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"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."—Eph. vi. 24.  
"Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."—Jude 3.

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## THE "FOOLISHNESS" OF PREACHING.

(A Sermon preached at St. Paul's Cathedral on Sunday afternoon, 25th July, being St. James Day, 1886.)

By THE REV. CANON LIDDON, D.D.

"It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."—I Corinthians i. 21.

St. James the Great, whose festival the Church of Christ keeps to-day, differs from all the other Apostles in this, that his life falls altogether within that district of history which is covered by Holy Scripture. He was a son of the fisherman, Zebedee, and, together with his greater brother the Apostle and Evangelist St. John, he obeyed our Lord's call on the sea of Galilee to become His disciple in the early part of the year 27. In the spring of the following year he was chosen to be one of the twelve Apostles, and some months later he witnessed the miraculous raising of the daughter of Jairus. Another year passed, and, whether on one of the spurs of Hermon or more probably on some slight elevation at the summit of Tabor, St. James witnessed the transfiguration of our Lord. That as yet their great privileges of intimate companionship with the Divine Redeemer had not moulded the characters of the sons of Zebedee into full accordance with our Lord's will is plain from two circumstances. When our Lord was setting out on His last journey to Jerusalem, and had on His road to pass through Samaria, certain Samaritans, with their old jealousy of the Divinely-ordered worship at Jerusalem refused to receive him, His crime in their eyes was that he was going to worship at Jerusalem, and not at Gerizim. James and John begged our Lord, like Elijah, to call down fire from Heaven to consume these inhospitable villagers, and they were rebuked for not knowing what spirit they were of. And again, at the end of this same journey our Lord had been encouraging His Apostles to encounter the troubles which were immediately before them, by the promise that they would hereafter sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. This promise raised the question, who would sit on the thrones nearest that of the King? And, it may be, that the sons of Zebedee at this time felt some jealousy of the sons of Jonas. At any rate, it was probably this promise which led James and John to ask, through their mother, Salome, that they might sit on the right hand and on the left of the King. They were told that they should indeed share their Master's sufferings, but no encouragement was given them to look for any especial pre-eminence in the future glory. It is probable that, as in the earlier lists of the Apostles, St. James's name is also mentioned before that of

St. John, he was at this time the more prominent and energetic of the brothers, and had more than St. John to do with the petition for fire from Heaven and with the petition for the higher seats in the Kingdom. With his brother and St. Peter, he was near our Lord during the agony in the garden, and then, if we except the mention of his name among those who met for prayer in the upper chamber at Jerusalem on the day of Ascension, he disappears from history until his martyrdom. In the year of our Lord, 44, he came up to Jerusalem for the Passover. His impetuous character, now sanctified and devoted to the propagation of the faith, marked him out as a leading Christian whose removal would be agreeable to the enemies of Christianity, and accordingly Herod Agrippa arrested him, together with St. Peter, and, to the satisfaction of the Jews, as well as his own, slew him with the sword. The narrative, reported by St. Clement of Alexandria, that St. James converted his prosecutor by his calm, undaunted bearing in the hour of death, and that they were both led to execution together—this, although not mentioned by St. Luke, cannot reasonably be rejected as apocryphal. Clement lived near enough to Palestine to get perfectly trustworthy information on such subjects. He lived within the second century of our era, and as no motive for the invention of the story can be assigned with any tolerable degree of probability, its historical accuracy may be taken for granted. Between the call of St. James and martyrdom seventeen years elapsed. During fourteen years out of these seventeen we know nothing certainly about him. What was he doing between the Day of Pentecost and Easter, *Anno Domini* 44? We cannot doubt that he was, like others who were dispersed by the persecutions that arose about Stephen, going everywhere preaching the Word. Some later traditions say that he even made his way to Spain as a herald of Jesus Christ. It may be so. There were easy means of communication in those days along the whole length of the Mediterranean; but there is no such evidence as to warrant anything like certainty on this head. All that can be presumed with certainty is that the fourteen years after Pentecost were spent in the work of propagating the faith.

Now here it may be well to notice a circumstance in the history of the sons of Zebedee which is not without its bearing on the work of St. James. Our Lord gave the two brothers, apparently, when He made them His Apostles, the name of *Benai-reges*, which in the popular dialect became *Boanerges*, "the children of tumult" or "of thunder." The epithet probably referred to the natural impetuosity of disposition which was especially prominent in St. James, and which displayed itself on the occasion already referred to. But it may also have had a kind of prophetic significance. Nature does not part with its salient characteristics when it is disciplined and transfigured by grace; and the fearless preacher of the faith who died by the sword of Herod was still the man who, before the Pentecost, had called for fire on the Samaritan village, and had asked for the highest places in the Realm of Glory. He was the same, yet he was different. The energy remained, but the refining fire of the Holy

Spirit had melted out of it the alloy of impatience or ambition which had before disfigured it. And let us, then, on this his festival, think of his work as a preacher of the faith; and, in order to do so, let us place ourselves under St. Paul's guidance in the text.

St. Paul is, no doubt, immediately interested in Corinth—a scene of work very different from any on which we can suppose that St. James ever laboured. But in the early Christian time all the Apostolic workmen had, to a great extent, common experiences; and St. Paul is thinking of all who had been thus working for Christ when he says that it had pleased God, by means of that preaching which the Corinthians thought so foolish, to save them that believe.

Now, what was the preaching referred to? The word might be fairly rendered "the truth preached," for St. Paul is not thinking of the action and process of announcement, but of the message announced. In his eyes mere discourse or oratory, irrespective of the claims of the subject on which it was employed, would have no charm or dignity whatever. His own speech and preaching, he says, "was not with enticing words of man's wisdom." It had nothing of method, nothing of the employment of rhetorical topics, nothing of the studied choice and embellishment of language. The idea that public talking upon any subject whatever, whether in the interests of human improvement or not, whether in the interests of Divine truth or not, has in itself a value, a virtue, an operative force for good, as though it were a sort of sacrament—this idea, however welcome in certain quarters of the modern world which will probably occur to us, did not find favour in that serious age of the Apostles, or in the eyes of that society which was founded by the first Apostles of Christ. They were too much bent upon the possession of truth to care for any language, however beautiful, which did not minister to and convey it. They were too deeply concerned with the actual truth announced to spend over-much care and time over the machinery, the drapery, and the process of announcement. The message itself, the truth preached, was the great, and indeed exclusive, concern for them; and it is to this that St. Paul refers as the instrument by which God was pleased to save them that believed. The world was saved by the substance of a message from Heaven, not by the human words that conveyed it.

Now, one leading characteristic of the Apostolic preaching which gave it its saving power was its positive and definite character. It is said of our Lord by His Evangelist that "He taught as one having authority and not as the Scribes." The Scribes, they argued, hesitated, suggested, balanced, corrected themselves, explained themselves, retraced what they had said, modified what they had said, as knowing themselves at the very best to be but feeling their way amid uncertainties. Our Lord spoke with His eye fixed on the unchangeable; and this note of conscious authority passed on to the first preachers of the Gospel. "As God is true," writes St. Paul, "our preaching towards you was not yea and nay; for the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me