument in the hands of God for the conversion of sinners, or for the building up of the saints. For neither eloquence nor depth of thought makes the truly great preacher, but such a life of prayer and meditation and spirituality, as may render him a vessel meet for the master’s use, and fit to be employed both in the conversion of sinners and in the edification of the saints.

Müller, George. *A Narrative of Some of the Lord’s Dealings with George Müller*. Vol. 1. London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1860. Print.

What does this excerpt demonstrate concerning Müller's view of pastoral ministry and what is most needful for a congregation?

How does this compare to our church or churches that you have been in before?

This commitment to Scripture was challenged during this first year of Müller's ministry when he encountered a group of women in Sidmouth discussing believer's baptism. How did one of these ladies challenge Müller on this subject?

How did Müller respond? What type of man does this show Müller to be?

Müller did not stop with a reform to his view and practice of baptism. His constant desire was to simply live out that which is found in Scripture. What are some of the other reforms that were made in Müller’s convictions during this period?

The year 1830 proved to be a momentous year for Müller in more ways than one. Not only did he begin his first pastorate in this year but he also found a fellow-laborer who would be at his side for the next forty years. Her name was Mary Groves and in October of this year she became Mary Müller.

Mary was uniquely suited to be George’s help-meet. She was the sister of the dentist who had inspired George years prior in his trust in God to supply all temporal needs. Mary’s brother had left his successful practice and went to the mission field trusting solely on God to provide. Mary seemed to be of a like heart and mind and this would be essential in her marriage to George. Müller could not have conducted his ministry over the next four decades in the way that he did had Mary not been as convinced as he that the Lord would provide for their every need.

If you are married, you are married to the exact person that God intended for you. How has God uniquely gifted this person to be your help-meet?

If you are not married, consider how crucial a decision choosing a spouse is and ask the Lord’s guidance and blessing in this area.

When Müller comes to the end of his life he has a mere £160. Five decades after his death another famous (infamous) individual died with little earthly goods, Henry Gordon Selfridge. If you are familiar with Mr. Selfridge’s story, how do the death of these two “poor” men compare?

In August of the following year Mary gave birth to their first child, stillborn. Mary remained severely ill for several weeks. Here is an extract from his journal on the day she delivered their stillborn child:

August 9. After extreme suffering, which lasted about seventeen hours, my wife was this day delivered of a stillborn child.—Who of my readers would suppose, that whilst I was so abundantly blessed by God, and that in so many respects, my heart should have been again many times, during several months previous to this day, cold, wretched, carnal? How long-suffering is the Lord! Repeatedly, during this time, I could let hours run on, after I had risen in the morning, before I prayed; at least, before I retired for prayer. And at that time when I appeared most zealous for God, perhaps more so than at any time before or since, I was often far from being in a spiritual state. I was not now, indeed, indulging in gross outward sins, which could be noticed by my brethren; but often—Very often, the eye of my kind, loving Father must have looked on me with much grief. On this account, I have no doubt, the Lord now, in great compassion, sent this heavy blow. I had not seriously thought of the great danger connected with child-bearing, and therefore had never earnestly prayed about it. Now came this solemn time. The life of my dear wife was hanging, as it were, on a thread, and, in the midst of it, my conscience told me, that my state of heart made such a chastisement needful. Yet, at the same time, I was much supported.—When the child was stillborn, I saw almost immediately afterwards, that this could not have been expected otherwise, for I had not looked on the prospect of having a child as on a blessing, which I was about to receive from God, but rather considered it as a burden and a hindrance in the Lord’s work; for I did not know then, that, whilst a wife and children may be in certain respects, on the one hand, a hindrance to a servant of Christ, they also may fit him, on the other hand, for certain parts of his work, in teaching him things which are important to be known, especially for the pastoral work. The Lord now brought, in addition to this, very great sufferings upon my beloved wife, which lasted for six weeks, combined with a partial lameness of the left side.—Immediately after the eventful time of August 8th and 9th, the Lord brought me, in his tender mercy, again into a spiritual state of heart, so that I was enabled to look on this chastisement as a great blessing. May this my experience be a warning to believing readers, that the Lord may not need to chastise them, on account of their state of heart! May it also be a fresh proof to them, that the Lord, in his very love and faithfulness, will not, and cannot let us go on in backsliding, but that he will visit us with stripes, to bring us back to himself!

Müller, George. A Narrative of Some of the Lord’s Dealings with George Müller. Vol. 1. London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1860. Print.

What does this excerpt further tell us about the man George Müller? What lessons can we learn from this tragic episode of his life?

We had now in the new year to look up to our kind Father for new mercies, and indeed, during the year 1832 also, we found him as faithful and compassionate as before, not laying more on us than he enabled us to bear, though space will only permit me to mention a few particulars.

Müller, George. A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller. Vol. 1. London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1860. Print.

NEXT LESSON:

THE NARRATIVE OF THE LORD'S DEALINGS

About the same time also my wife and I had grace given to us to take the Lord's commandment, "Sell that ye have, and give alms," Luke 12:33, literally, and to carry it out. Our staff and support in this matter were Matthew 6:19-34, John 14:13, 14. We leaned on the arm of the Lord Jesus. It is now twenty-nine years, since we set out in this way, and we do not in the least regret the step we then took. Our God also has, in his tender mercy, given us grace to abide in the same mind concerning the above points, both as it regards principle and practice; and this has been the means of letting us see the tender love and care of our God over his children, even in the most minute things, in a way in which we never experimentally knew them before; and it has, in particular, made the Lord known to us more fully than we knew him before, as a prayer hearing God. As I have written down how the Lord has been pleased to deal with us since, I shall be able to relate some facts concerning this matter, as far as they may tend to edification.

Müller, George. A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller. Vol. 1. London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1860. Print.