

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bq\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php)

## Preaching in the Open Air.

(Address delivered to students and friends at a Theological Training College.)

OPEN Air preaching is woven into the texture of Bible history. The first sermon ever delivered was preached in a garden. It opened with the words "Where art thou?" and was continued by the Divine Preacher with much heart-searching. The two most prominent sermons in the Word of God were both delivered from mountains: the giving of the Ten Commandments from Sinai; and the discourse on the hill-side in the New Testament, known as the Sermon on the Mount.

In Old Testament history, discourses to large assemblies of people were perforce delivered in the open air, as there were no buildings erected large enough to hold the multitudes. The two places of concourse in the open air most frequently mentioned were "at the door of the tabernacle" and "at the gate of the city." When we come to New Testament history, we find Jesus often preaching in synagogues, but perhaps as frequently using the shore of the lake, the hill side, or the public street. As far as one can judge from reading the Book of Acts, the early preachers appear to have followed the example of their Master, dividing their discourses equally between the synagogues and schools, and the open air.

Open Air preaching early fell into neglect. It may have been that the cooler air of the various climes to which the Gospel speedily was taken, had something to do with this; but, alas, too probably the reason was to be found in the loss of the early aggressive and missionary spirit of the Churches. Believers began to look upon their places of assembly in the same way that the Church or Chapel is regarded to-day, i.e., too much as a religious club, a place for the comfortable enjoyment of the study of the Word. We fear that self-satisfaction is at the root of the neglect of the proclamation of Divine Truth in street and field; this is proved by the fact that whenever the Spirit grants a definite Revival of religion, Open Air preaching comes to the front once more. It was so in the days of Wyclif when he sent his preachers over the land. Also when the multitudes heard the Word at St. Paul's Cross. What a Revival of Open Air work did the Reformation bring in! Then, as Bishop Ryle says in his "Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century"—"those who

were forbidden the Churches were willing to use the steps of the Market Cross, or even a horse block as a pulpit, and found their audiences in market place, street, and field." In the 1859 Revival—see Gibson's "Year of Grace"—the valleys of Ireland adjacent to the towns in which the Revival was the most marked, proved vantage grounds for the preaching. Now there is need for another return to these great evangelistic methods. We would offer a few preliminary remarks concerning Open Air preaching before coming to the heart of our subject.

First, Prayer. Let none go forth to the difficult task we are studying, without an interview with the Master. Christ's severe words about those who pray at the corners of the streets should deter us from postponing our prayers until we get outside. Let the house—whether it be residence or place of worship—be the place of our petitions, and the open-air the place for our proclamation of the Word; that "our Father Who seeth in secret" may "reward us openly." The din and bustle of a public thoroughfare are not conducive to reverence of worship and singleness of thought required in prayer.

An important preliminary to the study of the work is the need of careful selection of the pitch or stand where the Service is to be held. Of course, the aim must be at the most populous site. In a late Mission conducted by the writer he was ignorant of the locality, and the Open Air leaders chose several spots where but few people could hear. He found afterwards that a well-frequented spot could be reached in five minutes from the Chapel. It was too late in the Mission then to hold more than one service there, but hundreds must have heard the Word. This matter needs the strictest attention.

We must remember to avoid, as far as possible, bringing ridicule upon ourselves and our message. Spurgeon, with playful sarcasm, pictured the Open Air preacher as talking to one child and a dog! A preacher is generally ill-advised to stand alone in a public thoroughfare. Christ sent out His missionary workers two and two. Of course, again, there may be exceptions to this rule. In a story from the "Quaker Saints" we read of a preacher urged by an inward compulsion, preaching on a vacated camping ground in the backwoods, not knowing that he had even one hearer. God blest the Word to a man hidden in the bush, and he was the means of leading to Christ some who became winners of many souls afterwards. But, as a general thing, co-operation should be sought. The street march is a valuable form of open-air work when there is an imposing company to take part. The march is preliminary. It should be remembered that, while conviction of sin in the open air is very frequent, conversion—that is to say a definite decision for Christ—is seldom made till the

indoor service is reached. Therefore, let the outdoor service be followed by an indoor meeting, however short, to give enquirers the opportunity of being further instructed.

Now, following these preparatory hints, let us survey the subject of preaching in the open air under four heads. First, the speaking; secondly, the singing; thirdly, the workers; and, fourthly, the results.

I. It is best to consider both the manner and the matter of the speaking. The manner is as the body of the work, the matter is the very soul itself. As to the manner, we have to remember the voice, the hands, and the style.

As to the voice, let us say at once, use it! God has given to the speaker a certain volume of sound which it is possible for him to produce. Let him make use of it all. Mumbling, murmuring, drawing, and half-hearted tones are not suited for the proclamation of Divine Truth. When the writer was speaking to a minister concerning our subject, and mentioned how gladly the people listened to the Lord in the open air, his comment was, "Yes, Jesus opened His mouth, and taught them." No semi-tones would satisfy the Master in His telling of the Father's Message. But an equally important remark concerning the voice is, do not abuse it. Nothing is more unpleasant to listen to than an over-strained voice, excepting it be an instrument out of tune. Above all, let us avoid the alternate shriek and whisper which only call down the ridicule of men in the street. Monotony of tone is equally to be deprecated. As far as possible, let the people be addressed in open-air gatherings in the voice and tones used in ordinary conversation, only, of course, heightened in accordance with the number of the listeners.

The use of the hands is almost as important as the voice. The senseless waving about of the hands will be derided by those who look on. Let what has been called "babbling of the fingers" be carefully avoided. Inappropriate actions are also quickly noticed by the crowd and will certainly prejudice their minds.

No less important is the style. Let us drop the ministerial altogether when we are out in the open. "Dearly beloved brethren," "my text this evening is," "let us take for our subject"—and similar expressions almost expected in indoor worship, are fatal in the open air, and will only disperse the crowd. Beginning with—"By the bye, have you heard?" Or "What a remarkable piece of news we have!" is sure to hold the listeners. at least for a few moments, until you can turn the incident related to some good account. This was the style of Christ, using the news of the day as the door to some eternal truth. When they thought to shock Him by telling Him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, He turned upon them with the

solemn lesson, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." It is easy to gain the attention of the crowd by some incident from the daily papers. The parabolic and pictorial style, such as Christ used, is more difficult for a western speaker and audience than for an eastern. But the human mind loves pictures, and therefore, illustrate freely, with the caution not to let your illustrations drown the truth you want to bring forward.

We have said much concerning the manner of open air preaching, but now we come to the soul of the thing, the matter. The speaker in the field or street must remember, equally with his brethren inside the building, that he is bound to "preach the Word," and to walk in the footsteps of the Apostle who said, "I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." Let the Open Air preacher take his stand at the Cross and refuse to leave it. A gentleman, some fifty years ago, who went to hear Dr. Parker on a Sunday morning, Canon Liddon in the afternoon, and C. H. Spurgeon at night, said he was more impressed by a working man in the open air talking about the Cross of the Lord, than by the sermons of the great preachers. Do not fear to detail the sufferings of the Saviour. As you picture Christ unrobing Himself before lying down on the Cross; then voluntarily making the wood His couch as He lies back upon it—"The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep"—as you show the executioners sending the cruel iron through hands and feet; as you bid the people listen to His cries; as you echo the triumphant shout which sealed the work of our salvation, "It is finished," you will find that you hold your audience with astonishing ease. "I, if I lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me."

Further, do not set aside the great doctrines of the faith when you preach in the open air. Remember, that the Spirit's work accompanies the words of Truth themselves. Texts of Scripture repeated by the helpers, as we point them out one after the other, the shot and shell of the open air worker, are very effective. So also with the text repeated in a loud voice by the whole company of friends with you.

Matter of the greatest importance, next to the Gospel Story, is the frequent relating of personal experience. To get one of either sex, and even a young convert, to tell in public how Christ found the wandering soul and brought it to Himself, will often hold a crowd which has been difficult to retain under an ordinary address. Where there are none with you able or willing thus to give their own conversion story, telling of the conversions of others will often prove effective.

It is possible even to use objections made, and turn them to good account as texts or themes or illustrations. An Open Air

preacher in the East End was interrupted by a listener who cried out, "Away with your Christianity! I believe in modern inventions." The preacher's wise answer was—"Then, my friend, when you are dying you had better send for the gasfitter." Another interrupter, speaking of the preacher, called out—"Don't believe a word he says! When we die, we die like the animals, and there is an end of us." The preacher calmly remarked, "Make way there for a man who believes that when his mother died, she died like a dog." Forgetting his previous remark, the interrupter shouted—"That's a lie! When my mother died she went straight to heaven." When a cabbage stalk was flung at the writer whilst he was speaking in the open air, he held it up and made it an illustration of spiritual death, a poor, lifeless thing. So we can find matter for our talks even from those who are seeking to put an end to them.

Sometimes a drunken man will stagger into the crowd. Let such interruptions be valued. It is sure to draw an increase to the throng. Patiently wait until the people have gathered around to listen to his wild remarks, then let a worker beckon him out of the crowd. Intoxicated curiosity will nearly always make him obey. And there you have the crowd he has provided for you. Infidelity will at times lift up its head. Refuse to argue publicly in the street upon religious questions. You might ask them if they believe in the Bible; and on getting the answer that they do not—refuse to discuss the question with them. Probably you will be asked such a stock question as "Where did Cain get his wife?" etc. One speaker in the open air always answered with Deut. xxix. 29. : "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

II. A few words about the Singing. Let this be as good as it is possible to have it. This inborn love of music is in almost every mind. Whenever possible, let the singing be accompanied by an instrument. Let the hymns be chosen sometimes from old and well remembered ones, to awaken old memories in the hearts of hardened sinners; and sometimes from the newer pieces to attract the curious. Solos are immensely effectual in the street services. It is hardly possible to pay too much attention to this branch of usefulness in Open Air work.

III. But what about the Workers? There should be as many of them as possible, and friends who do not possess the gift of either speech or song should still be encouraged, and indeed urged, to come, that the Service may be a true demonstration for Divine Truth, and that the speaker be supported by their prayers. It should be impressed upon all workers, that, although prayer was offered in the building before coming out, private, individual,

secret prayer should be ascending from every heart whilst the service is proceeding. Herein is the source of strength for the speaker, and for all the effort, the value of which can never be known. Let the workers always show a spirit of reverence. The moment the service in the street is concluded, let each worker turn round and speak to someone in the crowd. It may be found that something said or sung has taken effect. It is the worker's privilege to deepen that impression in the heart.

Do not reject the use of our sisters in testifying to what they know of the Saviour's Cross. If the woman of Samaria was so mightily used among her neighbours, how much more should we expect that Christian women will be used to-day. Be sure of one thing, that not only has it been well said that Conscience is always on the side of the Christian preacher, but in these Open Air audiences "chords that were broken will vibrate once more," as Truths long ago heard, hymns long ago listened to, fall upon apparently careless ears. Those who have neglected the worship of God since childhood will be reminded of scenes in village Chapels and in Sunday Schools which had been almost erased from their memories. That recollection may be used by the Spirit of God to deepen the impression of the Truths which you bring before them.

IV. The fourth view we take of Open Air work is that of certain and remarkable Results already accomplished. Let us picture to ourselves a crowd of men on Sunday morning in years gone by, waiting for the opening of neighbouring public-houses. As the service is proceeding, a young coster, leaning against the shutters of the corner shop, listens with interest; he is spoken to, and promises to attend the indoor service that night. The promise is kept, and he is converted to God. Only a few months ago he passed into his Saviour's presence, after over thirty years of faithful witness to his Lord. Picture again a gentleman walking down the same street and coming across a little band of open air workers. Having nothing to do that evening, he follows them into the concert hall, where the service is to be held. He has private conversation with the preacher afterwards, and comes out a changed man. This brother has since pursued a career of great usefulness in the United States of America and at home. One more picture; a man who afterward declared he had been the biggest drunkard, as well as wife-beater, in Bermondsey, listens to the open air speaking and singing. He comes into the hall to which the workers belong. He is given the text, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in nowise cast out." He carries it home in his memory, and in the solemn stillness of the early hours of the next morning he is led by the Word to his Saviour's feet. For some twenty years he has been an earnest worker in the midst

of the folks whose open air work was made such a blessing to him.

These are but a few of the many results which have come to the writer's knowledge as the years have gone by. Oh! the blessing God gives to preaching in the open air! Who can estimate it? Would that clergy and ministers all sought for opportunities thus to reach the non-church-going masses.

We are praying, as Churches of Jesus Christ, for missionary work in foreign lands, but let us not neglect the missionary work which lies close at hand in the un-Christianised millions of our own population. Whatever be the crowding of other duties upon us, is any one of them more important than obedience to our Master's Word, "Preach the Gospel to every creature," and "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He send forth more labourers into His harvest?"

O come! let us go and find them!

In the paths of death they roam.

At the close of the day 'twill be sweet to say

I have brought some lost one home.

WILLIAM OLNEY.

PAUL FRUIN was in 1653 Elder of the church at Dymock, Gloucestershire, now Upton-on-Severn, in Worcestershire. He became incumbent of Kempley in Gloucestershire, and was ejected. He took a licence in 1672 at Trowbridge. He was presented by the constables of Trowbridge both for commonly teaching in conventicles and for living within five miles of a corporation—which was an offence only because he had held a living. They called him Fluine, alias Fluellin, which at once suggests a Welshman; Welsh Baptists had been peculiarly ready to serve parish churches. In 1689 he appeared at London as pastor of the church at Warwick.

\* \* \* \* \*

THOMAS ADLAM was a soldier under the command of William Eyre, of Monkes, in the parish of Corsham, at the Devizes when forces were first raised for parliament. In 1651 he brought to Quarter Sessions of Wilts. a printed form of certificate from the treasurers for maimed soldiers, that he had latterly been a trooper under Captain Robert Glinn in the regiment of Colonel Matthew Thomlinson: he was allowed a pension of 53s. 4d. In 1672 William Adlames of Deverill Longbridge took from Charles II a licence as a Baptist teacher.