

The most valuable parts of the Bible, those on which all the rest depend not only for their value but for their very existence, are the parts which record the personal appearance in speech or act of God, whether it be to the patriarchs, to Moses and Joshua, to Isaiah and Ezekiel, or in the person of Jesus Christ. Without these, passages recording the actions of the unphenomenal God lose their power and significance. These are the foundation on which rest equally the religious experiences of David and the theological reasoning of Paul. Above all things, therefore, we are called upon to preach the history of God manifest. We may go far astray in the doctrinal inferences we draw from other historical portions of the scriptures; but when we have thus saith the Lord or thus did the Lord, our guide is a safe one. To build up Christian character on the pious breathings of the Psalmist or the lofty flights of the great apostle of the Gentiles, is to mistake effect for cause, to begin our structure at the top instead of at the foundation, to feign a heavenward flight before the eagle wings are grown. Subjective religion worthy of the name must spring from a knowledge of the objective God. Many a good creature may be found singing, "I love Jesus," because there is a certain glow in his heart, who has little knowledge of who Jesus really was and is. Religion is faith in one who, though ever living, was manifested in history. It has nothing to do, therefore, with imagination or the play of pious fancy; it has to do simply with fact and is, therefore, the most reasonable thing in the world.

We must preach dogmatically, therefore, but the dogma is not that of the fathers or the schoolmen, of the reformers or of the Westminster confession. It is God's dogma and pragma too; thus saith the Lord, thus doth the Lord. He who dogmatizes thus stands on a sure foundation. If any assail Him the eternal God is his refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms. And this is what people will listen to sooner than to aught else. For one hearer who loves theological reasoning there are a thousand who look for fact and delight in it. History is what they want to hear and what they need to hear, for it is by it, as John says, that they will gain fellowship with the apostles, with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

We preach, therefore, not to reason but to faith, faith in the statements of holy men of old. Our own faith in their statements must be strong. I cannot conceive a disbeliever in the miracles of the Bible being a preacher of the Word, for the book is the story of a continued miracle. I cannot imagine one who regards the historical truth of the book as nothing, its spiritual meaning as everything, setting forth the gospel that John delivered. It must be some other gospel, a philosophical vapour. What, you tell me that the friend whose hand I clasp, into whose honest kindly eyes I look, whose long years of fidelity and helpfulness I remember to bind up with his person, is nothing, and that the idea of friendship is all, or that the child may forget the mother's