

WHAT TO PREACH TO MOSLEMS

What is said in this paper is based on experience rather than theory. Experience doubtless forms a basis for the conduct of the individual. But the experience of one may have little value in shaping the conduct of another. The personal characteristics of the individual are a very important factor in the success or failure of any missionary in preaching to Moslems. The methods of one, if closely followed by another, may lead to failure. Different methods might lead to success. Parrot-work in preaching the Gospel to Moslems is dangerous. I have been asked, "What is the first thing you do on entering a village? Do you immediately begin religious conversation? What is the first thing you say on approaching a Moslem with the Gospel? Just how do you act and talk?" Not all men have natural adaptability for preaching to Moslems. The personality of the individual is so important a factor that each preacher to Moslems will succeed or fail, to a very large extent, by being perfectly natural. If he succeeds, it will be by being himself, and by shaping his conduct in accordance with the guidance of the Spirit, and by being able to turn to advantage the circumstances of the moment, rather than by imitating some other man's experience, or following too closely some other man's theories.

I have learned some lessons by observation and experience which are useful to me, and I pass them on for what they are worth.

Avoid argument, controversy, and disparaging references to Mohammed, the Koran, and Islam. If reference must be made to the things of Islam, speak of that which is good. Islam is a half truth, and therefore the most difficult religion in the world to combat. But give the devil his due. Never display heat or temper. Never say things simply because they cut. All these things are

suited more to repel the Moslem than to attract him. Avoid argument with individual professed fanatics. Little if any good is accomplished by meeting them. Seldom answer or discuss questions that are asked while preaching. Sometimes they can be answered by a snapshot, but usually, if they must be noticed, invite the questioner to a private interview. Preserve a dignity that is born of the consciousness that we are preaching the truth. Always try to leave the pulpit or bazaar in such a way that you can return without embarrassment, so far as anything you have said or done is concerned. When people curse you, say "Thank you" or "God bless you." I know a colporteur who was canvassing a bazaar in a good sized town, when one shopkeeper called out to another, "There comes the old book-seller your brother. Buy a book from him." The colporteur replied, "I may become a dog, but I never will become your brother." He never sold that man a book. I know a missionary, who in some respects is a very able man. His favorite method of presenting the Gospel to Moslems is by controversial argument. When one of his meetings was finished, the Moslems went away very angry, and one of them was heard to say, "That man has the religion of a beast." I have never heard of that missionary as being the instrument of leading one Moslem to Christ.

There are two general methods of presenting Christ to Moslems, viz., the destructive, and the constructive. By the destructive, I mean setting forth Mohammed, the Koran, and Islam in a disparaging light; saying things about their shortcomings and fallacies which may be perfectly true, but which are unwise to say. By the constructive, I mean presenting Christ and His glorious Gospel in such a way as to attract Moslems. When the purity and beauty of Christ's life, the sublime truth of His teachings, His infinite, eternal, and holy love, and His divine power to save the souls of sinners from spiritual death, are affectionately set forth in the power of the Holy Ghost, the fallacies of Islam will take care of themselves,

and the Gospel will appeal to the hearts of Mohammedans. We are out to *win* men, not to repel them. Preach sympathetically. Regard Moslems simply as lost sinners, whom God loves, and for whom Christ died, and preach accordingly.

Preach on a level which hearers can understand. This does not mean regarding all the people in every group of listeners as uneducated men who can never think for themselves, and therefore talking baby-talk to them. In almost every crowd of men there will be one or more above the average in intellect and education. The skilful preacher will gain that man's ear while causing the less intellectual and educated to understand. The average missionary is incapable of quoting effectively Arabic passages from the Koran or passages from the poets and from Persian literature, and such quotations should be used cautiously. But many good quotations and illustrations can be drawn from Moslem life and thought, and put into such form as to convince and attract. Draw many illustrations from the Bible. Do not try to display scholarship or high attainments in the Persian language. If manuscript sermons are used, it should be very rarely, and then only on formal and stated occasions. Remember it is your business to make as many as possible of your hearers clearly understand what you are trying to say. Make thorough preparation, and then preach offhand with nothing more than notes. Extemporaneous, but not impromptu, preaching is the best method. Keep a few of your best sermons always on tap for emergencies. Repeat them often enough so that you can preach them in the midst of confusion. Theoretically, at least, every clergyman has been trained in homiletics and in presenting the Gospel message, and the general principles of good seminary training, modified in their outward form so as to meet the needs of the Moslems, hold good.

In Persia, preaching to Moslems includes pulpit work, itinerating, bazaar preaching, and social intercourse. Live with the people. Eat, drink, and sleep in their

houses. Learn not to be annoyed by vermin. Go to their shops. Get acquainted with their methods of thought, their life, their difficulties. Learn to observe from their point of view. Never hold the Book behind your back while preaching. Never drop it, or toss it carelessly on to the table or carpet. Manifest a holy reverence for the Book. Emphasize without argument that the whole Bible is the Word of God. Emphasize Bible reading for all who can read, or who can get someone to read to them. Emphasize God's love manifested in Christ. Islam glaringly lacks the fervor of God's love. It is our great drawing card. Preach the simple doctrines of God's love, justice and mercy. Preach the virgin birth, the Trinity, the crucifixion, the atonement, the resurrection, the ascension, the second coming, the day of judgment, heaven, hell, God's foreknowledge, and man's free will. Preach Christ, the only and sufficient Saviour. Preach salvation through the atonement of Christ by means of repentance, faith, and obedience to His teachings.

The following are some of the texts I have preached on in Meshed during the past year:

- Col. 3:2, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."
- Heb. 11:8, "By faith Abraham, when he was called.....obeyed."
- Matt. 7:13-14, "Enter ye in at the strait gate."
- Jno. 16:8, "He will reprove the world of sin."
- Matt. 7:21, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."
- Jno. 1:29, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."
- Isa. 57:21, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."
- Jno. 3:7, "Ye must be born again." (four times.)
- Jno. 6:48, "I am that bread of life."
- Lk. 9:56, "The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."
- Rom. 3:20, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified."
- Gal. 3:13, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law."
- I Tim. 1:1, "Jesus Christ, which is our hope."
- Matt. 16:26, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"
- I Tim. 1:15, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

The primary object of Christian missions is to spread the Gospel of salvation for sinners through the atonement of Jesus Christ. Medical, educational, literary, and all other forms of missionary work which are not direct

preaching, should aim specifically at this objective, or else they should have no place in mission organization. Every missionary is in a very specific and definite sense a preacher of salvation through Christ. Repeatedly during the past year, I have preached to people on a Sunday who were dead before the next Sunday. In every congregation or group of listeners there are likely to be some to whom we shall never again have the opportunity of preaching the name of Christ. We are dealing with the eternal destiny of immortal souls.

L. E. ESSELSTYN.*

Late of Resht, Persia.

*Since this article was written, Doctor Esselstyn has passed away.