

Here we have the first recorded missionary sermon. The Apostle Paul was the preacher. Paul was above everything else a preacher. He never magnified rites or forms. He always gave preaching the foremost place in his ministry. He always acted in accordance with his own words. "Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel;" "Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the Gospel." He preached whenever and wherever he had the opportunity. At Antioch in Pisidia he went with his companions to the synagogue on the Sabbath. He always observed the Sabbath and frequented the place of worship. In these respects he condemns multitudes of men and women in this Christian land! When asked by the officials of the synagogue to give them a word of exhortation, he arose at once. The Scripture had been read, but that was not enough. They must be *explained* and enforced; and Paul was always ready to do so. His sermon at Antioch is interesting and instructive. Preachers and teachers can learn much from it. Let two points be noted.

I. The *manner* of Paul's preaching to the Jews. The *manner* in which truth is presented has much to do with the *results*. It is not enough to preach or teach the truth, we must suit ourselves to our audiences, and so speak as to interest and win.

(1) He was *courteous* and *conciliatory*. He spoke to both sections of his audience. He addressed them all as brethren. Roughness and rudeness always repel. We can be faithful, but at the same time courteous and loving.

(2) He was *prudent* and *careful*. He first prepared the minds of his hearers by a brief and kindly account of the story of the Jews, and then presented Jesus to them as the promised Messiah and the Saviour of the world. He did not charge *them* with the crime of putting Christ to death. He even extenuated the guilt of the Jews at Jerusalem. They crucified Him "because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets." They thought that he was an impostor. They never dreamed of the Messiah appearing as he did. They looked for a king of glory, a majestic conquerer. His humiliation staggered them. They read the Scripture wrongly. They read them with the coloured spectacles of prejudice. Thus "through ignorance" they put Jesus to death. Of course ignorance does not *excuse* guilt, but

it certainly does mitigate it. Thus like Paul we should exercise great care and prudence in presenting the truth to our hearers, and be "wise in winning souls."

(3) He preached to *himself* as well as to his hearers. He united himself with them. The new version translates verse 26—"To us is the word of this salvation sent forth." We must all preach and teach from experience and for our own benefit. H. Clay Trumbull well says, the preacher can never make a truth apply with force to others unless he feels its application to himself. We can be preachers only to the extent of our own experiences. The dangers of others are our dangers. The possibilities of others, are our possibilities. The best hopes for others are hopes for ourselves. We could never ask men with true earnestness to rejoice in the salvation which Jesus offers, unless we ourselves were rejoicing in that salvation.

(4) He based his argument on *Scripture* and facts. He did not theorize or philosophise. He related undoubted facts and proved his declarations by Scripture texts. His gospel was a narrative of events. He told the simple story of Christ's life, death, resurrection and exaltation to heaven. Dr. McLaren says "the story is more than all comments on it or references from it." Let us then ever "tell the old, old story of Jesus and His love."

II. The *matter* of Paul's preaching. His message was "glad tidings" vs. 32. It was the glorious news of *salvation*. His hearers were sinful, sorrowful, dying. They sorely *needed* salvation; and he joyfully assured them that there was salvation for them. Their first great need was *forgiveness*, vs. 38. This is a *primary* blessing. The psalmist puts it first in his list of mercies for which he praises God in the 103rd Psalm. That is its rightful place, for what enjoyment can we have in other blessings if we are unforgiven? What enjoyment can a condemned criminal derive from dainty food, beautiful flowers and costly garments when about to ascend the gallows? His greatest need is pardon. That would be worth more to him than all things else. The same thing is true of every sinner. Forgiveness is his chief need. But he can confidently count upon receiving all other good things necessary.