

trying to say to their times. But we can use the forms and texts and stories they give us and fill them with a new meaning that is nevertheless their true meaning.

3. *We must preach the Old Testament because it still, today, pleases Jesus Christ to give His own living witness to Himself through these very Scriptures which shadow Him forth so vividly.*

When the two disciples were on the road to Emmaus, the risen Jesus drew near. They did not recognize Him, and it was not till He entered their house, and in the sacramental action of the breaking of bread gave thanks, that they knew Him. But He did nevertheless seek to prepare them for the final recognition all the length of the journey on foot by expounding to them the Scriptures—and of course the Scriptures were the Old Testament writings. 'Did not our hearts burn within us as He spoke to us by the way?' We have thus in this Emmaus incident the risen Jesus mediating Himself to His disciples through the Scriptures and through the sacrament.

It is still His way to do this to His people in the Church. He still draws near when men speak about Him to one another in faith, and in our attempts to preach the Old Testament we must never forget that the risen Christ on more than one occasion gave living witness to Himself through these Scriptures. Perhaps it will not be so difficult to preach the Old Testament when we remember this. If we are faithful in pointing to Him through these Scriptures, our success will depend again, not on our skill so much as on *His* drawing near.

FROM A WISE MASTER-BUILDER

I mean by 'preaching the gospel' preaching the love of God to sinners, preaching the life, death, resurrection, and intercession of Christ, with all the blessings which in consequence thereof are freely given to true believers. By 'preaching the law' I mean explaining and enforcing the commands of Christ briefly comprised in the Sermon on the Mount.

. . . What is the stated means of *feeding and comforting* believers? What is the means, as of *begetting spiritual life* where it is not, so of *sustaining and increasing* it where it is? . . . Some think preaching the law only; others, preaching the gospel only. I think neither the one nor the other; but duly mixing both, in every place, if not in every sermon.

I think the right method of preaching is this. At our first beginning to preach at any place, after a general declaration of the love of God to sinners and His willingness that they should be saved, to preach the law in the strongest, and closest, the most searching manner possible; only intermixing the gospel here and there, and showing it, as it were, afar off.

After more and more persons are convinced of sin, we may mix more and more of the gospel in order to *beget faith*, to raise into spiritual life those whom the law has slain; but this is not to be done too hastily neither. Therefore it is not expedient wholly to omit the law; not only because we may well suppose that many of our hearers are still unconvinced, but because otherwise there is danger that many who are convinced will heal their own wounds slightly; therefore it is only in private converse with a thoroughly convinced sinner that we should preach nothing but the gospel.

If, indeed, we could suppose an whole congregation to be thus convinced, we should need to preach the gospel; and the same we might do if our whole congregation were supposed to be newly justified. But when these grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, a wise builder would preach the law to them again; only taking particular care to place every part of it in a gospel light, as not only a command, but a privilege also, as a branch of the glorious liberty of the sons of God. He would take equal care to remind them that this is not the cause but the fruit of their acceptance with God . . . that we are still forgiven and accepted, only for the sake of what (Christ) hath done and suffered for us; and that all true obedience springs from love to Him, grounded on His first loving us. He

would labour, therefore in preaching any part of the law, to keep the love of Christ continually before their eyes; that thence they might draw fresh life, vigour, and strength to run the way of His commandments.

Thus would he preach the law even to those who were pressing on to the mark. But to those who were careless or drawing back he would preach it in another manner, nearly as he did before they were convinced of sin. . . .

Preaching the law in the manner above described . . . would both *sustain and increase* their *spiritual life*. For the commands are food as well as the promises; food equally wholesome, equally substantial. These also, duly applied, not only direct but likewise *nourish and strengthen* the soul. . . . Do not all the children of God experience that, when God gives them to see deeper into His blessed law, whenever He gives a new degree of light, He gives likewise a new degree of strength? Now I *see* He that loves me bids me do this. And now I *feel* I can do it through Christ strengthening me. Thus light and strength are given by the same means . . . God gives me more light into His commands. I see the exceeding height and depth of it. At the same time I see (by the same light from above) how far I have fallen short. I am ashamed; I am humbled before God. I earnestly desire to keep it better; I pray to Him that hath loved me for more strength, and I have the petition I ask of Him. Thus the law not only convicts the unbeliever and enlightens the believing soul, but also conveys food to a believer, sustains and increases his spiritual life and strength. And if it increase his spiritual life and strength, it cannot but increase his comfort also. . . .

And all this, I conceive, is clearly declared in one single passage of Scripture: 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. . . . The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart, the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes . . . sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.' The commandments are both food and medicine; they both refresh, strengthen and nourish the soul. . . .

According to this model, I should advise every preacher continually to preach the law—the law grafted upon, tempered by and animated with the spirit of the gospel. I advise him to declare, explain and enforce every commandment of God. But meantime to declare in every sermon (and the more explicitly the better) that the first and great command to a Christian is, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ': that Christ is all in all, our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption; that all life, love, strength are from Him alone, and all freely given to us through faith. And it will ever be found that the law thus preached . . . nourishes and teaches; that it is the guide, food, medicine and stay of the believing soul. . . .

As to the fruit of this *new* manner of preaching (entirely new to the *Methodists*), speaking much of the promises, little of the commands (even to unbelievers, and still less to believers) . . . I think it has done great harm. . . . The 'gospel preachers' so called corrupt their hearers; they vitiate their taste, so that they cannot relish sound doctrine; and spoil their appetite, so that they cannot turn it into nourishment; they, as it were, feed them with sweetmeats, till the genuine wine of the kingdom seems quite insipid to them. They give them cordial upon cordial, which make them all life and spirit for the present; but meantime their appetite is destroyed. . . .

Hence it is (according to the constant observation I have made in all parts both of England and Ireland) preachers of this kind (though quite the contrary appears at first) spread death, not life, among their hearers. As soon as that flow of spirits goes off, they are without life, without power, without any strength or vigour of soul; and it is extremely difficult to recover them, because they still cry out, 'Cordials, cordials!' of which they have had too much already, and have no taste for the food which is convenient for them. . . .

On the other hand, when . . . I took an account of the Societies of Yorkshire . . . I found them all alive, strong and vigorous of soul. . . .

From the beginning they had been taught both the law and the gospel. 'God loves you; therefore love and obey Him. Christ died for you; therefore die to sin. Christ is risen; therefore rise in the image of God. Christ liveth evermore; therefore live to God, till you live with Him in glory.'

. . . This is the scriptural way, the *Methodist* way, the true way. God grant we may never turn therefrom, to the right hand or to the left.

JOHN WESLEY, 1751.

ELISHA AND THE BEARS

The story told in 2 Kings 2: 23-25 with the usual O.T. economy of words, often causes uneasy feelings. Elisha is miscalled by some mischievous children, so he rounds on them, curses them and God duly sends a couple of bears to create havoc among the children. Such is a common conception of the story. Is it accurate, or does it miss the point?

During the war there appeared an unpretentious volume called 'The Severity of God' by D. E. Hart-Davies. A chapter in this is devoted to a study of the passage such as would be good for us to apply more often to the text of Scripture. The following notes along lines indicated by Hart-Davies are given not as a definitive exposition of the passage, but as an illustration of a great principle of interpretation enunciated by Wycliffe: '*It shall greatly help to understand Scripture if thou mark not only what is spoken or written, but of whom and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, in what circumstances, considering what goes before and what followeth.*'

First then, of whom and to whom are the words spoken? The principal persons involved are the prophet Elisha and a group called *na'arim qetanim*. Elisha, let us remember, has just succeeded to the office of Elijah: and, scanty as our records of the period are, we can see something of the position which Elijah occupied in Israel. He was the representative par excellence of the worship of Jahveh. He was the man whose very person was an offence to the compromising king of Israel (cp. I Kings 21:20). In him were met together the pure worship of the Living God and unrelenting opposition to impure or idolatrous worship.

Hart-Davies perhaps assumes too readily that the *na'arim* were around twenty years old. But let us note that *na'ar* usually means *lad* or *youth*, and even though it is here qualified by *qaton* the R.V. margin, 'young lads' seems a fair translation. (cp. I Kings 3:7). There is no suggestion that these were young children who did not know yet how to 'choose the good and refuse the evil.' Further, they were *representative* of the spirit of the age and place, as we shall see.

Now, with that words? We are concerned, first with what the hooligans said to Elisha and then with his reaction. What the youths called out was not just an uncomplimentary personal remark. Natural baldness is uncommon in the Near East, and is not associated in the Bible with old age. (see on this, R. A. S. Macalister asst. Baldness in H.D.B.). In any case, Elisha was a young man. Among the Arabs today, "bald-head" is used as an extremely offensive and indecent remark. There are two possibilities: either Elisha was not bald at all, and the mockers are deliberately reviling the prophet: or, as Stade long ago suggested (Z.A.T.W. 1894) they were actually mocking the shaving of the head or tonsure which marked him out as a prophet of God. And when they say 'Go up,' they are mockingly inviting him to ascend to the sanctuary.

Elisha has been the recipient, not of personal insult, but of abuse as representative of the High and Holy God. His reply is therefore in the name of God. As the hooligans had reviled God, so the curse of God falls upon them. This has many a parallel in the Scriptures: to take no other, Paul's dealings with Elymas in Acts 13: 6 ff. are surely an example of the same thing. Nothing could be further from a display of bad temper: it is a solemn reminder of what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the Living God.