

EVANGELISTIC SERMONS

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Evangelistic sermons by J. Wilbur Chapman & Edgar Whitaker Work

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J. WILBUR CHAPMAN & EDGAR WHITAKER WORK

EVANGELISTIC SERMONS



Arthur Chapman

Evangelistic Sermons

By

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

EARLY in his ministry J. Wilbur Chapman was called to do the work of an evangelist. Even while he was in the actual pastorate of churches, his ministry was evangelistic in tone and method. When the time came he gave up a pastorate of signal usefulness and power in New York City, and devoted his full energy to evangelistic work in the churches. No man of his time did more to promote the aggressive preaching of the gospel of salvation. In his own denomination he is credited, together with John H. Converse, with starting a movement for community and pastoral evangelism which is not likely to spend its force in many years—a movement strong enough in fact to change to an important degree the very character of a great Christian body. He was an intense lover of the Church, and a staunch advocate of the ministry of the Church. Believing so thoroughly in the divine origin and authority of the Church, he never threw stones into the well that gives water to the world. That he gave to evangelism so much of spiritual dignity and grace, was due to his own profound respect for religious propriety as well as to his singularly fine and noble personality. It was not in him to do anything otherwise than decently and in order. With him

the preaching of the gospel was never trivial: least of all could it partake of anything clownish. He was quiet, both in manner and speech. It was never necessary for him to shout to produce an impression. If he studied the art of making impressions, it was nowhere apparent. He was never other than a simple, quiet, direct preacher of the gospel. Yet there was a deep fervor in his speech that made itself felt in his audiences. He produced an atmosphere of his own, and it was one of profound quiet and responsiveness.

Few men in the history of evangelism have been more truly masters of assemblies. To speak of his quiet manner does not mean to say that he lacked in aggressiveness. On the contrary, he was richly gifted in the persuasive ways of evangelism. He could woo his audience by his voice, or even by a striking attitude, or a startling word. Many will remember his sudden enunciation of such words—as "Hear me!" and "Listen!" He well understood the latent dramatic power of the gospel. At times he was vividly dramatic. Often his language was picturesque and appealing. He could tell a simple incident or story in such a way as to melt strong men to tears. There were occasions when he burst into unusual utterance and method. Frequently he would say to an audience that he would gladly change his method, if only he could win souls. Like the Apostle Paul, he was willing himself to become almost reprobate in sensationalism

if by that means he could persuade others. Nevertheless, the foundation of his work was the quiet persuasiveness of a heart deeply in earnest, and filled to overflowing with a passion for souls. It was not necessary for him to resort to mere by-play. Soul-winning was far too impressive a process to be punctuated with gales of laughter. No one ever went away from his meetings with a mere feeling of having been entertained. He meant that every sermon, every prayer, every song, should remind men of the Saviour's call.

It is not difficult to state some at least of the elements of Dr. Chapman's power as an evangelistic preacher. He believed profoundly in the Word of God, and preached it fearlessly to men. He taught with tremendous realism the power of sin and the certainty of judgment. With equal passion he preached the doctrines of grace. A man may be a great sinner, but he has a great Saviour. The old message of faith and repentance faithfully reiterated brought many thousands to the Saviour. He was careful to explain that repentance means turning away from sin, as well as feeling sorry for sin. The doctrinal background of his preaching revealed his careful training in theological truths, but it was doctrine brought to the level of common understanding. One is often amazed at the skill with which he teaches profound truths of religion in utterly simple fashion.

His desire to see men saved was at the root of

his passionate preaching. He knew that men were lost without Christ, and he preached to lost men with the passion of a true ambassador of God. Close to this deep passion of his heart for the souls of men, was his power of pathos. He readily admitted that he was emotional, but emotionalism with him was not mere excitement. What he had was depth of feeling, great tenderness of sympathy, strong humanistic understanding of life—in one word, *pathos*. The word does not necessarily mean tears; certainly it does not mean loose and irresponsible utterance. In Chapman's case it was accompanied by a voice of extraordinary quality. It was musical, yet it was more than musical. It was sympathetic, yet even this does not express all that it was. There was a wooing note about it, a profound tenderness of feeling, an echoing persuasiveness, such as are found in but few human voices. He could hush an audience into deep stillness with a word. Without striving for effect, he could speak single words so that one would remember them. His pronunciation of the Master's name—"Jesus"—was always deeply impressive.

The unusual richness of his voice, together with his vivid imagination, and his intimate appreciation of humanity's varied life, gave him remarkable power in reciting incidents, stories and experiences that were related to his themes. From a wide knowledge of men he gathered many narratives of life which he used with telling power in his ser-