

Preachers and Preaching

J. D. Tant (1861-1941)

This is June 28th and I am seventy-two years old today. I have been thinking of the more than 8,000 people I have baptized during the past fifty years. Away over here in Arkansas, where I am preaching the gospel to many Baptists (by way of debate), who never heard it before, I am reminded of the old days in Arkansas, and of how their customs stack up with the present day practices.

A few days ago an old brother, after hearing me preach three times in Houston, Texas, came to me and said, "Brother Tant, I am glad to have heard you preach. You are not the type of man that I had expected to meet. It has been told on you by certain of your preaching brethren that you are vulgar in the pulpit. They said that you are rough and abusive; unrefined and uneducated; that you are so plain in your preaching that refined people could not listen to you. Since hearing you, I have decided that such reports are preachers' lies, prompted by jealousy, and not by the love of God."

As a further illustration, I recently received a letter from a good sister, saying, "We are dead here and doing no good. Many of us would like to have you hold a meeting, but our elders say that you are too tough on the brethren, too hard on the other churches, and that we must have a man the denominations like to hear."

A letter from a Baptist preacher who wants to meet me in debate in a town where one of our leading Bible colleges is located says he has talked to several of our younger preachers there, and they say, "Brother Tant is too old to debate, and he doesn't have a college education." Well, I'll admit that I have not the good English that N. B. Hardeman has. Neither can I measure up to G. C. Brewer's law of culture and refinement, because I frequently go barefooted when I sleep. I preach in my shirtsleeves and put pencils in my outside coat pocket. Neither have I the refined disposition of brother Sam Pitman. I am just an old-fashioned, plain gospel preacher from the frontier.

I have this month rounded out fifty-two years of plain gospel preaching. I have baptized approximately 8,000 men and women. More than one hundred of the boys I have baptized in by-gone years are now out preaching the gospel. I wonder if God will reject all these souls I have been instrumental in leading to him merely because I am not refined.

One of the ablest preachers we have in Arkansas lost his located job, not because he was not preaching the gospel, but because one of the influential sisters in the church could not bear to listen to his old-fashioned language. She did not like Arkansas grammar, and thus could not invite her denominational friends to hear him. I doubt if the poor thing could tell whether Jesus Christ was crucified at Calvary or shot at Bunker Hill.

I have tried to do the best I could to serve God in the backwoods and out-of-the-way places, where a college degree is not so important. When brethren condemn me on account of my rough manners and plain speech, I shall not be too upset about it, but shall speak kindly of them and pray for them. And after life's battles have been fought and we all come before God to be judged, I may not be able to produce much refinement and education, but I shall say, "Lord, I have done the best I could among the common people."