

Preach The Word

Preached at Tony's Ordination, May 8, 1977, as "Throwing Mud at Jesus"

In II Timothy chapter 4 reading verses 1-5:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and His kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

The story has been told, and a most unusual story it is, concerning a missionary, who died a martyr's death. The tormenters, the accusers, the executioners of this missionary sat before him a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then they began to throw mud on the picture of Jesus. The missionary, as a faithful servant of Jesus, sought to keep the picture of Jesus clean. He took a rag and cleaned

off the mud from the picture of the face of Jesus, and then the tormentors threw more mud on the picture, and again, patiently, he cleaned it off. Then his tormentors and accusers took all kinds of filth and smeared it all over the beautiful picture of Jesus. But again, he took that rag and he cleaned off the picture of the face of Jesus Christ. They took pencils and crayons and drew grotesque mustaches, goatees, beards and they completely marred the picture of Jesus. Again the missionary took erasers and he tried to erase all these markings. He took soap and water and he kept trying to keep clean the face of the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally, he knew he was not going to last much longer and he spoke up and said, "I will die before I see the face of my Lord smeared with filth." That is exactly what happened. They put him to death. He fell down beside this picture of the face of Jesus. He had died trying to keep clean the face of Jesus Christ.

As I understand the position of a Christian minister, I believe it is his obligation to so preach the Word of God that he lifts up before his congregation that perfect picture of Jesus Christ. If anyone tries to defile that perfect picture of Jesus, it is up to the minister of the Gospel to keep clean that picture of Jesus. Even if it means giving his very life in the cause of preaching the Gospel. In Matthew 17:8 the Bible says, "And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man save, Jesus only." It is my earnest and sincere prayer, Tony, that when you stand up before this congregation or any other congregation, any place, you preach the Word of God, that people will be able to see Jesus only through your preaching.

In Luke 4:20 the Bible says, "And he closed the book and he gave it again to the minister and sat down. And the eyes of all of them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him." Jesus, of course, was the preacher on this occasion. The eyes of all the people were upon Jesus. As you, a minister of Jesus Christ stand up before the people to preach the word of God, I pray that each time you preach the message from this book, you will so preach that all the people will fasten their eyes upon Jesus.

In Colossians 1:18 the Bible tells us, "And He is the head of

the body of the church, who is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in all things that He might have the preeminence." Again, I pray that as you preach the Word of God, you may so preach that Christ will receive the honor. Christ will receive the glory. Christ will be the one who is always preeminent.

Tony, as a preacher of the Word of God, it is your responsibility to lift up before the people the perfect picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the pre-existent Son of God. In John 17:5 we read, "And now, Oh Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." Yes, Jesus Christ is without beginning or end. He is truly the pre-existent Son of God. There are many voices in the world today, who would throw mud on the pre-existent Son of God, so it is up to you to keep that picture clean.

It is also up to you to present to the people the virgin born Son of God. In Matthew 1:18 we read, "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother, Mary, was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit." We all know that there are many in the world today who would, and who do, throw mud on the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. But it is up to you to so proclaim the glorious message of God's Word that you will keep clean the virgin birth of Jesus Christ and present Jesus in that miraculous manner to the people.

In John 1:29 we read, "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him and sayeth, 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.'" And so you proclaim the Gospel of Jesus in such a way that Jesus, Himself, will be lifted up as the Lamb of God.

The 19th century was the age of the exclamation mark, but the 20th century has become the age of the question mark. Everything that we once believed in is being questioned and, in most cases, is ridiculed today. Young people are asking, "If what you believe is right, why is the world in such a mess?" Some have even gone as far as to say that Christianity has failed. Look at the suffering, the

agony, the disease, the poverty, the hate, the racial injustice, the war, the blood being spilled all over the world: If God is the God of love, why doesn't He stop it? Christianity has failed, the enemies of Christ are saying.

I. The New Theology

I agree with G.K. Chesterton who said, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting, it has been found difficult and left untried."

Tony, there are those today who are throwing mud at the Lord Jesus Christ in the form of the new theology. One of your duties as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ will be to constantly keep clean the face of Jesus in the midst of this so-called new theology. One of the most popular words being used today in theological circles is the word *neo*, meaning new. We hear talk about the neo-orthodoxy, neo-liberalism, neo-fundamentalism. Recently, one clergyman suggested that we need to have a moratorium on God for one year and another minister said, "No, for twenty years." Can you imagine, we are not supposed to mention God for twenty years?

Recently, a preacher said in print, "There is no such thing as a devil." When I read that, I felt like the prize fighter whose opponent was almost beating him to death. As the boxer leaned on the rope and was about to fall his manager shouted, "Get up, he's not even hitting you." The fighter replied, "Then watch that referee, because someone is sure hitting me." If there is no devil, who is it that is hitting us? Those who are proposing the new theology, question the new theology, question the authority of the scriptures. They question existence of judgment and hell. They teach and accept a form of humanism. That's not new at all. This business of it being a new theology is a misnomer. It is as old as the devil.

Turn with me to Genesis 3:1-5, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He

said to the woman, 'did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?' The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' 'You will not surely die,' the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Three times the devil said, "Has God said?" We who are members of the Churches of Christ have always believed in the word of God, the Bible. Two thousand times in Old Testament scriptures, the prophets claimed that God spoke. We read such passages as these: "The Lord said unto Noah," "God spoke unto Israel," "God said," "The Lord commanded," "Hear the Word of the Lord," "Thus spake the Lord." "I put my words in your mouth." Either God did speak to these men as they wrote by inspiration or else they were the most consistent liars that the world have ever known. That they should tell and record more than two thousand lies seems incredible. Did Jesus deliberately deceive us? Because Jesus also quoted freely from the Old Testament and not once did He say, "Watch out, you can't trust that. You can't believe that." Jesus quoted from Noah, Moses, and Jonah. Three of the men whose Old Testament writings are most questioned by people today seeking to throw mud on Jesus. Jesus used many quotations from the Old Testament and the apostles constantly quoted from the Old Testament Scriptures.

The devil's second statement to Eve was, "You shall not die." Doesn't that sound familiar? What do people say in 1977? They say, "There is no Hell." A.C. Dixson is the man who used to say, "If we had more Hell in the pulpit, we might have less Hell in the community." In one village, where Jesus had cured a man, the people said to Him, "Leave us alone." That is what people are saying today to Gospel preachers. They don't want to hear about death and judgment and Hell. People want to hear about God as being a kindly, old man with a long, white beard sitting on a cloud saying sentimentally to everybody, "Love, love, love." It's true that God loves

and that God is love and we must preach that.

But this same Bible also tells us that God is a God of judgment. As you preach, may you make it very clear that the day of judgment is coming. That day, when every unsaved person is going to stand before the judgment throne of God and will be judged according to the deeds done in the flesh.

The third thing the serpent said to Eve was, "You shall be as gods." That is humanism. Today, humanism has pervaded the university campuses from one end of this earth to the other. The object of humanism is to replace Christianity with the national man-centered philosophy of progress and improvement. Humanism is simply the worship of man. It is all the more dangerous because it is so sophisticated and civilized in its expressions and it has even been invading the church.

I sympathize with people that want a new method for communicating the Gospel in the twentieth century. I don't say that we must imprison the Gospel message in the old English language, the King James Version of the Bible, but neither must we disregard the truth just because it is old. No mathematician would look at the multiplication table and say, "Well, that's old stuff, two plus two equals four. That's old. I learned that back in school over 30 years ago, don't you have something new?" Yes, when I was in school thirty years ago I was taught that at sea level water will boil at 212 degrees and freezes at 32 degrees. It will always be so. In the spiritual realm, as in mathematics, there are certain truths that are constant, fixed, and firm. God is constant. The Bible says, "For I am the Lord, I change not," Malachi 3:6. The Word of God is constant. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away," Matthew 24:35. Our Lord Jesus Christ is constant. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever," Hebrews 13:8. The way of salvation is constant. "Neither is there salvation in any other for there's no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved," Acts 4:12. Today, we do not need a new theology; it's ridiculous, the very thought of it. But we need the old theology, preached, believed, and practiced by all mankind.

II. The New Morality

As you are ordained to the Christian ministry, I would warn you that those who would throw mud on the perfect face of Jesus Christ are quite busy today in a second field called the new morality. I believe the new morality has been brought about in part by extremists of the so-called new theology. The new morality expressed in relativism repudiates the ten commandments, especially the seventh commandment forbidding adultery. It denies the absolute authority of God. It advocates permissiveness with affections. In other words it says, "Go ahead and sleep with that boy or girl if you find it meaningful or if love is involved, whether you are married or not." I would not call you back to that Victorian age, to that hush-hush period when everything pertaining to sex was supposed to be dirty and no one dared to talk about it. But, when a preacher writes a book on pornography that's so bad he had to be indicted by the District Attorney, that's a clear sign of how far we have gone. When a preacher stands in the pulpit to condone premarital sex experiences that's Satan preaching. When a preacher declares publicly that his hobby is painting nude girls, that goes beyond the bounds of any morality. When church people start discussing, overlooking, homosexuality and even discussing ordaining homosexuals to the ministry, that goes beyond anything since God wrote about it in the Bible.

Let us look at Romans chapter 1, beginning with verse 21, to see what God has to say about the so-called new morality.

For although they knew God, they never glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie,

and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator, who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversions. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

What we call this new moral relativism is nothing but the old immorality, rearing its ugly head and it can destroy your soul quicker than anything I know. The Bible says, "Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate sayeth the Lord and touch not the unclean thing," II Corinthians 6:17.

What we need in the church and in the ministry today is a Holy discipline. A disciplined life, not because we are under law, but because we are under grace. The truth has made us free. Free to serve God because we love Him. If you love God, you will obey His commandments and you will live clean and pure lives.

Let me sound this warning to each member of this congregation as well as to the candidate you are about to ordain. It is impossible to live a clean and pure life unless Jesus Christ lives inside you.

Sex is a gift from God and there is nothing dirty about it and nothing wrong about it. It is creative energy that you can surrender to Jesus Christ and then be dynamite for God. I do not believe any-

one can be a dynamic follower of Jesus Christ unless his sex life is surrendered to Jesus Christ. I'll guarantee, Tony, that God will do for you what he did for Joseph if you're surrendered to Christ. Joseph would not accept the new morality of his day and so he left his garment in Potiphar's wife's hand and he fled that which is evil. God gave him grace, power, and the strength to do it and God will do the same for you, if you will stand up and preach the right thing.

III. The New Evangelism

There is a third area where the enemies of Jesus Christ are throwing mud upon him. that is in the area of new evangelism. This new evangelism says, according to *TIME* Magazine, that personal soul winning is passé. The new evangelism wants to apply Christian principles to the social order. Its proponents want to make the prodigal son happy and comfortable and prosperous in the far country without leading him back to God, the Father. Of course, Christian principles have to be applied to the social order, but strictly speaking, the social gospel is not evangelism. What is evangelism? To evangelize is to so present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit that men will come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Savior, and to serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His church. Evangelism means to convert people to Jesus Christ.

I agree that we must have a Gospel large enough and adequate enough to meet the challenge of every hour. But we also need an evangelism that is winning men and women to Jesus Christ, then they will have a capacity to love their neighbors and feel compassion to all men. The word evangelist is used three times in the New Testament. The word Gospel is used 76 times. To preach the Gospel is found 24 times. To give good tidings is found in 5 references. To preach is found in 19 more references and it usually refers to preaching Christ. Now this means, there are 120 references in the New Testament to the sounding forth of the saving

grace of Christ to a dying humanity. As you are ordained to the preaching ministry this is your inescapable duty, **PREACH THE GOSPEL!**

Today, there are many preachers that are spending their time on peripheral areas. Maybe they are important, but so far as I understand the New Testament Scriptures, the primary duty of the minister of the Gospel is to preach the word of God and win people to Jesus, and it's sorely needed in our world. There are approximately 5 million undenominational Christians in this world and that's not very many in the world population of 4 billion persons.

But we have a far greater percentage than the early church had on the Day of Pentecost. In that beginning day there were only 120 people, who were praying for the preaching of the word of God. They didn't have any automobiles and they didn't have airplanes, they didn't have a printing press, they didn't even have the written Bible, they had no church buildings, no Bible seminaries, no Christian schools. They didn't even have a well trained clergy; these men had spent three years with Jesus. They didn't have university degrees, but they did have a degree from Jesus' seminary. They were ordinary businessmen, fishermen and laborers, but they had something that seems so missing in the lives of most preachers today. They had commitment and dedication. They were willing to deny themselves and take up the cross and they were willing to die in the Roman arena. That is exactly what they did, they died for the Gospel. They were torn asunder, they were cut apart, but they kept on preaching the Gospel. No wonder they turned the world upside down.

As you dedicate your life to the preaching of the Gospel, I hope you're doing it with the full intention of being a fool for Jesus' sake. I believe we've become too sophisticated and too respectable. Those early men, who followed Jesus, followed Him in the jails and prisons and they were out on the streets and they were among the people working and sitting where they sat. Lloyd Douglas called it a "Magnificent Obsession." The people of Jesus' day accused Him of being beside himself and they said Paul was

mad. I think we need some of that madness in the twentieth century.

Those of you who know me very well know that I'm not much of a sports enthusiast and some people that know me very well wonder how in the world there was ever a sportsman like Tony that came out of the Thomas family. But, occasionally I go to a ball game, if I'm forced into it. I do remember back in November of 1975, I went to a football game at Colorado Springs, Colorado and I watched the Air Force Academy play UCLA. I must confess I was more interested in watching the Blue Angels performing in the sky than I was those men kicking a pigskin around out there in the yard. But one thing I did notice at that football game that was the enthusiasm of the fans. I was sitting around Generals and Lieutenant Colonels and Captains and Majors . . . respectable men, university professors with Ph.D. degrees. You know they were jumping up and down and screaming and shouting and arguing and I think some of them could've almost killed each other before that game was over. Those same respectable people would have been horrified if they have gone over to the Air Force Academy chapel service and somebody would have smiled they would have said, "That is too emotional for a church service."

It seems strange to me that we can get all worked up over sports and pleasure and money, and we can scream like a tribe of wild Indians at some musical show and then we're not supposed to show any murmur of enthusiasm when it comes to winning people to the Lord Jesus Christ. As members of the Harrison Church of Christ, I want to charge you today, on this day of ordination, to reaffirm your determination to evangelize Harrison for Jesus and to evangelize this world in our generation. We could do it, if we were energized and filled with the Holy Spirit and with the Holy Conviction that Christ is the way and the truth and the life and that there is no other way.

In the month of March, I had the privilege of going to the island of Haiti, for the tenth time, to preach the Gospel. While we were in Haiti this time, I got to go to Cap Haitian. Teresa and I

were the only two lucky ones out of the 69 people that went to Haiti. We got to go to Cap Haitian and work there and start a new congregation. Near Cap Haitian is the world famous citadel, and anybody that has ever read about Haiti has read about the citadel. The citadel was started in 1806 by King Henri Christoff, the first king of Haiti. Haiti declared independence from France in 1802 and there was a threat from Napoleon that he was going to come and recapture Haiti. King Henri Christoff built this citadel, which has been named the 8th wonder of the world, to be a fortress that would repulse the forces of Napoleon and the forces of France in case he came to recapture the island. It is one of the most amazing pieces of architecture ever to go up on the face of the earth.

Built on the very top of a very high and imposing mountain that looks over Cap Haitian harbor, it took King Henri Christoff 14 years to build. It cost the lives of twenty thousand slaves to get it built. He brought two thousand cannons from Mexico to put in this fortress and imported 10,000 cannon balls from Mexico. He built a powder magazine in the fortress that is as big as this worship auditorium or bigger. He even got two cannons from Napoleon, himself, and inscribed them with Napoleon's name. It is quite interesting how he got those cannons. When Napoleon's ship came into Cap Haitian's harbor, King Henri Christoff quickly captured that ship, took the two cannons off and set the ship on fire and sunk it and hauled the cannons up to the citadel. So there are 2,002 cannons there and you can see them right to this day. There came a time when Napoleon became quite serious about retaking Haiti. He sent a Captain from his army over on a ship to Cap Haitian and this captain came to King Henri of Haiti with the threat, "You'd better surrender, because if you don't Napoleon is going to come and crush you. Why not go ahead and give up and save all the bloodshed?"

King Henri Christoff was a very, very brilliant man. He entertained Napoleon's Captain royally. Then he brought him out on the wall of the citadel; it's a very narrow wall. When you look over that wall you look hundreds of feet below to nothing but jagged

rocks. It is a very fearful thing to stand on that high wall and look over. King Henri Christoff had this captain from the army of France to be seated there on the narrow wall and then he ordered his soldiers to start marching. It was a military secret, nobody knew it, but at that time King Henri Christoff only had two hundred soldiers in his army. He was so pitifully weak, militarily speaking, that Napoleon could've come and crushed Haiti like you would crush a fly with a fly-swatter, but of course, nobody know this. King Henri Christoff started these two hundred soldiers marching single file down the wall of the citadel. He only gave them one order, "Forward march," and as they began to march, he very quietly made the observation to Napoleon's man, "My soldiers number in the thousands, and they are totally obedient to my every command."

Napoleon's captain sat there and watched, horrified, because as those soldiers marched down the wall, King Henri Christoff never gave an order to halt and neither did he give the order to about face. When they reached the end of the wall they just toppled off, one by one, and they just kept marching off the end of the wall, falling to their death hundreds of feet below. they kept marching off the wall until one hundred soldiers had perished., That left only one hundred and, at that point, King Henri commanded them, "About face." The one hundred soldiers that remained did an about face and as they came past King Henri and the captain, King Henri gave them a secret order this time and they marched through the citadel into the changing room. They changed uniforms and marched back out, marched back in, and they kept this up, and kept it up, and the captain thought he was seeing different soldiers.

After this had gone on for more than an hour, suddenly he jumped up and screamed, "I'm convinced, I'm convinced. I've seen enough. Let me go." He rushed down to Cap Haitian harbor, climbed on his ship and sailed back to France. When he appeared before Napoleon history records that he said, "Emperor Napoleon, forget about Haiti. That King, Henri Christoff, has so many soldiers they are like the stars of the heavens. They are innumerable.

And his soldiers are totally obedient.” Then he gave the report of the soldiers marching off the wall to their death, because that’s what their commander told them to do. It put fear in the heart of Emperor Napoleon. He canceled all of his plans to send his army to Haiti. Consequently, Haiti has remained a free republic to this very day, because of the brilliance of that old king.

Tony, as you have dedicated your life to Jesus Christ, I would simply remind you that He is far greater than King Henri Christoff of Haiti. Jesus Christ, your commander, is King of kings and Lord of lords and He has only given one command. He said, “Go! Go everywhere, to everybody and preach the Gospel,” and Jesus never once has said turn back. May God bless you that you may go and preach His Word!