

# Richard C. H. Lenski

## New Gospel Sermons



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# New Gospel Sermons: With Outlines for Pastors

Texts for the Entire Church Year From the Four Gospels and The Acts

By Richard C. H. Lenski

Columbus, Ohio  
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 The Right Answer to the Question whether Few will be Saved.  
 “Lord, Lord, Open unto Us!”
62. We shall be Like the Angels of God. The Twenty-seventh Sunday Af-  
 ter Trinity. Matt. 22:23-33.  
 I. A Glorious Revelation

II. The Golden Hope

III. Cause For Gratitude and Joy

Outlines

The Seven Men who Kept the Sadducees out of Heaven.

Christ and the Sadducees on the Doctrine of the Resurrection.

Do You Hope in the God of the Living?

We shall be as the Angels in Heaven.

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How Can You Find Peace With God?

Benediction

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# Preface by Lutheran Librarian

In republishing this book, we seek to introduce this author to a new generation of those seeking authentic spirituality.

RICHARD C. H. LENSKI (1864-1936) best known for his insightful and still invaluable series of New Testament Commentaries. Professor of theology at Capital University and President of Western District of Joint Synod of Ohio. Served as editor *Die Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*.

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## A Note about Typos [Typographical Errors]

Please have patience with us when you come across typos. Over time we are revising the books to make them better and better. If you would like to send the errors you come across to us, we'll make sure they are corrected.

# From the Original Introduction

THE AUTHOR'S WORK on the *Eisenach Gospel and Epistle Selections* for the church year has found such a ready reception that the management of the Lutheran Book Concern felt encouraged to issue a similar series of Gospel texts for the church year, asking the author to undertake the work. So this new volume is sent out.

A goodly number of pericope systems have come into use in modern times in different sections of the church, in addition to the old line of pericope texts. But the moment we take up one of these newer lines, expecting to follow it by another, we discover that practically each line was selected without reference to the other lines, merely avoiding the texts already embodied in the old series. Many, especially the choicest texts, thus appear in a number of the newer lines of pericopes. The fact is that this could hardly be avoided. Take a festival like Christmas for instance. In all the four Gospels plus the Acts there are really only four Christmas texts, and the twenty-two newer pericope lines find themselves restricted to a choice between three, since the finest Christmas text of all, Luke 2:1-14, has been preempted by the old pericope system. Once we use one of the choicer newer series of texts we will not be able to take up another series without repeating some, perhaps many, of the texts already used in the first set. With this situation before him in the publication of the very choice Eisenach line of Gospel texts, the author determined not to take as a second series of newer Gospel texts one of the established lines however excellent it might be in itself, but to avoid the duplication that would thus result at many points, by selecting from all the remaining lines of texts, outside of the Eisenach series, the best texts offered for each Sunday and festival of the church year. To give, more room for selection those systems which utilize also the Acts were included, and a goodly number of new texts could be chosen from this precious New Testament book. Even so, however, it was found that here and there a text not utilized in any of the modern lines would be desirable in place of the texts offered by these lines. The result is before the reader: no Eisenach text

is here repeated, all the texts are new; yet not “free texts” as this term is usually understood but texts chosen from the remaining newer lines, most carefully following the thought of the church year in every choice, adding only as a further guide to the choice some of the patent needs of the American church of today. There is thus for instance a text on Inspiration, on the millennium, on the true unity of the church and others chosen for similar reasons. So much for the texts in these *NEW GOSPEL SELECTIONS*...

The management of our Book Concern demanded a full sermon on each text, as far more helpful than a collection of homiletical thoughts gathered from various sources. This addition, however, really puts two books together in one. The sermons herewith offered are intended, not as models, but as suggestive helps to those who may need such help. The author has, however, attempted to illustrate as best he could some of the most useful homiletical principles which his years of practical preaching have taught him to prize. May these simple Gospel testimonies serve the fraternal purpose for which they are put forth. A brief homiletical analysis under the title “Outlines” accompanies each text. Almost all of the outlines offered had to be composed by the author himself, since these newer pericopes are new ground with but very few outlines of any kind in print, and most of these of little or no homiletical value. The outlines offered are to stimulate the mental machinery of the preacher, to set it going by suggestion in thought and phrase, thus to enable him more quickly, and if possible more efficiently, to build the outline that meets his ideal and satisfies his need. While in the exegetical elaboration the Revised Version is used, this is only because it follows the Greek more accurately; for the sermons in this volume, as well as for the phraseology of the outlines, the good old Authorized Version is retained, the Bible which our people read and study.

May God bless these pages and the work of all who use them in ministering grace and truth unto immortal souls.

THE AUTHOR.

*Columbus, Ohio, July 5, 1919.*

# The Christmas Cycle

## 1. Peter's Sermon on God's Great Servant and the Blessing He Brings. The First Sunday In Advent. Acts 3:22-26.

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.

And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities. (Act 3:22-26)

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“Hail to the Lord's Anointed,  
Great David's greater Son!  
Hail, in the time appointed,  
His reign on earth begun!  
He comes to break oppression,  
To set the captive free,  
To take away transgression,  
To rule in equity.”

THIS IS THE NOTE that rises in our hearts as we hear how Peter in the very courts of the old Jewish temple tells a wondering multitude how the power of Jesus Christ has miraculously healed a poor lame beggar, making him who had never walked in his life, leap and run for joy. The Savior had come, the Savior promised long. That multitude was to realize it, accept him by faith, and share in all his Savior blessings. To kindle this faith Peter points them to Moses, Samuel, and all the old prophets, how they all spoke of Jesus, this wondrous Servant of God now raised up for them, the promised seed of Abraham their forefather, the fountain of all spiritual blessings for them and all men, for time and for eternity.

Peter is preaching to us today. This mighty Servant has wrought for us; all these prophets of God, including Peter, and even Christ himself, have spoken, yea still speak to us. What shall be our answer to this abounding grace of God? Only one answer will do:

“Hail to the Lord’s Anointed,  
Great David’s greater Son!”

Give ear then more fully to

## **Peter’s Sermon on God’s Great Servant and the Blessing He Brings**

### **1. The Blessing of His Work**

When Peter follows the great prophet Isaiah and calls Jesus God’s “Servant” sent to bless us, he certainly means, first of all, the blessing of His work, when he redeemed the whole world of sinners by atoning for their sins.

What was wrong in the days of old, even with the favored people of Israel? It was sin with its deadly curse. Do you hear how Peter strikes every man’s conscience in the multitude before him with his words: “every one of you ... his iniquities”? But surely, we have progressed in these 1900 years since that day, we have climbed higher, grown better. My friends, not one inch have we progressed away from sin. To this day God’s verdict is true the world over: There is not a just or sinless man upon earth, no, not one.



All the forms of sin, that born in us, as well as wicked thoughts, words, and deeds, go on in one appalling stream.

Only one thing occasionally seems to have changed, men seem more than ever inclined to deny their sins now in willful blindness, varnishing and whitewashing them with all manner of lies, trying to persuade themselves that they need fear no God and no judgment to come.

Here is where the wonderful mercy of God comes in: he planned to save us from our sins. This was the message of the mighty Moses whom God used as a mediator between himself and Israel, and of all the prophets down to the days of Christ. God knew, whether men did or not, that we were all irrevocably lost unless we were freed from the guilt and curse of our sin. Just as long as a single sin remains upon a soul, that soul is damned. No human power, skill, invention, money, works, or suffering is able to save it. Here God alone could help. Do you ask how? Take as the answer:

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16.

“The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Is. 53:6.

In other words, he made his own Son our Servant and Substitute to take our curse upon himself, to die for it, and thus to atone for it. That is why he became the seed of Abraham through his wonderful birth from the Virgin Mary. Yet, being true God, a person of infinite worth, his death could and did expiate the guilt of all. “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.”

This is the inwardness of Peter’s great Advent sermon to us: the promise of God through the ages was made good at last — God’s own Son came as his Servant to bless all the kindreds of the earth by canceling their sins with his own blood, opening the way of escape for us all. This is the heart of the Gospel; take it into your heart and hold it fast forever.

## **2. The Blessing of His Word**

As Peter follows Isaiah in calling Jesus God’s “Servant” to bless us with deliverance from sin, so also he follows Moses in calling him our “Prophet”

whose word we must hear. To the wonderful blessing of this great servant's work there is added, then, in Peter's sermon the service and blessing of his Word.

God himself calls Jesus a Prophet, one of those specially chosen and sent to proclaim the purpose and will of God. But he stands at the head of all God's prophets. Only one of them was also a mediator, namely Moses, and he of a covenant that passed away. Jesus is the Mediator of that new covenant which shall never be set aside for another. The man Moses could act in behalf of Israel on Mt. Sinai, only God's own Son in human flesh could act for all the kindreds of the earth on Mt. Calvary when our sins were to be wiped out with blood. So even Moses foretold the coming of this Prophet mightier than himself.

As great as this Prophet, so great is the service and blessing of his Word. Jesus preached the Gospel, the glad news concerning the salvation he himself brought, that men should not perish, but have everlasting life. St Mark (1:15) sums it up for us, Jesus preached: "The kingdom of God is at hand, repent ye and believe the Gospel." Never look at Jesus as laying down so many laws and commands for us, to which we with our efforts must come up, and if we do not we shall be lost. He comes with a heart burning with love, hands stretched out in invitation, calling us, and by his call drawing us, to come unto him and be freed from our sin and guilt for which he has atoned, and thus find rest for our souls, peace, and joy eternal. And when this service of his Word succeeds, his great joy is to lay his hand upon your head and say: My son, my daughter, thy sins are forgiven thee. See him in the house of Zacchaeus, the sinner, the publican, whom he changed by his Word to be a true son of Abraham, a child of God's kingdom. See him telling Nicodemus of the new birth through baptism and faith, carrying that old work-righteous Pharisee away from his error and folly into the salvation and peace of the cross on Calvary. That is the service of Jesus' Word.

This service still goes on. Only now our heavenly Prophet draws us to himself by speaking through the preachers he sends. Peter was one of them, when he spoke so effectively of Jesus to the multitude in Solomon's Porch. So were the Twelve, sent out into all the world. So are all those now who truly bring us Jesus' Word. Of all these he himself says: "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me." Luke 10:16.

It is because this blessing, of the Word is so essential for our salvation that we dare not despise it. It is nothing but the love of God trying to save us, when through Moses and Peter he declares: "Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you"; and when he warns us that, refusing to hear, we shall be utterly destroyed from among his people. To reject Christ's Word is to reject the salvation it brings, to spurn the atonement Christ made, to turn away from the door of heaven which he opened. Is there another way, outside of Christ's blood and Word, whereby we may come to God and be saved? There is none, and all who seek another, or think they have found another, are deluded and lost.

Christ opens heaven for us by his work, he comes to lead us in by his Word — blessings unspeakably great. But his final object is not reached for you and me until there is in our very hearts the crowning blessing of faith, faith in Christ, his work and Word. Only by faith is salvation ours.

When Peter spoke to the multitude he aimed at every hearer's heart, to fill it with the blessing of faith. It was what Jesus had done when he preached and taught as a Prophet among his people. It had been Moses' and Samuel's work likewise when they pointed to the Savior to come. Peter holds up Jesus before his hearers, and the blessing of deliverance from sin and iniquity found in Jesus. Ah, how every soul there present needed that very blessing! Would they see it, would they let this blessing open their hearts and enter? Would they trust this mighty Helper and his all-sufficient help? The moment anyone among them did, he had the blessing of faith.

It is so with us today as Peter's words come to us also. Here is your soul robbed of all righteousness by sin, poor, outcast. Behold Christ your Savior, offering you the sterling gold of his own righteousness. It is genuine, it will make your soul rich for all eternity. Trust it, take it — believe! — Look at your soul full of the deadly cancer of sin. O do not hide it, the sin is there, its roots go deep. Behold Christ your physician — his blood and pardon take away the guilt and punishment of sin, and break sin's deadly power. Yes, his help is real, it frees, cures, purifies indeed. Let him open your poor heart, trust him — believe! — You know your conscience is not at rest. When you think of God, his holy law, death bringing you into his presence, the great judgment to come — can you hope to stand before him, when already a single sin makes you abominable in his sight? Here is Jesus, and in him the pardon of all your sins; and with him in your heart all this pardon is yours. Yes, it is genuine, for God prepared it himself in Jesus, and this Jesus

is his very Son. Do not hesitate, take, hold this pardon — believe! — And all you who have long learned to believe, realize ever anew and more fully that in and through Christ alone all your iniquities are gone, vanished like the vapors of night in the noonday sun. Let your trust grow stronger as you learn ever better day by day that this glorious Servant of God is your Savior indeed.

Such a blessing is faith. Moses, Samuel, the prophets and fathers of old, Peter and all the apostles, and they who believed with them — see how happy they were, sure of God's eternal favor through his Son and Servant Jesus Christ. With your sins all gone, all is well with you regarding God. When you cry to him in prayer you know he will hear you for his Son's sake. When temptations and trials beset you, you have the assurance that the Son who loved you unto death is at your side to help you. All through life, and especially in its last hour, the certainty that heaven is open above you gives you priceless joy. This is what Peter's words contain when he says that God raised up his Son Jesus and sent him to bless you in turning away every one from his iniquities.

This Advent day we enter a new year of grace, filled with the blessing of Christ's work and Word. May all its grace be yours, every one of you, in fullest happiness through the blessing of faith.

## Outlines

The essential features of this Advent text are: Christ — the Word — faith; Christ as God's great Servant who obtained for us the supreme blessing — the Word by which God, through Moses, the prophets, and Christ himself, brings to us this supreme blessing — faith which gratefully receives and holds fast this supreme blessing. We may draw the three together into one: Our supreme Advent Blessing in Christ Jesus: we have it in Christ — through the Word — by faith. We may also reverse the order: What makes us so joyful this Advent Day? The faith which shines in our hearts — the Word on which this faith rests — the Christ who is ours by faith in this Word. — Another angle of approach is the idea of the covenant, so markedly referred to in the text. The old covenant, through many a golden promise fulfilled at last, led up to Christ. This old covenant merged into a new one, established in the work of God's great Servant Jesus Christ. And

we now are the children of this new covenant through faith in Christ Jesus. — In a similar way we may arrange the inner contents of our text around the idea of the “blessing” promised to Abraham and fulfilled in Christ, in particular the deliverance from our iniquities through faith in Christ Jesus. — The guiding thought for any arrangement of the material we may make for a sermon on this Sunday will be the one presented at the beginning, of our exegetical study.

## **Our Advent Faith**

1. It rests on the Word.
2. It clings to Christ.
3. It brings deliverance and joy.

## **The Great Days Ushered in by Christ’s Advent**

1. They shine with redemption.
2. They resound with the Gospel.
3. Let them also glow with faith.

## **Christ’s Great Blessing for all the Kindreds of the Earth**

1. The revelation of all God’s grace.
2. The fulfillment of all God’s promises.
3. The deliverance from all our iniquities.

## **How We, too, are Children of the Prophets and the Covenant**

1. We have their promises — only now completely fulfilled,
2. We have their Savior — only now with all his saving work done.
3. We have their faith — only now most wondrously enriched.

## 2. Does Christ Prophecy No Millennium? The Second Sunday In Advent. Matt. 24:1-14.

And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. (Mat 24:1-14)

OUR TEXT IS A GRAVE DISAPPOINTMENT to many who consider themselves very excellent Christians and students of the Bible. Here Christ himself gives us a complete prophetic account of the last times, stating all the things important for us to know for our guidance — and he says not one word about a *millennium*. “What?” these people exclaim, “does Christ promise us no millennium? Will he not return to earth in glory to reign here with us Christians in triumph over all nations for a thousand years?” Scan Christ’s words as closely as we will, those in our text and those that follow, not only as Matthew, but also as Mark and Luke record them, not a trace of any promised millennium is found.

Here is a delusion, my friends, which is spreading among the churches about us to an alarming degree: people are looking, hoping, praying for “the millennium.” They build up all sorts of fanciful notions about it, often letting their imagination run riot, and always twisting passages of Scripture to corroborate their self-made opinions. The church is to celebrate a grand final outward triumph here on earth, her days of cross-bearing, affliction, and tribulation are to end, Christ and his followers will dominate the world. The Jews as a nation will be converted, brought back to Jerusalem, and this city be made Christ’s great headquarters and capital. Pulpits, periodicals, books spread these utterly false doctrines. Already in the days of the Reformation fanatical sects proclaimed them, some even trying to start the millennium then. Our Augsburg Confession condemned the delusion at that time as nothing but a revival of old “Jewish opinions, that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall occupy the kingdom of the world, the wicked being everywhere suppressed.” We hold to that confession today because all such Jewish dreams are contrary to the Scriptures and dangerous for our souls.

When, then, men ask:

### **Does Christ Prophecy No Millennium?**

we give the answer of our text:

No! Only the old world ripening unto judgment. Only the Gospel going on to complete its work. Only the church sifted and tried by tribulation. Only the faithful saved at last.

## **I. Only The Old World Ripening Unto Judgment.**

Look at Christ’s prophecy concerning the entire course of the “last days,” the time between his redemptive work and the end of the world. What significant things shall occur in the world? Wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation. We need not ask the cause of these conflicts. It is sin and the passions it engenders among men, lust of power, greed of gain, cries for revenge, and similar products of our depraved nature. Then God himself intervenes and makes the results of men’s sins fall back upon their own



heads to crush them. Jesus adds: famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. They increase the terrors of wars and revolutions. Sometimes they occur by themselves, but always they are the stern call of God, if possible to make men repent.

Now for almost 1900 years since Jesus sat on Mt. Olivet and revealed the things to come to his disciples, these judgments of God have followed one another, just as he said they would. The convulsions of the world war through which so many of the nations have recently passed ought to impress us in the highest degree. Pestilence, famine, and even earthquakes were not absent.

Men said there could not be such a war, or if started it could not last. It came as it did, more than ever fulfilling Christ's prediction. Men now say and hope that this shall be the last of such catastrophes. But here is the word of Christ, these are but "the beginning of sorrows." literally he calls them the first birth-pains which shall be followed by still greater anguish. He thus points to the final calamities which usher in the last day. And the sum of his prediction is that from year to year *the world is ripening toward the final judgment.*

In the entire prophecy there is nothing about a golden age, when all these evils shall cease on earth, when Christ with his church shall rule in righteousness and make all men beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. All that Christ offers his followers is the comforting admonition: "See that ye be not troubled." Why not? Because he himself is ruling with a mighty hand, and all his own are in his keeping and care. We may suffer indeed, for much sin clings to us also, but we have his grace to pardon when we repent, and his power to bring us through every trial. That is all, and that is enough. Our final hope is not a millennium on earth, but the last great day itself, when all the enemies of Christ shall meet their judgment doom, and all his followers shall enter that glorious place, typified by the figure of the plowshare and the pruning hook, now realized only in part in the spiritual peace and prosperity of the Christian church, then fully ours forever in heaven.<sup>1</sup>

## **II. Only The Gospel Going On To Complete Its Work.**

Look at Christ's prophecy a second time. What is his plan for the world-age, however long or short it may be. The answer is clear: the preaching of the Gospel down to the very end.

Think what this Gospel is: "the glad news of the Kingdom," namely of the one which begins here in grace and continues above in glory. Nor is this Gospel merely news, Jesus calls it "a witness," a divinely true testimony that there is really forgiveness of sin, help and salvation for us all in Christ Jesus. Testimony that is true calls for trust, for acceptance by faith. It does so doubly when it is testimony on which our own salvation depends. To ignore, to reject it, to cling to lies instead is folly, crime, yea self-destruction. This precious Gospel witness Christ commanded his followers to carry to all nations, into the whole world. Why? Because it alone is the power of God unto salvation, by it alone can men reach God and heaven.

When thus we realize what the Gospel is, the one means whereby Christ saves men, then we will understand not only why he was concerned to send it out to the whole world, but also why in our text he assures us so positively that his sending will not fail: this precious Gospel shall actually reach all nations with its saving witness. Nothing shall stop it, neither wars nor world disturbances, nor the wicked hatred of men. Christ himself will see to it that this work of Gospel preaching shall finally cover the earth. All this means that the vital work to be done on earth is this Gospel work of Christ. Let the world scorn, slight, and fight it, this work alone counts for eternity, all other work fades and vanishes. And that in particular is the great thing for us believers to hold fast. Both for ourselves and for others the Gospel is the essential thing; when we have this fully and completely, we have everything; when we give and send this fully and completely to others they have everything. This makes plain why Christ has nothing else in his plan for the sinful world, save this Gospel and its promulgation, and why when this work is fully carried out, the end shall come. With the Gospel the only means of salvation, and all men reached by it who can be saved, there is nothing left but what Christ says: "Then shall the end come."

For 1900 years the Gospel has been preached; nation after nation has heard its witness. In our day we might indeed ask, as some have done: Is the end perhaps very close at hand? and with joyful expectation look for its early coming. But a millennium? Christ neither promises such an age, nor does he leave room for it. He has made the work of the Gospel the all-important thing for all sinners through all the ages. Is that blessed work to stop

while he comes to reign for a thousand years in visible glory on earth? If so, then why thus delay the end, why not reign at once with his saints in eternal glory? Only the most positive assurance from his own lips could make us expect such a delay. Or is the work, of the Gospel to go on during the millennium? How could there be this “witness” of the Gospel, when men could see and speak with Christ himself in his glory on earth? The old Gospel testimony would be useless, it would be set aside. So also faith, “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1.) Men would have sight here on earth instead of faith; salvation would be by sight, and no longer as now by faith. And what of Christ’s positive assurance that no man, or angel, and not even he himself knows the time of the end? The moment the millennium arrived all would know that the end would come in exactly 1,000 years. No; these millennial dreams all lead astray. Christ treats us all alike, he gives us all, down to the last day, the saving witness of his Gospel. Blessed are they that hear and keep it!

### **III. Only The Church Sifted And Tried By Tribulation.**

Now look at what Christ prophesies concerning the church, those who profess his name and join his followers. The picture is dark down to the very end.

Christ warns us all against false Messiahs. When the Jews looked for the Messiah, and rejected the true Messiah when he came, they fell a prey to deceivers who claimed to be the heaven-sent Christ come to establish the Kingdom — always, of course, trying to make it a grand earthly kingdom. This is exactly the danger now when men are looking for a millennium with a Christ here on earth bringing earthly gifts and glories. Openly or covertly some have already claimed to be the Messiah, or forerunners of his to announce his earthly reign. And always many have been deceived.

Again Christ warns us against false prophets, men who pervert the Gospel in whole or in part, teaching that God has said what he has not said, and that he has not said what he has said. Look at these churches around us, which are not churches, because they tread the Gospel under foot; and at these, churches which are not true churches, but sects, because they separate themselves from the true church by clinging to doctrines contrary to the

Gospel. What crowds of false prophets, harassing the church, even as Christ said.

Now the bitter word persecution. The history of the church already has many a bloody page. Think of Stephen, James, Peter, Paul, the ten great persecutions in the early ages, and the bloody deeds of Rome. The vicious hate which has made so many martyrs already, the Scriptures tell us, will flame forth with still greater fierceness as the end draws nigh. And always did persecution cause many to deny Christ and turn traitor to the church; like Judas some of these even betrayed their own brethren to death. It shall be the same and worse in the dark days to come. Always there is silent opposition to the true church, and every true follower of Christ must feel the cross. Never will the church and the world be friends; Christ and Belial cannot agree.

Add now to all this that the church herself in many of her members shall prove untrue. Christ positively declares that the love of the majority shall grow cold, because the faith from which alone it springs has declined or died. The word of men counts more for them than the Word of God. Do you know any such? Human works please them more than those that delight God? Have you seen Christians like this? The love of the world and its pleasures is sweeter to them than self-denial and the cross of Christ. Ah, I know that you have met many of this kind.

That is the picture which Christ foresaw. Always it is *the church sifted and tried by tribulation*, winnowed of chaff, purged by fire.

Can it be otherwise, my friends? Dare we cancel from our Bibles, at least for the last 1,000 years the word, that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God? Take away tribulation and the church is bound to fill up with self-seekers of all kinds. When Christ does send us pleasant days see how many learn to love the pleasantness more than the cross, and fall away like leaves in a tempest when the trial comes again. What would a 1,000 years of uninterrupted and magnificent earthly grandeur be for the church? Lo, the crowds that would flock into her doors! But crowds drawn by these golden earthly things alone. But no; Christ's plan is not the cross for some during centuries of world-opposition and trial, and then a 1,000 years of earthly ease and joy for others. For all his followers alike, from the beginning to the end, he has designated the cross; not till the world lies utterly behind us shall we receive the crown.

## **IV. Only The Faithful Saved At Last.**

Therefore, this is Christ's final admonition and promise: "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Never let them fade from your vision.

While God's judgments rock this world with mighty warnings, while borne by faithful hearts the Gospel moves forward amid sinners on its saving mission, while the church is ever tried and tested anew, let this be your great concern and mine: to hold out in faith and faithfulness to the last.

Is the load heavy and the battle hard at times? Then let this word spoken to strengthen the weary cheer you ever anew: "the same shall be saved." Eternal deliverance — in a little while it shall be yours. What if men love this earth so well that they prefer it completely to the church: what if others love it so well that they hope to combine its glories with the church and enjoy them thus for a 1,000 years, your glory — let it be the cross; your hope — let it be Christ's promise: the crown of everlasting life in the world to come.

### **Outlines**

In analyzing our text for the sermon we may note two of its dominant features: what Christ says of the world — and what he says of the church. As regards the world: its time of grace, the Gospel and example of the church, God's preliminary judgments and mighty warnings. As regards the church: the same Gospel, a fountain of faith, love, and faithfulness; the false Messiahs and prophets who oppose the Gospel; the hatred of the world and its persecution; the promise for final faithfulness. Both facing the great end. — The different features of the text fall easily into place when looked at from the point of Christ's final coming, whether this is taken alone, or combined with the thought of our preparation for the end. — Verse 13 is a fine avenue of approach, suggesting especially the personal element so necessary also in this sermon. There lies an admonition in it, as in all Gospel commands and admonitions the necessary grace is offered; then also a mighty promise, highly effective for the endurance of faith.

**Jesus is Coming!**

1. Beware.
2. Make ready.
3. Be glad.

## **The Great Interval Between Christ's First and Second Coming.**

1. The triumphant progress of the Gospel.
2. The rising hostility of the world.
3. The sad defections in the church.
4. The glorious salvation of every one who endures.

## **Endure to the End!**

1. Undeceived.
2. Unafraid.
3. Unwearied.

## **He that Endureth shall be Saved.**

1. We think of a great danger.
2. We are comforted by great grace.
3. We look forward to a great deliverance.

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1. Cf. Philippi, *Glaubenslehre*, V. 3, p. 1G0, etc., on Is. 2:4 and similar O. T. passages. ←

# **3. The True Greatness Of Our Advent King, As John The Baptist Saw It. The Third Sunday In Advent. Luke 3:15-18.**

And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people. (Luke 3:15-18)

IT IS REMARKABLE, when one stops to think of it, what unworthy conceptions men have of Jesus Christ. See these people of whom St Luke writes in our text. They were Jews, descendants of Abraham, instructed in all the Old Testament promises concerning the coming Savior, and at this very time had a great prophet preaching to them, St. John the Baptist, telling them how to prepare aright for the coming Savior, and yet they were actually entertaining the idea in their minds that St. John himself, a mere prophet of the Savior, might perhaps be the Savior himself. They thus betrayed that they were far, far behind the true conception of the real greatness of the coming Savior, and hence also of the work he would do. — That is what is the trouble with so many today. Here is the entire Bible the combined testimony of the prophets and apostles, yea, the Savior's own word and work. But the world passes it all by in unbelief. This Jesus — they think they can safely ignore him. If he ever lived on earth as the Bible says, he was only a man, nothing more — why trouble much about him? At best, some think, we may learn a little from him for our life and conduct on earth, and that is about all. But the worst is that so many of us Christians, who confess com-

plete faith in the Bible, after all fall below the reality in our conceptions of the Savior. We betray it in all kinds of ways. Quite openly we fail to honor him and his Word as we ought. We constantly have difficulty in trusting him and his salvation as they evidently deserve to be trusted. And as for genuine preparation for the great hour when we and all the world shall face him at last on his judgment throne — it surely is missing in many places where we have the right to expect it.

What do we need? This “fiery angel, St. John, the true preacher of repentance,” as our Lutheran Confessions call him, and his mighty message. We need him, to do all his great Advent work upon us, in particular to fill us with a full measure of faith in Jesus Christ, our great Advent King. Come then in spirit, join the multitude in our text, open your ears and let your hearts perceive:

### **The True Greatness of our Advent King, as John the Baptist saw it.**

Do you hear what he says of the latchet of his shoes? — by that he means to tell us:

- This Advent King is the Eternal Son of God himself.

Do you hear what he says of the baptism with the Spirit and fire? — by that he means to tell us:

- This Advent King works out our Redemption complete.

Do you hear what he says of the fan and the threshing floor? — by that he means to tell us:

- This Advent King will Judge the whole World at last.

## **I. This Advent King Is The Eternal Son Of God Himself**

“One mightier than I cometh,” St. John the Baptist announced to all the people assembled there in the wilderness to see and hear him. Hear, him, he



announces it to you today. How much mightier? John answers that fully. So mighty that no, human being, not even a distinguished prophet like himself directly commissioned of God, was fit to touch even as much as this King's feet by loosening the thongs of his sandals. In oriental lands, where sandals are worn, that would be the task of the humblest servant. If even the Baptist is too unworthy for so low a task, how mighty and high then is this Advent King? What does John mean? Nothing less than what all the Scriptures, this King himself, and God who sent him to be our King, declare. Listen to King David in his inspired Psalm, telling that God declared: "I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion... Thou art my Son." Hear Nathanael exclaim to Jesus: "Thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel." St. Peter makes the great confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Hear the King himself: "I and the Father are one." Hear God's own voice from 'the open heavens: "This is my beloved Son, hear him." That is what the Baptist meant with his significant reference to the sandals of the coming King.

But when at last the great Advent King stepped forth, when men saw him with their own eyes, when for instance he made his royal entry into the Holy City Jerusalem, where was all this might and greatness of his? He appeared himself in the form of a servant, he was made in the likeness of men and fashioned as a man. He actually wore sandals, ordinary sandals, like other men. People could not understand, many cannot even today. Because he assumed our flesh and blood in order to perform his great work of redemption, they refuse to see the rays of divine glory which constantly shone forth from his bearing, his words and deeds. But the Baptist saw them when the heavens opened above Jesus: "I saw," he declares, "and bear record that this is the Son of God." And John the evangelist writes: "We beheld his glory, the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father." Jesus was the God-man — God himself come down to us in human flesh to rescue this sin-cursed world from its doom, and when his blessed work was done ascending visibly again to heaven to sit on the throne of his glory. The sick that he healed, the lepers he cleansed, the dead he raised, the devils he drove out, the tempest he stilled, every gracious word that fell from his lips, all without a single exception support the Advent testimony of the Baptist: Christ, our Advent King, is the Eternal Son of God himself.

O that I could drive it into your hearts and make it stay there in all that it means for you and me! This is the great salvation God has sent us: his own

Son from heaven. None other would do. Salvation deals not only with earth, but with heaven and hell themselves: not only with men here below, but with almighty God above. God's Son is the Savior you are to trust. What an insult to him, what folly and loss to us, if we harbor a single doubt, hesitate even a moment, trust only in part! Repent of your littleness of faith, rely on him to the uttermost. And honor? Why, he honors you with honors as high as heaven: he washes your sins away, makes you children of God, takes you into his kingdom of grace, fits you for his kingdom of glory. Honor him? It ought to be our highest and holiest delight. Dishonor him by word or deed? All the devils in hell should not be able to make us do it.

## **II. This Advent King Works Out Our Redemption Complete**

The mighty Advent King, St. John the Baptist tells the multitude in the wilderness, "shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." That word too counts for us to this very day. What does St. John mean? He is pointing all men to the stupendous greatness of the Savior as revealed in the completion and crowning of his Savior-work, and this to draw them all unto him in the fullest faith and adoration, since all this glorious work was done for them.

John saw the work as it was to be, and thus the greatness of him who wrought it; it is granted to us now to see it as it actually was, crowned just as John said it would be, and thus to behold as he did the blessed greatness of this Advent King. The Holy Spirit was poured out with miraculous manifestations on the great day of Pentecost. It was a pouring out, and that is why John called it a "baptism" Flaming tongues of fire sat upon each of the disciples when the Spirit came upon them; that is why John called the bestowal a baptism "with the Holy Ghost and fire." They all spoke with new tongues, in languages they had never learned, to the people of different countries drawn together there in wonder and astonishment. That is especially significant: the great King of Salvation from his throne above was starting to dispense to all the world the treasures of salvation he had purchased and won for them all. That work, through the Spirit once poured out, was to go on and on to the very end of days. It is going on this very moment. There is nothing greater, grander, more blessed in all the world. And

it all goes back to Christ; the great Advent King has wrought out our redemption complete. The pardon from sin which his Spirit now brings us through the Word — it is from him; he gave his life for it. The deathless life his Spirit now implants in us through the Word — it is from him; he died that thus we might live with a life that shall never die. The hope of eternal blessedness which his Spirit now makes ours through the Word — again, it is from him; he brought it from the tomb, he fulfills it in glory above.

But see, all this saving work of our Advent King lies far in the past, and his mighty Spirit works now only through his Word, moreover all his gifts are invisible, spiritual, heavenly treasures. That is why the world is full of people who refuse to be impressed by the Advent King and care nothing for his greatness. There is a dimness in our own eyes, Christians though we are. O yes, we see and prize and grasp at the things of this life, and many of these appeal to us though stained and stench with sin. But when we hear the blessed Word of Scripture, do we always see the triumphant Savior on his throne above, all his redemptive work so bitter and hard complete, sin, death, and hell overcome, forgiveness, life and salvation won, and his Spirit bringing to us these priceless treasures? That is why God sends anew the Baptist's Advent message to us. Away with our blindness and lack of faith! But for him and his salvation all would be dark. His greatness shall ever be our praise.

### **III. This Advent King Will Judge The Whole World At Last**

Once more Christ's Advent messenger speaks. He sees the Savior in his greatness at the last day. His fan is in his hand; with might he wields it on the threshing-floor; the wheat and the chaff are blown apart; (the wheat gathered and garnered, the chaff burnt with unquenchable fire. It is the Son of God, the eternal Judge of all the world. Who will say that this vision and word of the Baptist does not most intimately concern us all?

Chaff — beyond question that is the right word: immortal souls, lives hastening towards eternity, yet blind, indifferent, careless, full of lies and self-deception, satisfied with vanities, follies, fading treasures and pleasures, nothing that God or heaven could prize — all nothing but chaff. The worst of it is: here was Christ and his eternal salvation offered to these

souls, urged, pressed upon them by the Spirit, but they had no use for him, no real use, even if some pretended for awhile — they wanted to stay just chaff. — Wheat — that too is the right word: precious wheat, with its life-germ hidden within, its solid strength and usefulness. That is what the husbandman works for and wants, what delights his eyes, what he carefully gathers and keeps. We are spiritual wheat when Christ takes the blight of sin from us, gives us the new life of faith in him, and makes us fit for his kingdom above. For this he died, for this he sent his Spirit. His joy and reward are we when we are wheat.

Wheat — chaff — how can any man harbor the thought that these two can remain together for good? Their very nature proclaims, they shall be separated and remain so. Those who are wheat — those who are chaff: those who trust and love Christ — those who turn their backs on him; those who do what he says and hope in his promises — those who live and die without him: can any man dream that these two classes of men can remain together forever? But even if somebody should, here is the great Advent King himself, his mighty fan and threshing-floor, the fire unquenchable and the garner for his grain — he will make the separation, make it for eternity. It shall be as wide as heaven is from hell. Even the Baptist had to break his imagery to give us the full truth of this separation. For common chaff there is no unquenchable fire, but for the men who reject salvation the fire will never cease, the smoke of its torment rises forever. Let those who are chaff object and argue as they will, they shall change neither the word here written by inspiration of God, nor the terrible reality when it comes. And as sure as is this word concerning the fire, so sure is that concerning the garner or heaven. God's angels are singing there now; the souls of just men made perfect are already there.

O that these tremendous idealities might become so real to us now while still in this life that they would control us completely! What chaff around us on every side — no faith, no love, no hope in Christ. Do you see the fire awaiting it, and him whose unimpeachable judgment flames forth in that fire? With your eyes on him is there anything about this chaff that still attracts you — when you know that it would draw you away from him, away from his grace, toward that fire, yea into it? — And here are God's children in Christ Jesus. O the preciousness of the faith that makes them such — the preciousness of the life that proves them such. Already Christ draws them together here as they assemble to worship his name — while the children of

the world are drawn in other directions by the wind of empty pleasures and idle gains. Do you see what it is to belong to Christ now, truly to be his with heart and soul? On his throne of glory above he is waiting, now to receive us unto himself. At the latter day when he shall stand in his glory upon the earth what joy unspeakable shall be ours when he shall call our names as pardoned by his blood, and heaven's doors swing aside to let us in!

Go on, then, and worship this Advent King, the very Son of God, our Savior. Let his Holy Spirit make all the treasures of his redemption your very own. So meet the Advent King as your eternal Judge on the last great day.

### Outlines

It ought to be unnecessary to publish the warning that the sermon on our text dare not make the Baptist the chief subject, drawing "lessons" from his character and actions as portrayed in our text. Christ dominates this text, and anything said about the Baptist must be made completely and as directly as possible subservient to Christ. We, therefore, unhesitatingly reject such outlines as Langsdorff offers from Harless, Beck and others, preachers who propose to give to the Baptist either the entire sermon, or entire parts of it. They violate the Baptist's own fundamental principle, which was to turn all men away from himself unto the One mightier than he. — The great theme of the text lies on the surface; we have before us: John's Sermon on the Mighty Messiah. Here is his mighty person — and his mighty work (grace and judgment). Or we may term it: John's Sermon on the Mighty Work of the Messiah — on his work of grace — on his work of judgment (connecting with both John's testimony on Christ's divinity). — Another vital point on which to divide is the Advent idea as such, using John's word: "One cometh." Thus: The Great Advent Preacher's Picture of the Coming Savior — how he comes to save with divine grace now — how he will yet come to save with divine glory (gather the wheat, etc.). — Or: a coming: lowly — yet divine; full of grace — yet involving judgment; with many to reject him — yet a host to acclaim and receive him. — An adequate method would also be to single out what is connoted in Christ's "coming," namely reception on our part, dividing on that point: our reception of him ought to accord with his person — with the grace he brings — with the judgment he will bring. — Finally, the text may be viewed from the angle furnished by

the “wheat” and the “chaff”: for instance — how there comes to be wheat and chaff, and what becomes of the wheat and the chaff. Only in bringing men forward so prominently in the division Christ and his work must be used throughout to mark them.

### **Christ on the Threshing-Floor.**

1. The wheat and the chaff.
2. The wheat winnowed from the chaff.
3. The wheat garnered and the chaff burned.

### **What Effect has the Coming of the Christ upon Your Heart?**

Has it wrought in you:

1. A humble heart (adoring his divinity)?
2. An open heart (receiving the gifts of his Spirit)?
3. A serious heart (prepared for his final judgment)?

### **“Say with What Salutation Shall I thine Advent Greet?”**

When you make answer think as St. John the Baptist did of:

1. The latchet of his shoes.
2. The baptism with the Spirit and fire.
3. The fan and the threshing-floor.

# 4. Christ is the Golden Key of Mary's Magnificat. The Fourth Sunday In Advent. Luke 1:46-55.

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever. (Luke 1:46-55)

WHAT A WONDERFUL SONG is this that flowed from the lips of Jesus' mother when on her visit to her relative and friend Elisabeth she was greeted by her as the mother of her Lord! God had sent his angel to Mary to announce to her that she was to be the mother of the Savior of the world; and now she sees that God had made known this wonderful news to Elisabeth. Mary answers her friend's significant greeting by words that welled up from her inmost heart, in the form of the beautiful Old Testament Psalms, magnifying God and giving all the glory and praise to him alone.

But see what all her words include. She goes back to Abraham and the wonderful promise God made to him; she reaches out to all generations to come, to eternity itself; she speaks of princes and thrones, the hungry, and those of low degree; and over all time and all men she places God — him who is mighty, merciful, holy, and true, and she calls him: "God my Savior." A glorious song; doubly so when we get the full reach of its meaning. I have already pointed to the key. It lies in the word "Savior" and what Mary

says of the great deed of God by which he proved himself a Savior, the gift of his Son Jesus Christ for our salvation.

### **Christ is the Golden Key of Mary's Magnificat.**

## **I. Christ Unlocks To Us The Heart Of God Himself**

Here are wonderful words about God. How shall we grasp aright what all they say? Take the true key: Christ unlocks to us the heart of God himself.

With Christ before us we see indeed that God is our Savior. He sent his own Son to deliver us, not from this or that temporal ill merely, but from sin, death and hell forever. He did that by having him born as man, choosing the Virgin Mary to become his mother. It is the most wonderful of all God's miracles: uniting his own eternal Son to our poor race through this humble handmaiden Mary. Hear Mary's own praise: "He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden... He that is mighty hath done to me great things." We too praise and confess: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord." We know why he was born thus of a spotless maid — that by his holy life and atoning death he might purchase and win us from all sin, from death, and the power of the devil. This is the inmost center of God's loving heart, the salvation he wrought out for us in his Son. Mary unlocks it for us to see, believe, and with her magnify God as our Savior.

There is more: in Christ we see the inner things of God's might. The heavens, indeed, declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work, Ps. 19:1; we see his mighty judgments in the earth, fire and brimstone upon Sodom, destruction upon Jerusalem. But the fullest greatness of God's might is when the Creator joined himself to us poor creatures in order to save us from our sins. With God nothing shall be impossible. And here he wrought a deed by his might so great that foolish men still deem it impossible, though it was done for them. But God's might is still behind this deed of his: the gates, of hell shall not overthrow what he has done, nor spoil the fruits of it in his blessed church, those who like Mary worship his might and praise his name.



With Christ before us we behold the inner things of God's mercy, coupled with his saving might. Mary praises it: "His mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation." It is a shallow, not even half-way mercy which, moves men to pity and alleviate a little the suffering they see about them. They fail, in most cases, to see that all this woe is only the prelude to the eternal misery which must follow if no real help is found. What is the root of all this pain, woe, terror, death, despair, eternal doom, among men? How many do not know! But if they did, their hand could never reach and remove the root of it. But this very thing God has done — and that is his wonderful mercy, the very heart of it: through his Son Jesus Christ, born of Mary, he has broken the curse that causes all our woe, and opened the healing fountain to cure all our ills and remove every trace of them at last, and they who see it as Mary did, through the Redeemer God was sending for our race, can never cease praising his glorious name.

But the Lord our God is holy; wrong, wickedness, sin of any kind cannot stand before him, he must cast it from his presence into outer darkness at last. Yet Mary, herself a sinner, and knowing that all men because sinful too cannot draw nigh unto God, lauds him: "And holy is his name." Let us not fail to take the key. In Christ God found a way to remove our sins and free us from their curse, to make us clean and new inwardly now, and even outwardly too at last. Though born of a sinful woman, Christ, the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Ghost through a miracle of the power of the Highest, was sinless and holy, and by his blessed work joins us now to himself and makes us too holy and acceptable to God. What a different thing from the follies of men who would keep their sins and imagine God will not care, thus dragging him down to their base level! No, no; look at Christ, see how he lifts us up to God pure and holy, and then you will know his real glory, and with Mary may praise his holy name.

## **II. Christ Unlocks To Us The Marvels Of God's Dealings With Men.**

In the same way this golden key of the magnificat, Christ, unlocks to us the marvels of God's dealings with men.

It is God our Savior, in his might, mercy, and holiness who stands supreme above all the world of men, and with his hand rules their affairs.

Here they are, “the proud in the imagination of their hearts.” They puff themselves up like a great bladder full of air. They boast of their reason, their wealth, their moral excellence, the good and praiseworthy things they have done, their honor and standing among men. They are “rich” in this shadowy wealth. Some of them sit on thrones and blazon their names on history’s pages. All of them think they need no Savior God, no Redeemer Christ, no repentance and faith for their souls. They are like Herod and Caiaphas of old, like the proud, self-righteous Pharisees, like the rich free-thinking Sadducees, like blind heathen Pilate, like the learned supercilious philosophers at Athens. We have them in all their varieties today. Now how does God deal with them? You cannot understand unless you take Mary’s key. Why, he lets them go on and on for many a day. How can he? It is because he is a Savior and has sent us a Redeemer. He gives them all time to repent and to win the true riches of salvation in Christ. But when they will not repent, when all God’s gracious efforts are vain, when they keep on puffing themselves up, then God sends his judgments at last. He pricks the bladder, and behold, it lies flat. Look at his judgments as they strike men already in this life, revealing that they are nothing. But if even this will not help, death lays them all forever low. Christ, Christ is behind it all. They who live and die without him go down forever.

Behold the other side, with Christ as the key. Do you see “them of low degree”? Whatever their station in life, they have learned from God that they are nothing — all their righteousness only filthy rags unfit for the presence of the great King’s wedding feast; all their earthly wealth and attainments a mere shadow to be left behind at last; all the praise and honor of men only a sound that echoes for a day. But God holds out to them also his precious blood-bought gifts in Christ his Son, and thus he awakens in them a hunger which those very gifts are made to satisfy to the uttermost. So they kneel in the dust, confess their sins and take into their souls by faith the true riches in Christ Jesus. Some of them are great as men count greatness, like Moses, Abraham, David of old, but they know their nothingness before God; some of them are poor as men count poverty, like Jesus’ own mother, the beggars and many a sufferer Christ healed, but God makes them his children and writes their names in heaven. All of them have his blessings in Christ Jesus, and at last he crowns them with glory above.

That is how God deals with men. It is the inwardness of what happens day by day all over the world, including ourselves. Behold its real meaning

in Christ. There are questions indeed in these dealings which God has not revealed to us, since they belong entirely to him; but we know what we ought to know that with Mary we may fall at the feet of God's throne and praise his name forevermore.

### **III. Christ Unlocks To Us The Blessings That Lie In All God's Promises**

And now think of the promise of God, only take once more the great: key of the Magnificat. Christ unlocks to us the blessings that lie in all God's promises.

How does God bestow his gifts and make them ours? How are they really, actually transferred to us? In one way only — by his Word and promises. Long, long before Christ was born God promised him to Abraham. Did Abraham have to wait till the birth of Christ took place, or rather till Christ had finished his work, before Christ and his saving blessings could be his? What would then have become of him, and indeed of all the fathers who too had nothing but God's promise? No; that very promise, in the fullest sense of the word, made Christ and all his saving grace theirs.

It is so with us to this very day, living as we do long after Christ's birth and work on earth. Does not this space of time remove us from him, so that we today are without him? Never. He is ours today through God's Word and promise. That literally and actually bestows him upon us. And that is why Mary in her song combines Abraham who lived long before her, with Abraham's seed that would live in all the generations after her, saying: "to Abraham and to his seed forever," and again: "His mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation," including even those before Abraham. The time of Christ's birth affects none of them — they all alike get him and have him by the promise. Even Mary herself, Jesus' own mother, though she held him in her arms after his birth, and clasped his poor bleeding feet afterwards on the cross, did not thereby have him and his saving grace as the treasure of her soul. She too had him only through God's Word and promise. Only when God counts Christ for us as he himself says, only then is Christ ours. Judas had him in closest outward association, but his soul did not have him and his salvation, his soul was held by Satan.

O see, then, why Mary sings so of the promises to the fathers of old. They and all the great Gospel promises give us Christ. In him their blessings are all unlocked and made truly, really ours. But see at the same time that their unlocking and making ours is only for faith. He who thinks God's promises are empty, who casts them aside and seeks something else, by that very act casts away the diamond that is in them and intended too for him, and thus because of his own folly and unbelief remains a beggar. But you and I — let us learn from Mary here always, always to see the diamond Christ and all his blessings, forgiveness, life and salvation, in God's gracious promises, and thus join her and Abraham, the fathers and all God's children, in clinging fast by faith to these promises forever.

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## Outlines

It is the task of the sermon to read the Magnificat with something of the same faith with which it was originally uttered. Any proper measure of such faith will read in the first strains of that glorious hymn: that the great things God did for Mary in regarding her low estate he did for us, for this Savior is ours. In the second strains: that we are one of the generations who call Mary blessed, since we are partakers of her blessing. In the third strains: that we are to belong to the lowly and hungry that through Christ we may escape the judgment of God's holiness and might. And in the fourth: that what the promises fulfilled have brought is the key for us to the promises still to be fulfilled. These grand appropriative thoughts we may group around the center: The miracle of which the Magnificat sings: It is the gift of the Savior — bestowed by mercy and might — to bless forever the lowly and hungry — and crown all God's promises past and present. We may enter the text in another way by grouping its contents around the picture of God as our Savior, utilizing for instance his mercy, his might, his holiness, and his truth; and even go further by connecting with each of these attributes in their work of salvation what pertains to man: mercy toward man in his misery — might toward man in his helpless weakness — holiness toward man in his sin (to lift him out of it) — truth toward man in his shams and delusions (to lift him out of these). Since the attributes of God constitute his glory we may so combine them: Mary magnifies the Glory of God as manifested in his great

Gift: his might — that we may fear him; his mercy — that we may love him; his truth — that we may trust him. — There is a wide sweep in Mary's song; it goes back to Abraham, it runs through all the coming generations, it takes in the highest and lowest, and it brings God and his salvation in Christ in relation to them all. We advise against a sermon on Mary and her virtues, exalting these and making them models for us. Nor need we pay elaborate attention to the Mariolatry of Rome. We follow this blessed woman's example best when we try to rethink her glorious thoughts as here so beautifully and majestically expressed.

### **What does Jesus' Mother See in the Birth of her Son?**

1. That Son as God's supreme gift (v. 48-49).
2. That Son as our supreme possession (54-55 and 50).
3. That son as the-world's supreme judge (5-53).

### **Let the Mother of Jesus Show us how to Look at the Coming Christmas Festival.**

1. There is the gift of the Savior.
2. There is the mercy that gave him.
3. There is the call to accept both in true faith.

### **Mary Magnifies God as our Savior.**

1. She sees all the need of salvation (the lowly and hungry who admit this need; the proud, etc., who deceive themselves by denying it).
2. She rejoices in the gift of the Savior (the wondrous gift of mercy, might, and holiness).
3. She praises the blessings of salvation (their character as seen in herself, Abraham, all lowly and hungry — extent — duration).

### **Mary's Song Reveals God's Thoughts in regard to the Whole World of Men.**

1. How they all radiate from Christ.

2. How they are all set against those who boast of themselves.
3. How they all reach out in help to those who see their need.
4. How they are all unchangeable for ever.

# 5. See What Came to Pass when God Gave his Only Begot- ten Son! Christmas. John 3:16- 21.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. (John 3:16-21)

“BEHOLD, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” That is the Christmas miracle as the shepherds on Bethlehem’s plains first heard it announced by an angel messenger from heaven itself the night the great miracle occurred. At once those shepherds resolved to see for themselves what God had done: “Let us see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us.” It is the thing to do for all men everywhere, for us once more today.

“Now let us all with gladsome cheer  
Follow the shepherds, and draw near  
To see this wondrous gift of God,  
Who hath his only Son bestowed.”

In our text Jesus himself opens the door for us, not only that we may see, but actually take into our very hearts, and make our own forever, what God

has prepared for us all.

## **See What Came to Pass when God Gave his Only Begotten Son!**

Salvation Came: The gift of love — brought by the gift of light — to be our in the gift of life.

### **I. Salvation Came: The Gift Of Love**

Salvation came when God's Son was born in Bethlehem. That holy babe was the Savior of all the world, who in due time by his holy life, suffering and death, his resurrection and return to the glory above wrought our deliverance from sin and opened heaven for us all. How did this great Savior and his wondrous salvation come? Jesus, the Savior himself, declares: it was the gift of love — the infinite love of God: "For God so loved the world that he gave his Only Begotten Son."

"O love divine,  
All love excelling."

With the light of Christmas about you, with this precious Word from Jesus himself before you, realize the vastness and the true wonder of this love. As great as the Giver himself, so great is the love he gave. It was God, the eternal, infinite God, higher than all earth, yea than all heaven and its glories, who gave us his love, all of it, as great and wonderful as himself. As great as the gift he gave, so great is his love. And the gift was God's own Son equal with God in glory and majesty. Him he gave, from the glory of heaven, into this sin-cursed world, to suffer and die for us, thus to atone for us and save us. No human mind can measure this gift and the love that bestowed it on us. As great as is the gulf between the high and holy God and this sinful, lost world, so great is God's love and gift, when he bridged the gulf by his own Son and opened heaven for us in him. As great as is the purpose of the gift, so great is the love that carried this purpose into effect, to blot out our sins, remove our death and damnation, and lift us into eternal life above. As far-reaching as is this gift, so great is the love that gave it. It extended to all the world, to every sinner on the face of the globe, from



Adam on down through the rolling ages to the last day. This is what came to pass when God gave his Only Begotten Son — his infinite love brought salvation to all the world.

See it with Joseph and Mary as the little babe, our Savior, lay in the manger; with the shepherds and wise men who came, saw, and believed; with Nicodemus afterwards and thousands and thousands since who took all this love and its supreme gift into their hearts and enjoyed the salvation they brought.

Alas, that any should turn from love like this, and love instead their sin with its evil and judgment. Woe to the world which carries its sin thus far! This is the condemnation of the world, that when God's wondrous saving love came unto men, they spurned it and went on and on in their sins. Thank God that he did not withdraw his love! The more blind unbelief clings to its sin, the more let us open our hearts to God's precious love and take the salvation it brings.

## **II. Salvation Came: Brought By The Gift Of Light**

Salvation came when God sent his Only Begotten Son. That holy babe in Bethlehem was the Savior, not only to work out our salvation, but also to bring this salvation through his holy Word and Gospel, to place it into our hearts and make it our own by faith. Salvation, the gift of love, is at the same time the gift of light. It is the Savior himself who declares "that light is come into the world." He himself is the light, the full revelation of all the realities of our salvation.

The world is full of darkness. What does that mean? Men are by nature utterly full of ignorance, blindness, self-deception, and desperate delusion concerning the most vital things of their existence. They grasp at and hold fast earthly treasures as if these were real, and not mere shadows of an hour. They mask and make light of their sins, and think that thus the death and doom that are in them will be stopped. They invent a God of their own imagination, one who will not damn sinners and who needs no Savior for their deliverance. They paint up and puff up their poor, empty virtues, and think that these will be enough to insure them a place in heaven. Some even go much farther in the blind imagination of their hearts.

Into this dark, truthless world the Savior came and brought the real salvation of God for sinners. He came, therefore, as the “light,” revealing to us all beyond a question just what our sins really are, who God in heaven really is, and what he must really do with all sin and sinners; and then this greatest work of his as the “light”: what the love of God really is, how it has actually made a way of salvation in God’s own Son, and how you and I and every man may truly have and keep this salvation to all eternity. That is the gift of “light,” the light that saves. Its embodiment is Christ himself; its shining is the message that tells us of Christ, the Gospel, the saving truth of God. This pierces and drives out the deceptions in our hearts, and puts in place of them the true realities just as they are. It thus fills us with faith and trust in these realities, making God’s great Savior and salvation our inward possession, the supreme treasure of our souls, our very own. The gift of Christ’s saving work is brought to us by the gift of his saving light.

O glorious, heavenly light, shining out from Bethlehem, from Calvary, from Christ’s, open tomb — the whole Bible glowing with its radiance! See it together with Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and wise men; see it as Jesus shows it to Nicodemus, and as countless thousands have since seen it with him. It is what God has done, truly done for you through his beloved Son. Let it grip and hold your hearts with its blessed reality; believe, and be saved.

But many will not believe. Why not? — when all is actual reality, and a reality full of blessedness for them? The light comes to them, but they rush back into darkness and delusion, shout out the light, put every possible barrier of false notions against it. Jesus tells us why: they love their sins, their godless, self-chosen ways, so that they will not let them loose; therefore, they flee the light, lest it show what they are truly doing and brand their baseness for what it is. Oh, the desperate folly of unbelief! How can it escape the light on that great day when every last delusion shall be utterly dispelled? Thank God that the saving light has come into the world. The more men love darkness because their deeds are evil, the more let us be won by the light and blessed by the salvation it brings.

### **III. Salvation Came: To Be Our In The Gift Of Life**

Salvation came when God sent his Only Begotten Son. The babe in Bethlehem by delivering us from sin rescued us from the curse and damnation of sin, which is eternal death, and joined us to himself by faith, which is eternal life. Salvation, the gift of love, the gift of light, is thus, when possessed by faith, the gift of life. For Jesus himself says: “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” “He that believeth on him is not condemned.”

The worst thing about sin is its curse of death. Every form of ungodliness or godlessness separates from God, who alone is the fountain of life. There is no true, abiding life apart from God.

O yes, men live their natural lives here for a time. But what then, when this life fades out? The true light tells us: darkness, howling, gnashing of teeth. An existence indeed, and an unending existence, but wholly and forever separated from joy and blessedness, from God and heaven. And that is death, in the full sense of the word. The condemnation of this death is already upon every man who clings to his sins and will not have the pardon of Christ’s salvation. He is judged already. Without life now, and spurning the only Giver of life, he shall lie in the darkness of death forever.

Behold, then, what God gave us in his Son. It is pardon and release from sin, and thus reinstatement as God’s children. Death’s hold on us is gone; there is no condemnation for us, we have escaped. Christ is ours, and we are his; our faith binds us to him. Having him we have life, the true life that comes from God and shall continue with God forever. When our earthly days end, our eternal home above receives us, that there we may live with Christ in joy forever. Hear his glorious words: “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

O the joy of salvation in the Only Begotten Son of God! He came from on high and brought down to us here below the true life which we had lost. Mary found it in him, Joseph, the shepherds and wise men, Nicodemus too as the Gospel story tells us, and hosts of others besides. Thank God for the true life, all its happiness and joy here already as Christ becomes ours more and more, and the eternal happiness that awaits us beyond. Alas, that any should love death more than this true life, allowing sin and Satan to deceive them! But the more let us treasure and guard our life in Christ until its full fruition comes.

Salvation — *infinite love, saving light, eternal life*: that is what God gave us in his Only Begotten Son.

## **“Glory to God in the highest!”**

In heaven God’s angels who sang of this gift on Bethlehem’s plains will help us perfect our humble praise.

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### **Outlines**

A workable combination on this text is offered by Great Texts in the Bible as follows: 1) God and the world — “God so loved the world”; 2) Christ and the world — “gave his Only Begotten Son”; 3) the world and Christ — “whosoever believeth in him”; 4) The world and God — “should have everlasting life” The latter two numbers carry a strong negative behind them: those who will not believe — who are judged already and shall thus perish. — Likewise we have: The Giver and his universal love; The gift — the Only Begotten Son for our salvation; The act of giving — gave and sent to effect universal redemption; The reception of the gift — faith, and its opposite, willful unbelief. — Koegel in his sermon lifts these three into prominence: Love — Life — Light. He combines on our part with each of them: We need the love of this Love — We are to live by this Life — We are to rejoice in this Light. The latter might be changed to read: We are to be enlightened by this Light. — In any adequate Christmas sermon the objective elements of the text must receive a dominant position and treatment; the subjective are here too, but their place is subordinate in a proper Christmas sermon. It ought to be impossible for a Lutheran preacher to deviate from this order or treatment of the two elements. Usually the appropriative side, faith, etc., are reserved for the second festival day. This is done in the case of all the great festivals, and the texts are chosen accordingly. But with us the second festival day is not celebrated; there is no service and sermon. This makes it necessary to combine the appropriative feature with the objective saving act in one sermon. Our text gives ample opportunity for this, it is so strong in this direction that the preacher must beware of giving too much room and weight to this side of the text in his sermon. The central theme will always remain: God gave his Only Begotten Son.

### **The Christmas Gift of God’s Only Begotten Son.**

1. See it. 2. Take it. 3. Enjoy it.

### **God So Loved the World.**

1. That he gave his Only Begotten Son.
2. That we should believe in him.
3. And have everlasting life.

### **God Gave his Love to the World in the Only Begotten Son.**

1. He opened the fountain of life for the world in the Only Begotten Son.
2. He sent the light of salvation for the world in the Only Begotten Son.

### **The Greatest Christmas Gift the World ever Saw.**

1. Its Giver is God — there is no greater.
2. The gift is the Son of God — there is no greater.
3. The treasures in the gift are life and light — there are no greater.
4. The joy in the gift is eternal blessedness — there can be no greater.

### **Christmas, the Day of Light for all the World.**

1. Think of the night into which this day came.
2. Think of the light which this day brought.
3. Think of the escape from night to light which this day ushered in.

## **6. Soul, Soul, Whose Voice Are You Listening To? The Sunday After Christmas. Luke 12:16-21.**

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:16-21)

JUST A SHORT TIME AGO we heard the Christmas bells ringing, the joyous angels singing, for the Christ-child born in Bethlehem. Today the bells are tolling in our text, a funeral is in preparation, a man of great means has just died.

But do these two go together. They do — just as Christmas goes together with the last Sunday in the old year: just as the true Christmas joy is the prelude to the eternal joy hereafter. After all only a line divides life and death, time and eternity. Many are nearing, some are crossing that line now. And it is well, with the Christmas echoes still ringing in your ears, to think here of yourself. That dead man in our text is meant to deepen and direct your thought aright. Do you know, he talked to his own soul a few hours before he died; and God also talked to his soul. Alas, his soul listened to the wrong voice.

### **Soul, Soul, Whose Voice Are You Listening To?**

Your own voice of folly? Or God's voice of Wisdom?

# I. The Voice of Folly

You must know something about this dead man in order to understand the folly of what he said to his own soul.

He was a fine man, a substantial, prosperous farmer. He owned a stretch of fruitful fields, a well-built home, a good sum of money, and at the time he died his fields were heavy with grain, heavier than ever before, and he had just finished his plans to rebuild his barns in order to store the exceptional harvest. I am sure, his neighbors admired, and many envied him. He had a good name, his prosperity and progressiveness were an asset to the community. If only he had lived, how fine his place with its new buildings would have looked, and how happy he would have been managing and making the most of it all. But now he was dead. The end came very suddenly, he himself had not expected it at all. When people heard of it they were startled. Many wondered whether he had made a will, and who would now get his fine property.

That was the man. I need not ask whether you know any like him; I believe we have some ourselves as fine, prosperous, and respected as he. Certainly there are many less favored who would willingly trade their poorer homes and leaner prospects for his growing good fortune. Of course, his death — that is another thing. He had not thought about that himself, and leaving it out as he did, his life certainly looked attractive and looks so to any number of people today.

Now we are ready for the revelation which Jesus makes to us concerning this man. He knew him more intimately than any of his friends, in fact more intimately than the man knew himself.

It was the day before he died. He had just finished his plans about the new storehouses for his coming crops. When all was done, and done as well as any man could have arranged, he spoke to his own soul, and his soul listened to what he said, and was fully satisfied and happy. “Soul” he said, “soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” Consider what Jesus thus reveals to us concerning this man and his soul. He spoke of his earthly “goods,” of these alone. They were great and rich indeed, as we have seen, yet they were earthly goods only. They were, we may add, also God’s gifts, honestly, honorably obtained, but even so they were earthly gifts only. Did his soul think of that?,

No; there is no indication; all we know is that his soul listened to this man's voice speaking thus, was satisfied and smiled. He spoke of his having enough for "many years." Do you understand? he spoke only of earthly years. He thought of them stretching far into the future, beautiful, lovely years; but even if they had been granted him, they would have been nothing but earthly years. Did his soul think of that? No; his soul added nothing, it accepted the dream, and was happy in anticipation. In what he said the man did not mention God. Strange — a man so experienced, so careful and wise in many ways, yet not one word about God. Did his soul notice that and interpose? No; his soul never objected at all; it seemed not to observe the omission. And the man said nothing about death. That too seems strange. He was no longer young, and surely he had seen many die. Did he not know that he too finally must die? Of course, he knew that, but it did not seem really to impress him; his thoughts always followed other channels. And so now in this prosperous moment he did not think to mention it to his soul. And his soul? It too was satisfied to leave death unmentioned, left out of the reckoning. He did not speak either of salvation, the spiritual treasures of God's pardon for sin, of the hope of everlasting life. He left all these out too. No, he was not an infidel, a scoffer, or anything like that. He went to church, but when the service was held he generally thought about his fields, his work, his plans and the like. He was naturally a practical man, and these spiritual things did not seem so real to him that he should mention them in any special way to his soul. And his soul never missed what he withheld; it had been well trained not to expect these things, and so it was quite undisturbed and content without. That is the way with poor souls when advantage is taken of them. Even that last afternoon before he died, when he had this special conversation with his soul, even then his soul, with only earthly things mentioned and all others left out, was satisfied. And so the man died!

That is Jesus' revelation about this man. Now do not say that this is an exceptional case. You know there are souls enough to whom never anything else is said than what Jesus tells of this man's soul. And the dread comes into my heart that in our very midst today there may be some soul like that. This is the reason why this man's talk to his own soul is told us today as another year of our earthly lives draws to a close. What about your soul? What have you told your soul? What is the voice it gets to hear from you? A voice of folly, like that of the man here shown by Jesus?



O realize its utter folly! The man died that very night. His soul went out into eternity with nothing better than this man had obtained for it. Oh, I know, that does not happen just in that way to every man the night after he talks with such a voice of folly to his own soul. But what difference does it make how many years a man may yet go on in life if all along he has no other voice for his soul? It only strings the folly out more. And the folly is this: to tie the soul fast to earthly things, when God has made it for heavenly things, brings these heavenly things to us, and opens heaven itself for our souls. In a day, in a night every earthly thing you make your soul delight in, even if they are far greater, finer, richer than this man's "goods," is bound to slip away from you. Then whose will these things be on which you have spent all your time, strength, life, and your very soul? Naked your soul will go out into the night — your folly recognized too late.

## **II. God's Voice of Wisdom**

Look again at this man in our text, for there is more to be said of him and his fine earthly life and prosperity. Who gave him his life? Who increased his years? Who filled his days with sunshine and prosperity? Of whom did his fine home, his thriving fields, his goodly barns, his health so far, his ability to labor and plan — of whom did it speak? And his own soul, which lifted him far above the brute creation around 'him, endowed with wonderful powers and capabilities, able when cleansed and purified, to enter heaven itself and live with God — who gave him that soul? There is only one answer — it was God.

Need I repeat these questions to you in regard to all the good things of your lives and in regard to your immortal souls? There is a difference indeed, some have more, some have less of earthly goods, some have a longer, some a shorter life. But all they have is alike from God, and our souls are alike the breath of his mouth and equally destined for eternal joys. Compare as we will, this essential result is the same: God is our creator and benefactor, and he has made us for himself.

And now you are ready for that second revelation Jesus makes about this man in our text. As he knew him most intimately, so he knows also the God who made him and us all, and this other revelation deals with God.

It was again the night before the man died. There he sat amid all the blessings God had bestowed upon him, making his plans to take care of them all in the best way. Alas, he did not hear the voice of God. Yet it spoke to him then most clearly and effectively. I mean more than that final word which God had to speak since this man would not hear the other words. Down to that fatal moment God's goodness spoke to him in lovely words of benefaction in every good thing the man called his own. Down to that last moment God's grace spoke to him in all the provisions it had made to save this man's soul. What was the matter that this man's soul heard none of these wise, blessed, holy words? Ah, his soul was deaf, its ears were stopped, it was dead to God. That is why his soul was satisfied to hear only that other voice, the voice of its own folly. And so the fatal moment came and God said: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" All the goodness and the grace of God had been without avail, the hour of reckoning was now at hand. Why did not that soul quail and tremble at those words? Why did it not fall down in the dust and repent? There was yet time for a few hours, a few at least. That was its judgment. Deaf so long, it was more than deaf now. The man put away his accounts and his money. The contractor left who was to build the new barns. The man went to bed as he had done many another night. It was his last. That night he died.

That is the second revelation of Jesus about this man. Do not tell me this was an exceptional case. You know the story has been repeated with outward variations times without number. Would to God his case might never be paralleled among us. But this is the very reason we are given to hear this voice now as another year of our lives passes. Jesus adds his own voice to that of his Father, saying at the end: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." These are the words of wisdom for us, a million times, better than all the blind, foolish reasonings of men. Soul, soul, hear these words of God and your Savior!

Mark well their wisdom. "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Mark 8:36. 'Seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink... But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you." Luke 12:29-31. "The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Rom. 14:17. We are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Rom. 3:24. "The blood of Jesus Christ

his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” 1 John 1:7. “Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Rom. 5:1-2. “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” 2 Cor. 5, I. “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” Rev. 3:11. These are the words of God’s wisdom that make us rich toward God. These riches are God’s pardon for sin through Jesus blood, a place in his kingdom here below, his Word and grace to nourish our souls, his comfort in every trial, and the hope of eternal blessedness in death. And these riches, do they detract from the earthly goods God gives us? Hear, O soul, the voice of his Word: the first Christians, many of whom were not rich in earthly things, that Word declares, “did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.” Acts 2:46. With our souls rich toward God “whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.” Rom. 14:8. O blessed wisdom of God, O glorious riches of God!

There are souls too many that will not listen to any voice but that of their own blind folly. As for my soul, now as the passing year reminds me of my own end, my soul shall hear and heed God’s voice of wisdom alone. And yours? Say it with God’s help, and say it truly: and mine!

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## Outlines

Our text is full of contrasts: riches — poverty; wisdom — folly; life — death; time — eternity; man’s opinion — God’s decision. The sermon is to arrange some or all of these so as to convey the message of the text for the last Sunday of the year. Kliefoth makes the following combination: What death will take from you — leave that; What death wants to bring you — seek that; Whatever aids you in this leaving and seeking — learn that. — The time feature is the one which connects the text in a simple and natural way with the Sunday for which it is set, the last Sunday of the year. Looking at the man in our text we may use him to turn our thoughts back to our

past life and the past year; to the future as we are approaching it now; to the day or night which will surely be our last; to the eternity which cannot be far away. — The word of Jesus: “rich toward God” is one on which to center the entire text. Here was a man not rich in God. Beside the portrait as Jesus drew it we may place another, that of how the man would have looked if he had been rich in God. It makes a tremendous difference whether you are only rich, or also rich in God: 1) There is a difference in regard to every year we add to our lives; 2) A mighty difference when the last day or night arrives; 3) A difference in all eternity.

### **The Obituary of “A Certain Rich Man.”**

1. He lived only for material wealth.
2. He passed by the true riches of God.
3. He died, and lost both.

### **What Are You Telling your Soul?**

1. The wisdom that seems wise, but is really folly?
2. The wisdom that many deem foolish, but that is really wise?

### **Investing For the Soul.**

1. The way to lose. 2. The way to win.

### **Are You Rich in God?**

1. In heavenly gifts beside earthly gifts?
2. In earthly gifts used for heavenly gifts?
3. In heavenly gifts lifting higher the earthly gifts?

### **The Rich Fool set for our Warning at the Close of the Year.**

There is a warning and call for us in:

1. What he did with his years.
2. What he planned for his future.
3. How he used his last day.,
4. How he entered eternity.

## **7. There Is A New Year's Message For Us In What Was Done With The Barren Fig Tree. New Year's Day. Luke 13:6-9.**

He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down. (Luke 13:6-9)

HAPPY NEW YEAR! HAPPY NEW YEAR! is the universal greeting today, and blithely men start out on the new year. There is a serious side to the beginning of another year of our earthly lives, and the common greeting, meant well enough in its way, must not make us forget that. Here in our text a beautiful vineyard appears. Two men with serious mien walk down the vine-bordered path. They go to inspect the fine big fig tree which proudly rears its mass of branches and foliage near the center of the garden. That tree has not been doing its duty, and it has stood long already. Shall it be cut down now, or shall it be left another season? Shall justice take charge, or shall patient grace still continue? Yes, it was not a mere happy sunshiny day for that tree, it was a serious, decisive day. Let us go along with those two men, the owner of the vineyard and its caretaker, and think of ourselves as they look at that tree and decide what to do.

**There Is A New Year's Message For Us In What Was Done With The Barren Fig Tree:**

A message of Grace mingled with Justice in what was said of its past; a message of Justice tempered by Grace in what was determined about its future.

## **I. Grace Mingled With Justice**

The owner and the vinedresser think of the past as they look the tree over, for the one tells the other how he has been coming for some time to find fruit, and yet has found none. They think of the advantages the tree has above many another fruit tree. It was planted with its young roots into a favored place, not out in the wilds, but right in the midst of the owner's beautiful vineyard. It had the best of soil, and the finest of care, for the vinedresser of the vineyard tended the tree just as he tended the vines.

That favored tree is a picture of Jerusalem of old, the capital of God's chosen nation, planted, established, fed and fostered in the midst of the Holy Land. It was not out in the wilds of some heathen country, amid idolatrous people. It had God's Old Testament revelation and promises of the Messiah, the Temple and worship of the true God, priests and prophets to proclaim to it God's salvation. Surely a large measure of grace! Jerusalem did not earn, or merit these blessings, God granted them to Jerusalem in his grace, in order that the city might develop to his honor and glory.

You see how this reminds us of ourselves. You and I too are planted of God in his blessed vineyard, the Christian church. We were not born and reared in far off heathen lands, amid idolatrous people, in benighted surroundings. We were placed in the true church of God, where his Word is preached and taught, where Christ the Savior is known and worshipped, and a thousand spiritual blessings surround us, like the fruitful soil lies about the roots of a tree, like the balmy air and sunshine enfold its branches and leaves. Did we deserve all this grace of God? No, it was a pure gift of his love, his wonderful favor bestowed in unstinted measure upon us. Let us get a true view of our lives in these past years. They are full of the richest grace down to this happy New Year's Day.

But note that this grace is mingled with justice, and properly so.

Why this planting in the vineyard, this tender and constant care of the tree? You hear the owner make answer: he desired to have fruit of that tree. For that he planted it. He took a fruit tree, not any kind of a tree, and he

gave it everything that ought to make it bring fruit. What then did he have a right to expect? Fruit, of course. If you had done with a tree what he did, you certainly would feel justified in looking for fruit.

Jerusalem, the favored city of God, was intended to bring fruit. That is what the prophet of old said of the whole vineyard: “and he looked that it should bring forth grapes,” Is. 5:2. God had a right to look for more from this city than merely earthly magnificence and prosperity. If God had wanted only that he could have had it in any heathen city, in Rome for instance, the pagan capital of the world at that time. But Jerusalem — the grace vouchsafed to it ought to have made it a city of God, of faith, of love, to God and works delightful to God. Could God be satisfied with less? Your own sense of what is natural, right, and just will furnish the answer. It is the same appeal which Isaiah records of God concerning the entire vineyard, when it had proved unfruitful of old: “And now, O men of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could I have done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?” Is. 5:3-4.

But we and Jerusalem are alike here. Placed as we are in the most favored surroundings, right in the midst of God’s garden of grace, what must be in justice expected of us? Simply that we grow and prosper in earthly things? have fine homes, plenty of money, earthly ease, pleasure, friends, prosperity? Why, if God had wanted these, he would not need a church at all, nor this care of placing, keeping, blessing us in his church. Any fine worldly community would be enough, without his sending to us his Son as a Savior, his Holy Spirit with his Word and grace. No; mark it well, God must expect fruit of us. Get a right view of your life and what it includes. The grace bestowed upon you necessarily includes an element of justice: God has alright to look for spiritual fruit from you. Jesus tells us: “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” John 15:8. And his apostle beseeches us that we “receive not the grace of God in vain.” 2 Cor. 5:1.

All this is intensified when we note what the owner of the tree in the parable says he had done: for three years he had patiently waited, coming again and again to look for fruit. That mention of three years is significant. Already in the case of a tree, if you find no fruit upon it for three consecutive years, your patience will very likely be at an end.

But for Jerusalem, when Jesus spoke this parable, the last three years had been the most gracious of all. These three years embraced all the ministra-



tions of John the Baptist, Christ's forerunner, and Christ's own work up to this time. There never was a city which had enjoyed a greater measure of grace than this. That is why God looked so earnestly for fruit during these three wonderful years. If all this grace, and all this patient waiting on top of it was in vain, then, surely, Jerusalem was hopelessly unfruitful. To use Isaiah's words once more: What more could God have done?

But in this point too we resemble Jerusalem. All the fulness of God's grace in Christ Jesus has been poured out upon us in the past. The whole way of salvation is preached and taught to us; no doctrine of God's word is withheld. God has tried in countless ways to make his grace fully effective among us. And all this for more than three rich years. If now there is one in whom no fruit appears after all this, no living faith in Christ, no evidence of a new life of godliness, what shall we say? In simple justice, can anyone offer excuses, and ask for still more? Put these things together and think of your life and what God has done for you in it, as you ought to think this New Year's Day. See the full measure of his grace and the simple justice that mingles with it. Pass not by these things, but let them affect you deeply. God desires fruit from you, and you cannot rightfully withhold it. That is the first part of the New Year's message of the barren fig tree.

## **II. Justice Tempered By Grace**

But there is another part. When the owner and the vinedresser considered the fig tree, how all this time in spite of all it had received its barrenness remained, the owner said at last: "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" It would have been right to say this before, it surely was right now. So long the tree had not only proved unfruitful, it had also taken up this valuable ground which might have been put to far better use. The sentence was utterly just: "Cut it down!"

Put Jerusalem for the tree, and you have what Jesus meant for the people of this city by his parable. "All day long," cries the prophet in God's name, "have I stretched forth my hand unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." Rom. 10:21. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ...how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." Matt. 23:37. Was it not time to end this perverseness, this wicked, willful unbelief? Should God also continue to waste his grace

on these people, when others might be found in whom his grace might achieve a better success?

But Jerusalem is only an illustration for us, if we neglect to use our time of grace aright. There is not one among us who has received all God's grace in Christ Jesus here in his church, if he has remained cold and indifferent, bent after all on worldly things, counting as little or nothing what here is offered to him and his family, but should be brought this day to a final and terrible reckoning. Let no man think that because God is so good and gracious he can do with God's grace what he pleases. Behind that grace there stands justice. God does wait long, but at last he commands: Cut the tree down!

But behold this justice even now is tempered with grace. The vinedresser asks that justice may be stayed. No, he does not dispute the owner's demand to cut the tree down. He is just himself and righteous in all his ways. But he appeals once more to the grace of the owner's heart: "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: but if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." He will loosen and aerate the ground, and add still more to its richness. He will thus most literally leave nothing untried. If after all this the tree refuse to bear, he himself says: "Thou shalt cut it down." The owner consents, for the two are wholly of one heart and mind — grace mingled with justice, and justice tempered with grace.

And so Jerusalem was granted a final period of grace, that precious season when Christ finished his work by giving his life for our sins, rising from the dead, and ascending on high. O the wonder of all this mercy, the supreme effort of love divine to win fruit from the hearts of the men of Jerusalem! The parable does not tell of the outcome, but we know that even this supreme effort was in vain. That tree Jerusalem remained barren and was cut down. The prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." Matt. 23:38. What he said of the Temple likewise: "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Matt. 24:2. As an example for all time this tree was utterly cut down, and neither stem nor root left in the ground.

"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." Rom. 11:22. Look aright at men's lives about you, and at your own life, now that another year of God's grace be-

gins. The godless go on with the church at their very door, and spurn its gifts and blessings. Some enter the church, but their hearts' love is not on Christ, but on the world. Still others are like trees full of leaves, but the fruit is poor and disappointing. Why are they not cut down forthwith? Only because the justice of God is tempered with mercy. Only because Jesus intercedes for them. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." 1 John 2:1-2. As our great High Priest he ever liveth to make intercession for us. Let no man look upon God's patience, long-suffering, and grace lightly. While he brings all his grace to bear upon you and waits long for fruit, justice stands ready to cut the unfruitful down when the fatal hour comes.

Thank God if you have shown fruit in any measure in the past. It was surely due to Christ's patience and grace alone. But let no fruit that you have brought lull you into false security, as if this warning message of the unfruitful fig tree were not needed by you. Learn more fully what this life of yours is really for, this new year God has granted you to see. It is for fruit, for fruit alone; all else is vain. God looks for true knowledge and faith in you, a true confession and worship of his name, genuine and increasing love for him and his grace, Christian virtues and graces and their works in every part of your life, a sure hope and expectation of eternal deliverance in Christ. There ought to be more, far more of this fruit in us all. When you see what all God does to throw the barren fig tree at last into full bloom and golden fruitage, let all the indifference that still besets you fall away, and give your whole heart and life henceforth to him and his grace. Happy is he, and he alone, this New Year's Day, who lets the justice of God warn him away from all carelessness and indifference, and the grace of God and his patient love win him wholly unto God and his Savior Jesus Christ.

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## Outlines

The thought most naturally awakened by a careful reading of the text is, that New Year's Day is very much like the day when the owner of the vineyard and the vinedresser went to decide about the unfruitful fig tree; so their eyes rest upon us this day. From this central point of the text all its contents

are readily reached, and the applications may easily be appended. For that decision took everything into account; all that had been done for the tree — all that should be expected of the tree — all that might now be done with the tree — all that might yet be tried in regard to the tree — all that would result after the final trial. — Another cardinal point in the text is God's seeking fruit in us. That is why we exist and our years are extended — that is why God gives us his grace and waits with such patience — that is why Christ intercedes for us and fills up the measure of grace still more — that is what eventually will decide our fate. — Another pivot in the text is Christ's intercessory prayer. The tree was both without excuse and hopeless as it stood; but the intercessor's appeal availed, and his work held out promise indeed. Or, as we contemplate that intercession, there is revealed to us: the dire need of it — the mighty efficacy of it — and the glorious reward it ought to obtain.

### **Think of the Unfruitful Fig Tree this New Year's Day.**

It will help you

1. To put away all indifference.
2. To thank Christ for his intercession.
3. To prepare for the day to come.

### **“Let it Alone this Year Also.”**

A word also for us, (1) To remind us of the seriousness of life; (2) To point us to the fruit of grace; (3) To help us prepare for the day of judgment. — Beck.

### **Let the Unfruitful Fig Tree Teach You to Look at Your Life Aright.**

1. At the grace you enjoy.
2. At the fruit you should bring.
3. At the account you must render.

## **What Makes us Happy this New Year's Day?**

1. God's grace.
2. Christ's intercession.
3. The blessed fruit of both.

## **The Calender of the Unfruitful Fig Tree.**

1. These three years (longsuffering and grace).
2. Now (righteousness and justice).
3. This year also (intercession).
4. Then (judgment).

# **8. Keep In View The Day When You Shall Appear Before Christ And The Angels Of God. The Sunday After New Year. Luke 12:4-9.**

And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows. Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. (Luke 12:4-9)

WITH THE NEW YEAR we have set ourselves once more to live the new life and journey on toward the new Jerusalem. What do we need as thus we pass on into the days before us? Exactly what Christ offers his friends in our text — a new vision. He scatters the murky clouds of earth that hem in our view, he takes the film from our eyes, and makes us look across the short span of our earthly lives and see in all its glorious reality that supreme day which all of us will reach at last. It is as if, pouring the light of his Word upon us, he calls to us:

**Keep In View The Day When You Shall Appear Before Christ  
And The Angels Of God.**

On that day you surely want me to confess you. Then in these days you surely do not want to deny me.

# I. On That Day You Surely Want Me To Confess You.

We have started on a new year. Will you live to see the end of it? Neither you nor I know. One thing we do know; our life is just what St. James says it is (4:14), “a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” What a mistake, then, to act as if our lives, are to continue indefinitely, or to busy ourselves only with what we may get and enjoy from day to day. Lift up your eyes and see what Jesus here shows you: the supreme day of all the days of earth, that final day when all earthly years shall end, when he himself shall end them by coming in his glory with all the angels of God about him, to gather all the nations of the earth before him and to pronounce the final judgment on every man’s soul. You will be there, and I. With all the shining angels looking on, every one of us will stand forth and our very souls will be laid bare in their sight. Then what?

Jesus himself has told his friends, and us with them, what will then be done. He will either confess or deny us. He will either turn to us in his heavenly love and graciousness and say before all that angelic company: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”; or he will turn in his holy indignation from us, and say before them all: “I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” What do you want him to say on that day? The time to answer that is now.

And you are able to do it. We know now already, and can tell with certainty in advance, just what Christ will say in any given case, for he has told us in advance whom he shall confess, and whom deny. Hear his own word: “Also I say unto you, whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: but he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.”

What does he mean by confessing him before men? Look at the name by which he designates himself, and you will be able to tell, He is “the Son of man.” That name he loved and used most often because it points both to what he is and what he has done for us. He, the eternal Son of God, became man for our sakes to be our Redeemer and Savior from sin. He who was more than man became man that he might die for our sins, by his blood remove our curse, and so make us children of God and heirs of salvation. And

now you see what it means to confess him before man. It means to recognize him as the divine Savior, made man for our sakes, to accept the cleansing of his blood, to believe and trust in him as our Redeemer, and then to declare and show it openly by word and deed. The vital thing is the heart; that must cling to him as our only hope and help against sin and damnation. But the heart governs the entire life. With your heart holding fast to him, your lips will speak out, your words and actions will show that he is in your heart. And since you know him only from his Word, by which he comes to you and gives you all his grace, your heart will cling to that, you will prize it, live in it, obey it, hope and trust in it. Your lips and life will show that you do. And that is what it means to confess Christ.

And now it is plain what it means to deny him. It means to refuse to believe that he is what he says, and that he has done what he and his Word declare, namely redeem us by his blood. It means to reject his saving grace, to do without, or to figure out some sort of salvation for ourselves. That includes, of course, that a man care nothing for his Word, but prefer his own wisdom to guide and direct his soul. Such a man's lips and life will show in many ways to those about him that he has no use for the Son of man — he thus denies him.

So Christ will confess on that great day those who confess him now, and deny those who deny him now. What do you want him to do with you? O say it with all your heart: I want him to confess me! But realize at once what your words must signify, if you mean what you say. They must signify: I want to be one of his true confessors now — to believe and follow him, to rejoice and glory in him, to hear and obey him, to serve and honor him, and to do this so that men may know I belong to Christ, and to Christ alone. The mere wish to have him confess you is not enough; nor a half-effort to be one of his confessors. Such wishes and partial attempts deceive many; in the end consternation will overwhelm them when they find themselves denied and all the angels of God closing the gates of heaven against them. That is why you cannot keep in view too vividly that day when you shall appear before the Son of man and the angels of God. Confess him today as if that day were to be tomorrow. Then all your life will be filled with the joyous certainty that he will confess you.



## **II. Then In These Days You Surely Do Not Want To Deny Me.**

Now all this must be turned around and said in another way, just as Christ does it in our text when he warns his friends, and us with them, not to deny him before men. The trouble is that thousands start out to confess Christ, but when they find so many men hostile to this confession and its consistent practice, they end up miserably by denying the Son of man before men. The supreme realities of that great day, and all that they involve for us now already, are blotted out from their vision by the inferior painful, threatening realities of these days and what they seem to involve.

Two powerful motives block the road to confession and try to crowd Christ's friends into denial, the fear of the harm men may do us, and the dread of the loss we may incur. Here is a precious doctrine of God's Word, perhaps the central one of our salvation. Instead of standing up to confess and uphold it when assailed, we allow it to be contradicted and vilified in our very presence. Here is a plain piece of Christian conduct, assailed in the same way; again we keep silent, denying Christ through fear of men. Worse than this: men expect us to set aside Christ, our faith in him, our faithfulness to him. in all kinds of ways, in business, in society, in politics, in individual actions of this or that sort. What happens? We are afraid to say no to men, and thus by what we do or leave undone at their bidding we deny the Son of man. Gain invites us: friends, influence, money, a good position, favors and advantages, if we drop our close adherence to Christ's teaching, if we take some liberty with our loyalty to his commands. We dread to lose this gain held out to us, we pay the price — we deny. Who will count the instances in which these two motives, the fear of what men may say and do, and the dread of what we may lose, have made cowards of confessors and turned them into deniers. O yes, there is always an excuse, something about the situation which seems to justify the denial. But no excuse changes the denial when it is made. It is not a confession, but the opposite, and God knows that it is this, and the Son of man knows. Only one thing can change it, blot it out altogether and remove it from the sight of God: bitter contrition and repentance, like that of Peter when from fear of men he too had denied the Son of man.

But look into our text and learn how to confess and never deny. Here Christ takes the worst possible case, not some loss of money, position, friends, and the like, but the deadly hatred of his enemies when they actually kill his confessors. You know this has really happened. The long bloody story of the martyrs attests it. What if you had to face hatred like that? If you deny when men threaten you a little, what would you do if they threatened your life? If you are upset to lose some single advantage in life, what if you were to lose life itself? Oh, I dread to think how in such a trial many who now are counted confessors would be scattered like leaves before the wind. But look at the folly of denial even when life itself and all that makes it fair and lovely is at stake. Let the light of that great day shine upon anything and everything that may happen to us in these days. Which is worse: to have men kill the body — which is literally the worst they can do, — or to have God, when we deny his Son, cast us body and soul into hell, and to have that doom sealed forever by the Son of man on the last great day? It is a thousand times better to lose our poor earthly life, even in the worst possible death, than to lose body and soul in eternal damnation. It is almost incredible how any man here could make the wrong choice. But while we must mention this extreme possibility, because Christ mentions it, and it has occurred, we must ever remember that Christ's enemies cannot do as they please. Look at the sparrows that flit among the trees. Poor people used to buy them for food, five sparrows for two farthings. Now a dozen are not worth a cent because nobody cares for them. But not one single sparrow does God forget, each little life is made to last just as long as God wants. What then about us, to whom God has given immortal souls, for whom the Son of man died on the cross, whom he has adopted in his Son as his children and "heirs of heaven? Christ himself tells us: so dear are we to him that not one hair shall be plucked from our heads by a hostile hand, or a single loss come to us as tiny as the falling of a hair from our heads, without the will of God. Fear of men, dread of loss? They shrivel into nothing beside the power of God and of the Son of man, our judge on the last day, the power to disown and damn forever those who deny the Christ that saved them, and to preserve, bless, and eternally confess those who confess Him with a true heart and life.

Life flows fast. "We spend our years as a tale that is told," wrote Moses of old. So this year will soon be gone. What shall its record be? Full of true, noble, stalwart confession of Christ, no matter what the cost? or marred and

stained by cowardly denial for fear of men and hope of gain? Make your answer today and every day with your eyes fixed on the Son of man and His holy angels as you shall stand before them on that great day. Then I know the answer will be: On that day I want Him to confess me; and in these days nothing shall move me to deny Him.

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## Outlines

Three great lines of thought are twined together in our text in such a way that we may either simply coordinate them and thus combine them under one theme, or subordinate any two of them to the third, in either case doing full justice to the text and the Sunday for which it is set. A world of opposition calls upon us: to confess Christ; do it without fear; relying on God's protection and care. Again: Always looking across to the last great day: we will let no fear of men turn us aside — we will rely wholly on God's care — we will courageously confess our Lord. — Genuine Christian fearlessness never hesitates in the confession of Christ — always finds support in the promises of Christ. — Men often imagine they lose by confessing Christ. Consider what we gain when we confess Christ: Christ's confession at the last day; God's care till we reach that day.

### **“These Times Call for Decision.”**

A decision:

1. Between confession and denial of Christ.
2. Between the fear of God and the dread of men.
3. Between reliance on God and trust in ourselves.

### **What does Christ Say unto us, His Friends?**

1. Fear no man!
2. Trust God!
3. Confess the Son of man!

## **What Happens when we Make a Fearless Confession of Christ?**

1. The world, opposes us.
2. The Father protects us.
3. The Lord accepts us.

ADAPTED FROM J. RUMP.

### **“Jesus, be our Guide, As through life we glide!”**

1. “Faithfully in our behavior may we follow Thee, dear Savior.”
2. “When the world is cold, let us to Thee hold!”
3. “Open, when life’s o’er, Lord, to us thy door!”

# The Epiphany Cycle

## 9. St. John the Baptist Proclaims the Wonders of Christ's Epiphany at the River Jordan. Epiphany. John 1:29-34.

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. (John 1:29-34)

Epiphany is the festival of Christ's manifestation.

The heavenly light that shone over Bethlehem's plains when the angels sang their gloria at the Savior's birth died away and a great silence fell once more. For about thirty long years there was little or no sign to make known that God's Son was on earth, and that the great work of saving the world from sin was under way. That interval came to an end when Jesus, grown to manhood, stepped forth from his obscurity to assume the mighty office for which he had entered the world. He came to the banks of the Jordan river where John the Baptist was making ready the people of Israel to receive the Savior, he himself was baptized, though sinless, in order to place himself beside us sinners and take our sins away. At that great moment God in

heaven, by the most wonderful manifestation, drew aside the curtain as it were, and once more revealed the heavenly realities connected with our Savior and his blessed work.

That was an Epiphany, a manifestation or appearing, so significant in what it revealed that the ancient church set aside a festival day for its celebration, the Epiphany festival, which we too are celebrating this day. In our text John the Baptist himself acts as our Epiphany preacher, and tells us both what God did that day and the full significance of what occurred. Let us give ear, then, with willing hearts as

## **St. John the Baptist Proclaims the Wonders of Christ's Epiphany at the River Jordan.**

### **I. The Father's Revelation**

These wonders begin, he tells us, with the Father's revelation.

John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for the Savior by calling the people of Israel to repent of their sins and by baptism to receive the forgiveness of God. John knew that the Savior, promised these many centuries, was now at hand and would appear. God had revealed that to him when he sent him to preach the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins. But John, though he knew Jesus all along and no doubt had his own expectations regarding him, did not know with absolute certainty who the Savior would be. Remember how Jesus had made no sign of any kind, but had lived for years in the most quiet retirement. So John tells us, and even repeats it: "I knew him not." As a true prophet of God he never for a moment followed his own ideas or conclusions, but waited patiently for the revelation he knew would come from God.

And the hour arrived. Just when it was we do not know, for John has not told us. But God at last revealed to the Baptist that the Savior would now step forth from his obscurity, and that God himself would make the Savior known by a mighty miracle from heaven. He would send his Holy Spirit in a visible manner from heaven upon him who was to be the Savior. By that heavenly sign John would know him indeed, yea, would know much more, namely that he would both complete his saving work and then himself send forth that same Spirit again in a miraculous manner, to spread the blessing

of his salvation through all the word. Surely, John's heart rejoiced when he received this message from God, and he waited with anxious expectation for the great hour to arrive.

So the wonders of Christ's Epiphany began with the Father's revelation. God in heaven himself prepared that Epiphany, for he intended to inaugurate our Savior into his high and holy office as no man before ever had been, as no mere man ever could be, inaugurated. Thank God for his blessed revelation, which, with the glorious deed that followed, is a mighty support to our faith.

## **II. The Holy Spirit's Descent**

The second wonder is the Holy Spirit's descent. Hear how John proclaims the Epiphany of Christ at the river Jordan; he bears record, saying: "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him." And again he says: "I saw, and bare record."

The baptism of Jesus was finished, he had walked from the river and stood on its bank. Then suddenly the heavens were opened. A voice spoke from the glory of the open sky. It was the Father in heaven saying so that men could hear: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And as the words sounded with heavenly power and sweetness from above, the Holy Spirit came down slowly and gently, so that men could see, in the form of a dove, the symbol of graciousness and peace, down upon Jesus, and remained upon him, not merely touching him again to ascend on high. That was the Savior's Epiphany, the manifestation that he was the Savior indeed.

It made him manifest as the Savior by thus audibly and visibly inaugurating him into his office as our Redeemer. Kings, priests and prophets of old were inducted into office by a solemn ceremony of anointing. An oil like perfume was poured upon their heads, whereby they were set apart for their divinely appointed work. This oil was symbolic, a sign to picture in a human way the gift of the Holy Spirit to be given by God to these his servants for the work to which they were called. We have a similar sign still, the laying on of hands at baptism, confirmation, and ordination, when we ask God to send the gifts of his Spirit upon those whom thus we consecrate as his servants. All human anointing and laying on of hands can, of -course,

do nothing more than picture and ask of God the needed gifts from on high. In themselves these symbolic acts cannot bestow even a single gift of the Spirit. But when Jesus came to undertake his work, God himself acted, as he had said he would. Jesus was to be our eternal prophet, high priest, and king. Both to set him apart and to" equip him in body and soul for this tremendous task God anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Visibly, for men to see, the Spirit came upon 'Jesus, and remained. Not one, or several, or even many gifts of the Spirit were made his, but the Holy Spirit himself, in his fulness, and with all his gifts, was poured out upon him. By this divine act he was made the Christ, which signifies the Anointed One, anointed in the supreme sense as our eternal Savior.

That, then, is the second wonder at the Savior's Epiphany at the river Jordan. The descent of the Spirit shows us the work of our salvation as so great that all the persons of the Godhead combine in undertaking it: the Father sends the Spirit upon the Son, and thus in conjunction with the Father and the Spirit our Savior takes up the mighty task. Thank God for this wonder of our Savior's Epiphany, which again forms a mighty support for our faith to rest upon.

### **III. The Savior's Divine Nature**

Among the Epiphany wonders at the river Jordan there shines with especial brightness the Savior's divine nature. When John heard that voice from on high and saw the Spirit descend, then indeed he knew what here he proclaims to us so emphatically: "And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God."

Think of Jesus in his humble earthly life in Nazareth with Mary his mother. There was the daily round of duty, the work of the little household, and the many little things that brighten even the homes of the poor. It was this same humble Jesus who had come to John, "made in the likeness of men and being formed in fashion as a man." How could this be the Savior? How could he remove the sins of the whole world, conquer death and hell? Remember Jesus had done no miracle as yet, nor had he risen from the dead. Surely, it must have seemed as if he could not be the Savior of the world.



But God made manifest that this was indeed his own Son. With his own mouth he declared from the open heavens: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” It is the identical declaration made to Mary before his birth by the angel Gabriel: He “shall be called the Son of God.” The angel over Bethlehem’s plains repeats it: He is “Christ the Lord.” Not for naught did God make so plain and positive from the very beginning who this Savior is, sent by him to redeem us. He must be great and mighty enough for the tremendous work, else all will be utterly in vain.

And that is why this Epiphany at Jordan with its heavenly wonders is so precious to our souls. Luther has well said, that if only a man were my Savior, I am lost, for no man is able to remove my sin and release me from death, but with a Savior who is God my salvation is forever assured. Let men deny Christ’s divinity, they make God himself a liar, to say nothing of his angels and prophets. Unbelief thus seals its own doom. But the Epiphany at Jordan assures us once more of the Savior’s divine nature. On this our faith rests, and we glorify the Father who sent his only begotten Son to save the world and made him manifest as the Son.

## **IV. The Coming Atonement**

But the glory of the Epiphany wonders at the river Jordan includes still more, for here is made manifest also the coming atonement for sin. When John saw Jesus coming to him he stretched out his hand and cried to all who were near to hear: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!”

“Lamb of God” — every Jewish ear that heard the word from the Baptist’s lips thought at once of all the lambs sacrificed in endless succession at the daily sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem, and of the lambs slain at the great Passover Feast once a year. And there was the great prophecy of Isaiah 800 years before, that the mighty Servant of Jehovah would be a Lamb on whom God would lay the iniquity of us all. Now that Lamb was at hand, provided by God himself in the person of his own Son. And here is the Baptist as God’s own prophet declaring to us that this is the Lamb which taketh away the sin of the world. He points to the coming sacrificial death of Jesus when on Calvary’s height he shed his blood for us.

Mark well this Epiphany of our Savior as the Lamb of God. Here all the shallow opinions which men have of sin are utterly crushed. If God could set our sin aside as lightly as men imagine, never for a moment would he have made his own Son a Lamb for the atonement of sin. If any lesser sacrifice would have sufficed, surely God would have provided that. But no, he took his own Son, the blood of none else would do. Why such a price? Because the guilt of every sin is infinite — and here is the guilt of all the sins of all the world. Unless a blood, an atonement, an expiation of infinite worth could be brought, the guilt of sin would damn every human soul forever.

But behold the Lamb of God is at hand; in him the coming atonement for sin is manifest and proclaimed in advance. Let this blessed Epiphany wonder fill your soul with light and peace now and at that great day.

## **V. The Mission of the Holy Spirit**

Among the Epiphany wonders at the river Jordan John proclaims as the crowning of the Savior's work the mission of the Holy Spirit; for God's own revelation to him was: "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost."

The Son of God supported by the Father and the Spirit would pay the penalty for our sins in his sacrificial death upon the cross. But with this done he would ascend on high, and from his throne above send down that same Spirit upon us, to remain and abide here with us, as once he remained upon him while on earth, and so shed abroad upon us all the treasures of Christ's salvation. "He shall receive of mine and shall shew it unto you," Jesus afterwards said. That sending of the Spirit took place at Pentecost, as the crowning of the Savior's work. The Holy Spirit was poured out in his fulness upon the Christian church, that is why God said Christ would "baptize with the Holy Spirit" — the outpouring was the baptism. And once poured out, that Spirit has remained, working on and on in all languages, amid all nations, even as the miracle at Pentecost foreshadowed, when the disciples in the power of the Spirit spoke in so many different languages declaring the wonderful works of God.

The baptism of the Holy Ghost, then, continues on to this day. It is the Spirit of God poured out upon the hearts of men through the means of grace, the Word and sacraments, giving us Christ's blood-bought pardon, making us children of God in Christ Jesus, filling our hearts with faith, love, and hope. Without this mission of the Spirit we would neither know nor be able to receive the least of the saving blessings Jesus has obtained for us, but with this Spirit we are infinitely rich in all his heavenly treasures. The special miraculous gifts which the Holy Spirit bestowed on various members of the church in the first period of his work have ceased, such as tongues, healing, and prophecy, but all the vital and ever necessary gifts which he came to make our own he still dispenses in unstinted measure. This glorious mission of the Holy Spirit extending over all the world, the Epiphany at Jordan made manifest in advance when the Savior began his mighty work. That Spirit, as he has blessed us "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" down to this very day, seals the Epiphany made at the river Jordan as true indeed. Thank God for the promise of the Baptist fulfilled in such heavenly riches to all of us now. Here let our faith rest and continue in joy and praise.

But the wonders of Christ's Epiphany thus proclaimed by John the Baptist of old, his revelation from the Father, the descent of the Spirit, the Savior's divine nature, the coming atonement for sin, and the mission of the Holy Ghost, all point to a still greater Epiphany when Jesus shall appear in his glory at last and gather us all into the eternal kingdom of his glory. Then his Epiphany shall be our Epiphany, his glory our glory, to the praise of his name.

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## Outlines

The Epiphany note is struck full and clear in the words: "that he should be made manifest to Israel." Here a theme is offered leading into the heart of the text: How Jesus was made manifest as the Savior of the world — by the Father from heaven — by the testimony of the Baptist — by the fulfillment of his work — by the inspired Word which reveals this testimony and work to us. — The pivot of the manifestation may also be his divinity: How the Baptist knew that Jesus was the Son of God, our Savior. — Since the mani-

festation or Epiphany presented in the text is intended for faith, the cleavage may be at this point: both what God revealed concerning the person Jesus, and concerning his work, calls for faith. The sermon thus may have three parts: person — work — faith; or only two, faith being connected directly with his person and his work. —We decline to follow Langsdorff who furnishes outlines which parallel our baptism with that of Jesus. Any reference to our own baptism is sufficiently taken care of in treating the words: “He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost,” i.e. now, since the day of Pentecost, with the means of grace, Word and sacrament.

### **The Epiphany of Jesus at Bethany beyond Jordan.**

1. An Epiphany of his wonderful person.
2. An Epiphany of his blessed work.

### **The Great Purpose of our Savior’s Epiphany.**

1. His person is made manifest.
2. His work is revealed.
3. Both, that we may know, believe, and be 1 saved.

### **When Jesus Assumed his Office as our Mediator.**

1. He was manifested as the Son of God.
2. The Holy Spirit descended upon him.
3. He bore our sins as the Lamb of God.
4. He made ready to send us the Holy Spirit.

### **Our Salvation in the Light of Christ’s Sacrifice.**

See it

1. In the divine Savior.
2. In the Savior’s sacrifice.
3. In the sacrifice made ours through the Spirit.

# 10. The Gospel Is Our Epiphany Today. The First Sunday After Epiphany. Matt. 4:12-17 And 23-25.

Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Matthew 4:12-17)

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan. (Matthew 4:23-25)

OUR SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST was made manifest when he began his blessed Savior work. God himself made known who he was and what he would do for our salvation. That was the first great day of Epiphany.

Since then the work of revealing salvation to the world darkened by sin and death has steadily gone on. In our text we have a comprehensive description how the whole land of Galilee and a number of the adjacent countries began to emerge out of their age-long darkness of spiritual death. The Gospel was heralded through Galilee from end to end. Christ himself proclaimed it in carrying out his great prophetic office. Many heard and began to awake from their sleep of death. That Gospel still resounds, for Christ

committed it to his church and its chosen messengers to carry it to the ends of the earth. It is ours to hear now, and it still reveals, wherever it is rightly preached, all that we need for our eternal deliverance from sin and death. In fact, we are perfectly right in saying that

### **The Gospel Is Our Epiphany Today.**

Wherever the Gospel is preached, there Christ is revealed — the Kingdom comes — light is shed abroad — repentance is wrought — and heaven is opened — and thus the Gospel indeed makes an Epiphany for us today.

## **I. Christ Is Revealed**

By its preaching of Christ the Gospel brings to the desperate spiritual needs of men the one and only Savior able to deliver from all those needs.

The land of Galilee was prosperous enough in an earthly way. There were fine cities, trade, wealth, business. One of the main arteries of trade passed through the land from Damascus and the east. There was plenty of religion also, for the people had their synagogues, their central sanctuary at Jerusalem, and an elaborate ritual of worship. They even had the Bible of that day, namely the Old Testament. But in spite of this all, hear the prophet Isaiah's word on Galilee: "The land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people which sat in darkness... which sat in the region and shadow of death." What was wrong with Galilee and the countries around it? These people lay helpless in their sins, with the death-curse of sin upon them and knew no way to get rid of their sin and curse. They did not even realize what was wrong and what they really needed. They were like a man dying with some deadly disease, far from any remedy, not even perceiving the deadliness of his malady. So they were drifting on.

It is a picture of the world today where men have not yet found the Gospel. Look at the wealth, even the luxury about us, many a man literally faring sumptuously every day. There are churches too perhaps, of one kind or another, even with the Bible in them like those old synagogues in Galilee, and worshippers often zealous enough like the Jews in their day. But there is no Gospel. The sin and the curse on men's souls is not re-

moved; they do not even know that it ought to be removed, to say nothing of knowing the only way in which this can be done. Thus they sit in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death. Their very earthly prosperity blinds them; with their bodies so well cared for they fail the more to see their soul's desperate need. They are like a ship sailing gaily along, but on a false route, soon to be dashed to pieces on the hidden rocks that lie under the placid surface of the sea they are sailing.

What did Galilee need of old, what do all these peoples of today so like those of Galilee need? The Gospel, the Gospel above everything, because it brings us Christ, the Savior and deliverer from sin, death, and hell. See him going from city to city in Galilee, preaching and teaching everywhere the Gospel of the kingdom. Today he sends us that same Gospel, the glad message that he, Jesus Christ himself, the eternal Son of God, has come to save us from our sins and make us forever blessed. Nothing but the precious blood of Christ can blot out and wash away our sins. He and he alone is the propitiation for our sins, taking their curse away before God forever, and putting God's eternal blessing in its place. A man may have untold wealth, wonderful learning, he may be a president of a nation, a ruler of an empire, unless he has Christ and his atoning blood, he is in the darkness of eternal death. A man may live in the church, read the Bible every day of his life, practice a thousand forms of worship, unless in his church and religion he has found the Rock of Ages cleft for him and has his heart taught to sing: "Simply to Thy cross I cling!" his sin and curse remain and he is lost. This, and this alone is eternal life, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. The Gospel, the Gospel alone is our Epiphany, because it brings us Christ, the Savior and deliverer from sin. Oh, let its blessed message fill your soul and make Christ's deliverance wholly your own.

## **II. The Kingdom Comes**

The Gospel is our Epiphany, for by its preaching the kingdom of heaven comes to us.

When Jesus went through Galilee we are told that he preached: "The kingdom of God is at hand." And his message is called "the Gospel of the kingdom." The same is true today: wherever the Gospel is preached and by

it Christ is brought to men, there the kingdom comes, the spiritual kingdom of God. Christ therefore also bids us pray constantly: “Thy kingdom come.”

Men are far from the kingdom as long as they live on under their sins, the guilt and curse of their sins. For that means that they are under a deadly influence which must at last destroy them. Their earthly good fortune, whatever they may have of it, is like the flower of the field; the wind passes over it and it is gone — all its bright petals withered and whirled away. The power of sin never lets go of itself, it clings to the soul and finally drags it down into eternal darkness and night. The terrible thing about it is that, like the men of Galilee, to this day men fail to recognize this fearful influence of sin until it is too late. God must come to their rescue, or they will perish blindly forever.

That is why he sends us “the Gospel of the kingdom.” What is this kingdom? A new power, different from and higher than any in the world, a mighty, efficient influence from above to free us from our sins. It is the rule and reign of Christ as the king of our salvation, for all this power centers in him and flows from him. And he exercises this power through the Gospel, which therefore the Bible calls “the power of God unto salvation.” It is the power of Christ’s mercy and grace pardoning our sins, putting us into a new relation, that of children of God and heirs of heaven. It is a spiritual, and hence an invisible power. But to show us how real it is Jesus, when he came to Galilee as the king of salvation, made his power visible to men by healing with a word thousands of poor physical and mental sufferers. “And they brought unto him all sick people that were taken, with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.” These miracles stand for all time as the tangible evidence that when now Jesus declares in the Gospel: “My son, thy sins are forgiven thee,” our sins are actually, instantaneously gone, just as were those diseases when Christ spoke his kingly word. What Christ demonstrated and proved so fully when he walked on earth needs not to be proved over and over again. The spiritual power of his rule is established forever. Note well that all those miracles were deeds of deliverance and help; they picture for all time just what is done for our souls when by the power of Christ’s grace our sins are taken away — just as completely away as were those diseases in Galilee.

Behold, then, the Epiphany of the kingdom when the Gospel of Christ, is preached. In and through that blessed Word the King stretches forth his



hand, pierced for your redemption, and takes the guilt from your soul and puts his own righteousness in its place. By that Gospel his blessed hand takes and lifts you out of the devil's kingdom and sets you into his own kingdom as a child of God. A thousand blessings follow, all the gift of his gracious power, all of them conveyed through his Gospel. Oh that we all might realize what a glorious Epiphany came for Galilee, comes for us, when thus the kingdom is brought to us by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **III. Light Is Shed Abroad**

The Gospel is our Epiphany when by its preaching it fills our souls with the saving light of truth. The darkness of ignorance, falsehood, vain and deadly delusion is driven out, the real knowledge of our lost condition and of what God really does in Christ Jesus for our salvation is brought in. So when Christ preached the Gospel in Galilee "the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up."

The world is full of darkness; Galilee is a true picture of it to this very day. Men know neither what is really wrong with them, nor what God really has done and now wills to do in order to help them. Some think little or nothing is wrong. The sun shines, the birds sing, their lives are happy from day to day — what should be wrong? They are like a boat, drifting in the sunshine slowly, steadily down the terrible current of the Niagara river; so long they will drift, then the river drops away beneath them, they plunge into the abyss of eternal death. Some are in trouble or distress of one kind or another, sickness, misfortune, unhappiness. They think, if only this misery were removed, all would be well. They are blind: the woe they now feel so keenly grows out of a deep, bitter root which is bound to send up woes a thousandfold worse in the end. They tug at some little outgrowths, and never think of the great poisonous root that sends them out. Others feel that they have a remedy, some religious plan or works, self-invented or learned from others; this they cling to and dream they are safe. Look at the Galileans with their synagogues, their Temple, their sacrifices, fastings, alms, purifications, and yet Christ tells them positively that unless they obtain a righteousness infinitely better they will never enter the kingdom of God. People today feel sure of salvation because they try to be good, kind,

helpful, charitable, devotional at church, prayer and worship. But Paul, Christ's great apostle, tells us, that he tried all this and more, and found it nothing but dung, with absolutely no power to save his soul. The world is full of such darkness. Deliberately men put their souls into banks that are bankrupt, and think their treasure safe — till it is too late. Deliberately they try to cross the raging gulf of death on a miserable, rotten plank, just because it looks sound and safe; when they make the fatal step, crash goes the plank, and they plunge to their doom with a shriek.

Into this desperate spiritual darkness the Gospel, and the Gospel alone, carries the light that saves. It shows us everything as it really is, driving away every falsehood and lie, every deception and delusion. Our wound is deadly, and the Gospel says so. No man can help himself in the least, and the Gospel says so. But God sends us Christ, his own Son, as our helper with help sufficient to the uttermost, and the Gospel not only tells us so, but brings him and his help right to our souls to cure the wound and make us whole. Does it offend your pride to hear that you, a respected citizen, an honored business man, a fine fellow in many respects, are nothing but a poor, lost, damned sinner in the sight of God? Then keep on lying to yourself, in due time you will discover that what the Gospel said was the literal truth after all, only then it may be too late. Does it seem foolish to your wisdom that the blood of One who was crucified almost 2,000 years ago is your only remedy against sin and the judgment of God? Then keep on trying your own remedies and lying to yourself that they will surely help, in due time you will meet that Christ on his heavenly throne, and then discover that the foolishness of the Gospel was God's own wisdom and light, only then it will be too late. But the man who lets the Gospel open his eyes to see the truth as it is, who lets go every false comfort and help, and falls at the feet of the only true Helper, Jesus Christ, oh, how his heart rejoices, he sees and knows that he is safe, and the more the Gospel shines in his heart, the more he finds Christ indeed "the Light of the World," and his Word "a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path," so that his step cannot slide and his soul is brought safely home at last.

The Gospel is our Epiphany, because in all this dark and treacherous world it brings us light and truth.

## **IV. Repentance Is Wrought**

It is our Epiphany once more because it works repentance in our hearts. “From that time Jesus began to preach” in all Galilee, “and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

When the Gospel brings Christ the Savior, the powers of the kingdom, the light of its truth to our souls, all these must work a mighty inward change in us in order to accomplish their great purpose. This inward change is called repentance, and means that the soul turns in grief and sorrow away from all sin, and in full confidence and trust to Christ as the Savior from sin. This change is absolutely essential, and nothing can take its place. “Repent!” cried Christ in Galilee. What though his hand touched a man and removed the most terrible bodily affliction, that did not free his soul — the man had to repent. No matter how near we get to Christ now, how much we say we love his Gospel, how close we live to his friends, repentance, repentance alone will make us his own and give us the inward Epiphany we need.

No man can repent of himself. At best, when the bitter consequences of his sin find him out, he can long to be rid of them, and thus with remorse wish that he had not thus sinned. But true repentance means first of all a contrition or sorrow for sin as sin, as an offense against God, so terrible as to separate us from him, to call forth his wrath, judgment, and damnation. God himself must work this in us by his holy law, crushing our hearts by its holy demands and its dire penalties. Woe to him who offends God by his sins! And all our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds do offend him, yea, already our sinful state depraved and stained from our very birth on.

But the terrors of God would drive us to despair when we fully realize what they are, if God did not link the Gospel with his holy law, the precious promise of forgiveness in Christ Jesus. Again we see how no man can possibly repent of himself, for God’s promise alone has the power of working in us the second part of repentance, namely the inward assurance of faith, that for the sake of Jesus Christ his Son he forgives our sins, acquits us from judgment, declares us free from guilt, ascribes and gives to us all that Christ has done for us, and thus declares us acceptable in his sight. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.” He who trusts this promise of God has all its blessedness. That trust or faith, combined with contrition, is repentance, the inward change which makes us children of God. “Ye are all the children of God,” writes the holy apostle, “by faith in Christ Jesus.”

This inward change of repentance must continue; there must be, as our Catechism puts it, “daily contrition and repentance.” Our whole inward attitude must ever be away from sin and toward our Savior from sin. Therefore, no man can repent and still play with sin or consciously go back and live in it. The love of sin, even of some one pet sin we may have, is the opposite of contrition and the contradiction of faith. Our daily contrition and faith means newness of life, walking in the footsteps of Jesus by his constant help and support.

What a glorious Epiphany thus to escape the curse and power of sin and by the repentance which the Gospel works and maintains in us to live as true children of God. O let no heart shut out this precious Gospel, but in ever fuller measure take in all its blessed power, for true repentance is the one way to eternal salvation.

## **V. Heaven Is Opened**

And now we may add: the Gospel is our Epiphany because it opens heaven to us. It is the Gospel of “the kingdom of heaven.” Its saving power is from heaven and leads us back to heaven.

Alas, men cling to this earth as if they could remain here forever. They let the ties that bind their hearts’ affection to this life grow stronger and stronger. And yet how brief is our stay! Like a shadow life moves on; seventy, eighty years at most, it is gone. Then what? Thousands think not and care not. They see their neighbors stricken down, but as long as they themselves are still untouched, they blindly go on. Torn away by the inexorable hand of death at last, what will their end be?

The Gospel is the opposite of all such folly. It is God’s message from heaven, not merely to make us think of something higher than earth, but to open heaven itself for us and finally lead us thither. There Christ has prepared a place for us — rest, peace joy, blessedness, never to cease. The powers of his grace and mercy which now we feel in our hearts draw us gently away from the things we must leave anyway at last, to those things which shall abide forever, for they are in the presence of God. The change now wrought in us is only the preparation for a more perfect change to come, when soul and body alike shall be swept clean of all trace of sin. and we shall be glorious like the angels of God and like the glorified body of

our Lord. This is hope that maketh not ashamed, for, unlike the false hopes so many indulge in, this hope is, not built on the mere self-made expectation of men, but on the power and promise of Christ who now awaits us above and will himself carry us thither. With this sure promise in our hearts ours is a constant Epiphany. “That where I am, there ye may he also,” lights our daily path, leads us through the shadow of temporal death, and turns to glorious fulfillment when heaven at last is ours.

Thank God that the Gospel is our Epiphany, with its Savior, its kingdom, its light, its repentance, its hope of heaven. God keep us ever in this Epiphany and manifestation of his grace to the praise of his holy name.

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## Outlines

The proper leverage for the sermon on this text will be found in what it says of Christ’s preaching the Gospel, with which it is easy to connect the general idea of manifestation as the Epiphany season requires it. We see: How Christ wrought as our Prophet in Galilee — he preached the Gospel — he sealed the Gospel by his miracles — he brought men to repentance by the Gospel — How Christ revealed himself in Galilee: men found him a Savior in his message, and in his miracles. — The kingdom twice mentioned in our text invites our theme and division: Christ’s proclamation that the kingdom has come — its powers go out to men — change men — open heaven to them; all this by means of that proclamation. — The Gospel is light. So we may preach on the theme: How the light came to darkest Galilee — he brought it by the Gospel — shed it abroad by his constant preaching — filled men’s hearts with it in repentance — led them to the light of heaven.

### How the Epiphany Light Began to Spread afar.

1. The most benighted region —
2. Heard the Gospel of the kingdom —
3. Saw; its blessed power —
4. And began to follow Christ.

## **How Christ Revealed the Kingdom of Heaven in Galilee.**

1. He brought the power of the kingdom.
2. He set in motion the work of the kingdom.
3. He dispensed the blessings of the kingdom.
4. He drew men into the kingdom.

## **Christ's Epiphany in Galilee.**

1. He revealed his grace.
2. He manifested his power.

## **Why we Ought to Prize the Gospel as our Highest Treasure.**

1. It brings us the Savior.
2. It works repentance.
3. It delivers from darkness and death.

## **The Epiphany Blessings which Came to Galilee.**

1. The darkness gives way to light.
2. The light reveals Christ.
3. Christ comes with his kingdom.
4. The kingdom uses the Gospel.
5. The Gospel works repentance.
6. Repentance leads to heaven.

# **11. The Voice of Human Authority in Religion: “Have any of the Rulers or of the Pharisees Believed on Him?” The Second Sunday After Epiphany. John 7:40-53.**

Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of him. And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him.

Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man. Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed. Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet. And every man went unto his own house. (John 7:40-53)

IN THE ORDINARY AFFAIRS OF LIFE it is the part of wisdom to accept the voice of human authority. Governmental and judicial authority have divine sanction, and when properly exercised are beneficial in the highest degree. The same is true of other departments of life. When the body is sick we want the counsel of a competent physician; in education we listen to the advice of trained school-men; in money affairs the authority of good business men is decisive: when we build a house we need a good architect; when we sow,

plant, and reap we need an expert farmer to instruct us. Human authority in all the ordinary affairs of life is of decisive weight. Though it is never infallible, and hence needs to be tested and tried out, still we know it is the best we have, and we would lose by setting it aside.

But the thing is entirely different when we come to the soul, to religion, to our eternal interests. Can human authority dictate and decide in matters of this kind? Unhesitatingly we reply: It can not! Yet this is exactly what such authority presumes to do, and what thousands of men allow it to do for them. Behold the striking instance in our text, when the High Council of the Jews set up the claim that since none of its exalted members believed in Jesus all lesser men ought to do the same. Their authority they think ought to settle the matter. It fills them with indignation and rage when this was not at once acknowledged. Let us examine

### **The Voice of Human Authority in Religion: “Have any of the Rulers or of the Pharisees Believed on Him?”**

## **I. This Authority Convinces Many**

Beyond question this authority convinces many. When men have climbed high in human affairs those who have staid behind naturally look up to them. The men high up expect and demand it, the men below find it proper and profitable. When power is put into the hands of those above they even use it to compel the others, and these yield the more readily, obeying the law of force. It seems to be the world order, some by virtue of position, learning, power, and authority lead, the rest follow, either willingly or by force.

Without further question this relation of superiors and inferiors is extended to include religion. The presumption is that here too the great, high, and mighty ought to dictate, and all the rest ought to bow in humble submission and accept the decisions handed down to them. The Pharisees in our text acted on this presumption. They were certainly superior in every way to the servants who acted as their police officers. They belonged to the High Council or Supreme Court of the Jews; they were rich, influential, learned. They hated Jesus, and wanted to arrest him and put him out of the way. Their decision, they imagine, ought to settle the entire question for all



men beneath them, their officers as well as the common people, the multitude who came from the country far and near to attend the great Jewish festivals in Jerusalem. Have any of us believed on him? they ask. That ought to settle the thing for you, is their idea.

This claim of human authority is made still stronger when those who exercise it are men high up in the church and in matters of religion. Surely, then their decisions ought to be final. Those Pharisees in the High Council of the Jews were learned in the law. They studied their Old Testament most diligently; they carefully maintained all the old teaching and traditions of the fathers before them; they devoted their lives to the most careful practice of all their religious customs; and the people as such looked up to them as venerable, learned, and holy. With authority like that, expert authority we may call it, surely, they ought to know, and men ought without question to submit to them. That was their conviction at least. And thousands agreed with them. This voice of human authority in religion convinced them completely, and they risked their soul's salvation on it.

Things have not changed much since that day. Men of science in the great universities tell us that certain things in the Bible cannot possibly be true. None of them believe these things, they say; and they imagine that ought to be enough for every one of us. Kings and rulers have frequently thought that their people ought to accept their decisions in religious matters without any question. This presumption is especially strong when the men who make it stand at the head of the church like these Pharisees in the Jewish High Council. The pope and hierarchy of Rome maintain as their prerogative, which dare not be questioned, that what they decide in regard to religion all the church ought to accept without the slightest hesitation; and the members of the Catholic Church willingly consent. Protestants often do the same thing, when doctors of divinity, professors of theology in the universities, the heads of church bodies, even preachers in congregations think that their word ought to be taken as decisive, and thousands have yielded to such claims.

But this voice of human authority in religion is false, no matter when, where, or by whom it is uttered and by what multitudes it is obeyed. One is our Master, Christ, and no other. It is in vain to follow leaders teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. Even if an angel from heaven brought us a gospel of his own, we ought to call him anathema, and turn from him as from the devil. In religion there is no real human authority, there is only

divine authority, the voice of God, of Christ, of his Spirit, of the Word of God, because the true religion is altogether a divine thing, and not a human thing. If all the world should follow the presumptuous authority of men, you and I ought to contradict them all and follow Christ alone.

## **II. It Stands Contradicted**

But the voice of human authority stands contradicted. Its false assertions are revealed as false, its authority unmasked as bogus, sham, a plain usurpation.

Look what happened in the High Court when the Pharisees, so sure of themselves, asked: "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?" They were thunderstruck to discover that one of their own rulers, and a Pharisee at that, Nicodemus by name, was at least on the way to believe in Jesus. It has always been so. When the proud philosophers at Athens mocked at Paul's teaching of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, one of their own chief men, Dionysius the Areopagite, believed. The holy apostle writes: "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called," 1 Cor. 1:26, not many, that means there are always some. It is not so that all the scientists refuse to believe the Bible's teaching concerning creation, Christ's divinity and atonement, and the other great doctrines; there is a goodly number who truly believe. So with all the men in high places. Christ had and still has his victories in their midst. Not all are blinded by their learning, power, and earthly greatness, some lay their hearts with all their attainments in the humble obedience of faith at the feet of Jesus.

The voice of human authority in religion is contradicted also in the substance of its assertion. Those proud Pharisees thought they alone knew the law or teaching of the Old Testament. But here they were condemning both the pilgrims at the festival and Jesus with them without ever giving either of them a hearing. They violated one of the most fundamental principles of any court, to say nothing of a Jewish court ruled by the Scriptures. If they did this, could their decision regarding Jesus be called safe? Not for one instant. So also they claimed no prophet could arise in Galilee. And yet their own Bible said that the prophet Jonah came from Galilee; and the great prophet Isaiah wrote that the light of salvation would come from Galilee. That prophecy God fulfilled in Jesus, who was indeed born in Bethlehem of

Judea, and not in Galilee, but was sent to live for almost 30 years in Galilee, and in Galilee carried on his ministry of preaching and doing miracles for so long a time that he came to be called the prophet of Galilee. That is a sample of what human authority in religion amounts to. When it sets itself up to assert its own wisdom it goes wrong, so that any man who knows God's Word can expose its falseness. Even those pilgrims at Jerusalem, common people for the most part, had a truer idea of Jesus than these blind Pharisees with all their authority. Some confessed openly: "This is the Christ." They were right. Others thought he was a special prophet to precede the Messiah. They were wrong, but nearer right than the Pharisees. Still others thought, because Jesus came from Galilee, he could not be the Messiah. These seem to have followed the authority of the Pharisees, and this very authority led them directly counter to the truth.

Never should the voice of false authority impress us. Let us get rid of the idea, as if when great human learning or authority speaks, we are helpless before it. Even those police officers felt there was something wrong about the assertions of the Pharisees against Jesus, for they had heard him speak and had to confess that never man spake thus. Nicodemus openly punctured their claims. When science contradicts the Bible, remember one set of scientists constantly contradicts another; one great philosopher upsets all that the others have said. Thus they tumble down each others' card houses. Why should we bow to their authority, when thus it contradicts itself? But if you take your Bible, you will know beyond any doubt that all this human authority in religion is spurious. To deny sin is never a remedy for sin, as little as to deny that cancer is cancer, leprosy leprosy. To mock at hell is no guarantee that the mocker will not be sent there. To say the Bible cannot be inspired is to talk as if the mouth of the Almighty were muzzled so that he cannot speak to us as he may deem best. To say that, God did not make man in his own image, but that man arose from the image of the monkey and the lower creatures, is to make poor fools believe that the effect can be thousands of times greater than the cause. To say that Christ is not the Son of God, and did not redeem us with his blood, is to leave the whole world a mass of miserable dying creatures with no real reason for the existence of any of them — save for such an existence as that of brutes, stocks, and stones. Even a little light from the Bible is able to overthrow these claims of false human authority. Away with the fear of such authority; it enslaves, but

if we continue in Jesus' Word we shall know the truth, and the truth shall make us free.

### **III. It Must Be Set Aside**

Without question or hesitation the voice of human authority in religion must be set aside, both when it comes unsupported by Scripture, or when it comes with its perversions of Scripture, and in place of it we must set the true authority of God and his Word and bow to that alone.

What can man know about the things of God when he refuses to listen to God himself? Well says St. Paul to the Corinthian Christians speaking of the time when they followed heathen authorities: "Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb Idols, even as ye were led." 1 Cor. 12:2. What were the Ephesian Christians before their conversion? Gentiles walking "in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." Eph. 4:17, etc. Christ says of such: "Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." Do we want to follow such authority?

More seductive is the authority of men when it tries to support itself by perversions of Scripture. Then they try to make their false authority look like the true authority of God. They repeat the trick of Satan when he tempted Eve, turning the word of God around, as if Adam and Eve would not die if they ate of the tree, while God had said they would surely die in that case. So the Pharisees claimed Jesus could not be the Messiah because he came from Galilee, when God had made that very coming from Galilee a sign of his being the Messiah. It is equally so when men deny that Christ is God's Son, claiming the Bible, does not teach it; that his blood does not cleanse from sin, because the Scriptures do not say it. All these and other perversions of God's Word are all exploded, if only we will heed what that Word really says.

In the place of the false authority we must put the one true authority, and bow whole-heartedly to that. One is our Master, Christ. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Ps. 119:105. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Mk. 13:31. "It is written," is the true criterion and test, the Word as it stands, interpreted by

that Word alone, in its true sense as God gave it to us and meant it for our enlightenment and salvation. Whatever in our own minds and hearts tries to evade or run counter to that Word, by God's help must be subdued and put away. "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it." Luke 11:28. He who fails to hear and heed Christ's Word is like a man who builds his life's house on the sand, the floods will surely sweep it away; but he who truly heeds that Word is like the man who builds his house upon the rock, it will never be shaken or moved. Thank God who has given us his Word to be our guide and stay, that forsaking all false human authority in matters of our souls we may rest in his blessed, saving authority now and ever more.

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## Outlines

Several doors open into the text. Perhaps the most obvious is the medley of opinions concerning Jesus here presented, the whole line from hatred through to true faith. We may then preach on: The many opinions concerning Jesus — a view of them — an analysis — our position. — The text is composed of two sections, one dealing with the people as such, one with their rulers; there is a cleavage of adherents and opponents in both parties, which may aid in making a lay-out for the sermon. — There are several important statements: 1) "So there was a division among the people because of him" — some were simply ignorant of the Scriptures — some held wrong views of the Scriptures — some were impressed by Jesus, but were still puzzled about the Scriptures — let us learn the full truth and believe in him with our whole heart. 2) "Never man spake like this man" — an impression significant — truer than those men knew — full of most blessed promise, if not destroyed. 3) "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?" a question regarding example — authority — personal responsibility.

## The Reception Jesus found among Men

Some hated and rejected him completely.

Some had and retained wrong opinions about him.

Some were being drawn nearer and nearer to him.

Some believed and followed him.

### **The Debate about Jesus.**

1. Out in the Temple courts among the people.
2. In the assembly hall of the Jewish rulers.

### **Where do You Belong?**

1. You surely do not want to be counted with his enemies! Look at what they are like.
2. You ought never to be satisfied merely to be one of his friends. See what they still lack.
3. Be one of his true believers and followers. That is blessedness indeed.

### **There was a Division because of Him.**

1. There always will be.
2. Where will you stand?

# **12. A Revelation of Christ's Compassion. The Third Sunday After Epiphany. Matt. 9:35-38.**

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest. (Matthew 9:35-38)

NO MAN KNOWS CHRIST who does not know his compassion. There is compassion among men, a noble, natural feeling of pity for human misery when its torn and bleeding wounds appeal to us. There is a much higher and finer compassion among Christians when instead of merely weeping over the wounds, or binding them up with oil and wine like the Good Samaritan, they follow in the footsteps of Jesus and apply the healing powers of the Gospel to bind up the heart itself and make whole again the crushed soul where the deeper hurt lies. But the compassion of Christ stands supreme. His mighty heart reached out to embrace the whole world of misery and woe. Deliberately he put himself where all the burden of it would fall upon his own soul. Not like some physician who tries to heal a wound while he feels none of the pain himself, but like no other physician with his own wounds he binds up ours, with his own blood he staunches ours, with his own agony he brings us life and joy again. To know this compassion of Christ is to know him indeed, and there is no knowledge so necessary, so comforting, so blessed as this. That is why our text gives us

## **A Revelation of Christ's Compassion.**

and calls upon us to

1. See its tenderness;
2. Mark its strength;
3. Hold fast its comfort.

## I. See Its Tenderness

“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.” Here is the tenderness.

Every man who was present there on the hills of Galilee saw outwardly just what Jesus saw — a great concourse of people from far and near. No doubt, they found it an interesting sight, and could tell of it with ardor when they got back home again, especially when something now and then happened that drew their attention. If some poor sufferer would try to reach Jesus, perhaps here and there a man lent a helping hand, and then told of that afterwards. But that was about all. Not one man’s heart, when he stood looking over those crowds, either while they rested in groups dotting the hillsides, or while gathered in a great mass to listen to Jesus, was moved with compassion at all these people. They saw nothing especial to pity. But Jesus did, and it made his heart melt with pity. What was it that he saw? A great flock of shepherdless souls. O yes, they had their great Temple in Jerusalem, their synagogues, their priests and rabbis, but none of these was doing for them what they really needed. They were all poor, lost sinners, and the only salvation from sin was hidden from them, neither priest nor rabbi brought it to them. They were left to seek salvation for themselves, like abandoned sheep in the desert trying to find food and shelter. And left long thus they looked to Christ just like such a flock of sheep would look. “They fainted,” which really means they were torn and bruised like lost sheep wandering through thickets and briars and brambles, among jagged rocks and cruel crags. They had sins of all kinds and no way to find pardon and release from them. “They were scattered,” that means exhausted, lying spent and helpless on the ground. All their efforts had: brought their sinful souls nothing, could bring them nothing. Jesus saw this picture of their souls, as the multitudes were spread out before him, and his heart melted with pity.



Oh, the picture has been repeated endlessly on earth! Men are often prosperous enough in earthly ways, but oh, their poor sin-laden souls! No food nor drink, no help nor shelter, no shepherd to care and keep. "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." Is. 1:6. "Every one of them is gone back, they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Ps. 53:3. Do men see this desperate, pitiful condition when their souls are without salvation from sin? No; at best they see only the outward misery when sin works its consequences, and usually they have no idea of the real cause. They are like the men in that multitude in Galilee, blind as to what is really wrong with themselves and others. O the pity of it! But there is one compassionate heart who sees us all in our need, and not one -bit of its terrible woe is hidden from him. It is his heart that still goes out to us all. Oh, mark its deep tenderness. See it melt with sympathy and longing to help us. It is Jesus, our compassionate Savior.

But his compassion is more than pitying tenderness; it is tenderness that yearns to help and save. Why was Jesus there amid those multitudes? Why was he not by himself in some quiet, sheltered spot, taking his ease? It was he who had himself drawn these crowds around him. These shepherdless sheep he was calling unto him that they might find in him the Shepherd they really needed. His was a heart not only to feel, but to think, plan, provide, and extend help. Those wounds he meant to bind up, that utter helplessness he would replace with strength. Or, to drop the figure: those poor sinners he would lead to the fountain of pardon and peace; those erring souls he would give the divine truth of salvation. His tenderness was moving him forward on his great errand of compassion, and that errand was to gather these people to himself, cleanse them from sin, and make them pardoned, happy, thankful children of God.

Nor has he changed since the day when he sat on the hills of Galilee and was moved by compassionate yearning to help. He is the same compassionate Savior today, and his heart still goes out to all these poor sufferers on earth to relieve them of their burden of sin and guilt, and all the bitter sorrows sin must bring upon them here and hereafter unless he takes that burden away. Hear him still calling: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And they that come experience what so many did there in Galilee, what David of old has put into these beautiful

words: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters; he restoreth my soul.”

## II. Mark Its Strength

For next to the tenderness of Christ’s compassion mark its strength. “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among them.”

That shows Jesus at work in his compassion dispensing the help he has brought. Look at this work — a whole land full of helpless, lost sinners there in Galilee; and single-handed Jesus begins to bring them what they need. Many a weary mile he walked for the sake of those people, many a busy day and week he had thinking only of their interest. No place was too small, that he should have passed it by; yet also no crowds were too great that he did not minister to them all. His heart went out to them in compassion, but in compassion which meant actual deliverance and help. He preached and taught them the Gospel of the kingdom, the Word that shows how a poor sinner may be saved by trusting in the mercy of God and in the merits of the Savior he has sent. He told of the Father who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. He told how he had come to seek and to save the lost, by giving his life as a ransom for many. He told and showed by living examples how he could and would forgive repentant and believing sinners all their sins and make them children of Abraham, yea, children of God. He told how he bestows the life that no death will ever harm, and how that life will be crowned by him in everlasting glory at last. And that men might realize once for all that all these were not empty words and valueless promises he sealed them by almost countless miracles of the most gracious help. Poor sufferers for whom there was absolutely no help from men arose sound and whole at a word or touch from this great Helper, the promised Savior indeed. What a glorious figure, the great compassionate Christ, dispensing help with his own hands through all that spiritually wretched land of Galilee!

O, you will say, would that he would do that yet, come to our greater land America and preach and work miracles here, that we too might be helped! In his own blessed way he has anticipated every wish of that kind, by arranging to put forth his work through others. His compassion is behind his words when here in Galilee he said to his disciples: "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest." As he saw all the need of men, so he saw in advance all that his grace and help could and would accomplish in men. It was like a harvest, ripe for the cutting and hauling in. While his words apply-first of all to what was to do in Galilee, we know that his compassionate heart thought of all other lands as well, for he was come as the Savior of the world. And that is why he planned to do his great work of gathering the harvest by means of helpers, men like his own disciples fitted and trained to preach and teach exactly as he would have them that precious Gospel of the kingdom of salvation to men everywhere. He told the disciples to pray God to send such men. That prayer of theirs was answered by their being sent first. The prayer has gone on and on, and it ought to rise with deepest earnestness and solicitude from your heart today: "Lord of the harvest, send forth laborers into thy harvest." Perhaps God can answer your prayer somewhat like he did that of the disciples in Galilee. If he has given you a son who may be trained as a true man of God to help proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ as he wants it proclaimed, then pray that he may send that son and make him the man for this work. Or if you have no son who may thus be sent, pray that he may accept and use your help in getting other men's sons and in furnishing what now is needed for the necessary training. For the harvest is more plenteous than ever, it extends literally to the ends of the earth, and there are still but few laborers as compared with all the work. Let the great compassion of Christ kindle something of the same compassion in your heart, that the great work he began and for which he laid the foundation in his suffering and death may be done by him also through you.

### **III. Hold Fast Its Comfort**

When thus the tenderness and saving strength of Christ's compassion reveal themselves to us, a mighty call comes to our hearts to grasp and hold fast

the comfort of that compassion.

“When he saw the multitude he was moved with compassion on them.” Those compassionate eyes are ever upon us also. We are never left alone with the crushing burden of our sins, and with the load of ills that grow out of them and are augmented by the hurts which other men’s sins inflict upon us. When we stumble and fall, when men rightly or wrongly turn against us and forsake us, when we are left alone, broken and outcast perhaps, weeping in lonely despair, one great and loving heart beats in tender pity toward us. It is Jesus in his compassion, the Jesus who once walked in Galilee and now looks down from heaven upon us. One of the great painters has depicted him extending his compassionate arms to receive us; and another has shown him with the poor sufferer pillowing his weary head upon his loving breast. These are faint efforts to bring home to us what his pitying heart really holds. Take your Bibles and read from St. Luke’s fifteenth chapter the parable of the good Shepherd finding his lost sheep, the parable of the prodigal son received by his forgiving father, and from the next chapter the parable of poor Lazarus, relieved of all his ills, carried by the angels of God into Abraham’s bosom. They all come from the compassionate heart of Jesus and reach out to enfold us too in their saving comfort.

And remember, this is more than the compassion and comfort of men, who may pity us greatly and do what they can to help, but are never able to take the load from our souls. The great compassion of Christ brings us the Gospel of the kingdom, the good news that the power of Christ’s grace and mercy embrace us also, to pardon every sin, wipe away every stain, and in-state us as the children of his kingdom to live in that kingdom under him as our Savior King forever. That is why he called for laborers to help in his harvest, for true ministers of the Gospel to bring the gifts of his kingdom to us all who need them. When that Gospel now is brought us, let us recognize the compassionate heart of Jesus in it and the precious pardon it brings us from his very heart. That takes the terror from our consciences smitten with the conviction of our guilt, the fear out of death when its dark shadow draws nigh, the despair out of the judgment to come which we know we must face. The Gospel of the kingdom opens heaven’s kingdom for us, and bids us enter all its rest, peace, and joy. It gives us this blessed treasure as the unspeakably glorious gift of Jesus our compassionate heavenly King. What of the few ills we have to bear when soon the day will break which is to usher us into the kingdom of eternal blessedness? Look at the compas-

sionate hands which took with divine power so many a disease from poor sufferers while the Savior walked among men. That same power, only in all its fulness, will take the last burden of suffering from us at last and lift us into the eternal happiness where now he awaits us.

Hold fast the comfort of Christ's compassion, and sing his praises every time you are made to feel its tenderness and strength in his blessed Word. It is thus that he comes to you now that you may cling to him in faith, until at last you shall see him face to face and with the multitudes of the blessed join in the songs of heavenly praise.

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## Outlines

The dominating thought of this text is the compassion of Christ, in fact it fills the text from the first word to the last, and the sermon should be according. If an application is made to compassion on our part, this should be only after the compassion of Christ has been most adequately portrayed. We may thus use Matthew's own words: "He was moved with compassion"—when he saw the shepherdless sheep (the great need pictured by this figure) — when he beheld the plenteous harvest (the deliverance pictured in this figure) — Or, throwing the emphasis on the present time: How the compassion of Christ still goes out to us: in the Gospel of the kingdom — proclaimed by his faithful laborers — to deliver us from our sins (figure of the sheep) — and gather us to himself (figure of the harvest). — The prayer for laborers in God's harvest: Christ's compassion lays it on our lips — our compassion is to utter it — God's compassion will answer it. — The greatest of all harvests: the gathering in of souls — by means of the Gospel — through our prayers — to the praise of Christ's grace.

### **Christ is Filled with Compassion**

1. His eyes — 2. his hands — 3. his voice show it.

### **Christ's Compassion Our Comfort**

1. Our woe touches his heart.
2. Our woe moves him to help.

## **The Great Harvest Field of the Kingdom of God and What it Requires**

1. Christlike compassion.
2. Christlike intercession.
3. Christlike work.

## **The Dimensions of Christ's Compassion**

1. Deep as the source of all our woe.
2. Broad as the world of sufferers.
3. High as the help from heaven.

# **13. The Revelation of Jesus' Power When He Walked Upon the Sea. The Fourth Sunday After Epiphany. John 6:16-21.**

And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea, And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid. Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went. (John 6:16-21)

NO MAN KNOWS JESUS except he know adequately the power of Jesus. The moment we grasp and hold aright that he is indeed the almighty Son of God, that it is literally true, all power is given to him in heaven and in earth, we will read in a new sense every word, especially every promise of his, our faith will become a different thing more nearly like what it ought to be, and our life will assume a new aspect, one of confidence, hope, and joy. That is why in this Epiphany season a special text is introduced to reveal to us the power of Jesus. When we are through contemplating that, we ought to sing as the poet himself did:

“All hail the power of Jesus’ name,  
Let angels prostrate fall!  
Bring forth the royal diadem  
And crown him Lord of all!”

Think what it means that Christ walked through the raging billows of the sea, with not as much as one drop of spray wetting him, like you walk over

some beautiful lawn, through some vine-bordered path, down some tessellated pavement. Think what it means that at his mere will the storm that had howled all the night long with unchecked fury died instantly to a zephyr breeze, and that the little boat which twelve men had been able by main force to row only about three or four miles all night long against wind and waves, at his mere touch was transferred instantly across the far waters to the very harbor it had tried to make. Then apply that to yourself, your troubles, dangers, doubts and fears, your sighs, prayers, faith and hope. It will give you just what we all need: the right idea of Jesus.

Open your hearts then to

## **The Revelation of Jesus' Power When He Walked Upon the Sea.**

### **I. As It Is**

First of all, see it as it is.

Up there on the mountain side beside the sea the multitude whom Jesus had fed so wondrously that afternoon with only five little loaves of barley bread and two little fishes had wanted to make him an earthly king. That was their idea of Jesus' power and what they thought they might be able to get out of it. Of course, they were impressed by the miracle, but only by the earthly side of it, as Jesus himself tells them: "because ye did eat and were filled." They never saw who he really was; they never grasped what he really brought them; they failed to put that and his other miracles properly behind his words and teaching; they went away with a shallow faith, as poor as they ever were, save for the one good meal they had gotten when hungry. To remove his disciples from any such thoughts, and then once more to show them what kind of a king he really was, Jesus made these men set sail in their boat toward evening to cross the sea to the city of Capernaum on the other side, while he stayed where he was and went up into the mountain again himself alone. So they set sail, those twelve disciples of his, good fishermen and sailors that some of them were. It promised to be a pleasant trip of some two hours at most across the placid waters. They did not know, but Jesus knew what this trip was to teach them. They were to see his power as it really is.



They had not gone far till darkness overtook them. Thick, black clouds covered the sky, a great storm set in. The waves so gentle before rose higher and higher and lashed their little craft with angry foam. Hurriedly they furled their sail and put out the oars, keeping head on against the wind to save the boat. The storm never abated, and so they labored on through the three hours of the first watch, through the three of the second to midnight, then on through the next watch another three weary, long drawn hours. Would the day never come? the storm never cease? They were all exhausted when the fourth watch came, with no relief in sight. And in all those weary, dismal, desperate hours they had rowed only some three or four miles, the harbor still far, far away. That was part of the revelation Jesus intended for them. What was all they had or could possibly do, against these mighty forces of nature? Like a nutshell they were tossed on the heaving deep. To see the power of Jesus as it really is we must see that our power is altogether nothing. Only when we hold the two together rightly do we see what we ought to see.

Then the miracle occurred. It was the fourth watch. All at once one of the Twelve cried out and pointed with his hand. The rowers paused, and every eye looked in the direction indicated — there walked a man upon the sea! “A specter, a phantom!” they cried; superstitious fear smote them. “An evil omen!” they thought — they would never reach shore. Nearer and nearer came that man walking on the sea, till all at once a voice, calm, strong, masterful, rang out across the raging billows — the voice of Jesus! — “It is I; be not afraid!” The Lord Jesus Christ walked on the stormy sea. The great waves fell smooth as glass before his feet — an even path formed before him — neither storm nor spray touched him — and so he walked upon the sea! How could it be? There is only one answer, and it went down into the hearts of those twelve men tossed in their little boat: his almighty power controlled the sea, the waves, the storm. Did they marvel when live tiny loaves grew under his hands to be enough for 5,000 men? Here the mighty storm that filled all the sky, the great waters that formed the sea, the rushing of a thousand waves as they piled high and sank low, acted as his humble servants. They beheld the infinite power of God, when Jesus Christ, the Son of God walked upon the sea.

But it was the power of God, not to destroy, but to help and bless. Jesus was walking toward the boat. And when the fears of those twelve men subsided, and they called to him to come to them, he walked to their boat —

motionless it lay in his smooth path, and without an effort Jesus their Savior stepped in. Then again his power shone forth. All in an instant the storm was gone, utterly gone, as on that other occasion when Jesus had commanded the wind and waves: "Peace, be still!" Nor was this all. While astonishment covered their faces, as the disciples looked, the whole scene was changed. Away out of sight of land they had been a moment before, now their boat was riding at ease in the harbor of Capernaum close to the shore. There were the houses in the dark of the early morning, and a few dim figures moving on the shore. What had happened? Something that we must all learn ever anew: Jesus, the Son of God, their Savior, had used his power in their behalf. No wonder they fell on their faces and worshipped him, saying: "Of a truth thou art the Son of God!" O let us too see that power as it is, and worship our Savior God.

## **II. Read It Into His Words**

The revelation of Jesus' power when he walked upon the sea you must first see as it is, and then read it into his words.

Here is his mighty word: "It is I; be not afraid!" The disciples could not help but read his almighty power into that word, for it was being fully displayed before their very eyes when the Savior spoke. But why should they or we ever be afraid when he who here said, "It is I," is ever and ever the same. Always all power is his in heaven and in earth; always all the elements of nature must do his bidding; always countless hosts of angels stand at his beck and call; always every foe lies prostrate beneath his feet. Be not afraid, the Savior's almighty word cannot fail.

Read his almighty power into all that he has done for our salvation. It was the Son of God who took our sins upon his almighty shoulders — he, and he alone could bear them. It was God's great Son who met our enemies sin, death, hell, and Satan and compassed their utter defeat. Who could have fought that fight and triumphed, save he alone? His almighty power carried him on high to sit on the throne of his glory above. Those humble feet, that once walked the earth and then the sea, stand now at the throne, where all the angels of God and the souls of just men made perfect worship in endless glory. O all you poor sinners, realize that God's almighty Son is your Sav-

ior. Back of all his precious Gospel is his infinite power to make that Gospel just what he says it is — life and salvation for us all.

Read his power into all his invisible work in the world. “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose.” Rom. 8:28. There are no laws of nature, there are no oppositions of men, there are no invisible powers of darkness, but what Jesus, our almighty Savior rules in the midst of them. When he wills they grow calm and still and all their rage ceases; when he bids them they bring us where he would have us. With his hand over us, with his heart ever near us, why should we be afraid?

So with every one of his precious promises. When his Word tells us to be “content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,” Heb. 13:5, his almighty power is behind that promise and he makes every syllable of it good. “Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me,” Ps. 50:15. “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear,” Is. 65:24. “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son,” John 14:13. Why do so many of these precious assurances mean so little to us, and why do we fail so often to rely on them? Because we do not read Christ’s almighty helping power into them. Because we are always setting limits to that power, as if it can and must help us only in certain little ways that we figure out. Those twelve disciples never dreamed of Jesus coming to them by walking over the sea into their boat; nor did they dream in all their hours of painful rowing how Jesus all in an instant would take them out of the storm and waves to the very landing in the distant harbor. We sing indeed with fervor:

“Commit thy way, confiding,  
When trials here arise,  
To him whose hand is guiding  
The tumults of the skies.”

But unless we keep revelations like Jesus walking on the sea, revelations of his limitless power, before our eyes, our words will after all be empty and bring us no real comfort.

What is true of the promises of earthly help is equally true of the great promises of salvation. “That whosoever believeth in him should not perish,

but have everlasting life,” John 3:16. “That every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day,” John 6:40. “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” John 11:25-26. Too lightly these and similar words of his almighty power fall upon our ears. Their tremendous significance must be reinforced for us by these revelations of his real power, when earth and sea and sky instantly do his bidding, when countless angel hands fly with holy ardor to carry out his slightest commands, when death, the grave, and all the powers of the world to come move obedient to his mere will. Then, and then alone, do we begin to realize the reality of what our almighty, glorified Lord said: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life, freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.” Rev. 21:6-7.

To steady our hearts and keep us from sin, let us read the almighty power of Jesus also into every one of his threats. “He that believeth not shall be damned,” he is judged already, he shall never see life, he shall be cast into outer darkness where there is howling and gnashing of teeth. Shall we ever think of challenging the omnipotent wrath of him who uttered these threats for our warning? There could be no greater blindness or folly. With David of old let us call to ourselves and all men: “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that, put their trust in him” Ps. 2:12.

### **III. Base Our Faith Upon It**

The revelation of Jesus’ power when he walked upon the sea we must see as it is, read into all his words, and thus also put it back of our faith.

We confess it Sunday after Sunday: “I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,” but do we show that we really have this faith? When we look close we often find that faith exceedingly languid. It does not run to him in prayer in every need, generally going to other helpers first; it does not worship him in proper humility and trust, with holy ardor and zeal; it does not walk with lively hope, as if heaven were really open above us, and every step taking us nearer to its glory; it will not confess him before men

as it should, nor fight the good fight of faith, putting on the whole armor of God, and laying hold with both hands on eternal life; it does not rejoice to run the way of his commandments, strong in love of him, putting on the new man, as indeed created in Christ Jesus unto good works. And one of the reasons of this slowness, coldness, and ineffectiveness of our faith is our inferior idea of the Lord whom we say we believe in and to whom we declare we belong. We must put the revelation of his infinite greatness and power behind our faith.

That morning when the twelve disciples of Jesus climbed out of their boat in the harbor of Capernaum, Matthew tells us, “they came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.” That was an entirely different thing than the effort of the multitude on the previous day to make Jesus an earthly king. What made it different? They realized the divine power and glory of Jesus — that lifted up their faith and made it come out full and strong. It is exactly what we must get out of this and other revelations of his divine sonship and almightiness. Why feel and act as if help for us is doubtful in distress when our Helper is the omnipotent Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us? Why ever feel ,sad and discouraged, as long as we know:

“When he makes known his pleasure,  
The counsel of his will,  
That in its utmost measure  
Will he at last fulfill”

And this is cowardice of ours, before his enemies, it is actually ridiculous when we know that they are nothing but chaff which the wind driveth away. And shall our love be slack, our service weak, our good works few and poor, when his almighty love has made us God’s own children, and all his heavenly heart is bent on working out our salvation? O let faith realize who it is to whom it clings, a Friend, Benefactor, Protector, Lord and Master, King and Ruler, who holds all heaven and earth in his hands and whose limitless power is all directed for our highest temporal and eternal good. Put the revelation of Christ’s eternal power back of your faith and you will find the strength you need and the joy that will make your life what it ought to be.

Behold the Son of God in him who walked mid storm and waves upon the sea. His power supports his every word. And blessed are they who make

that power and the love that wields it the rock of their faith now and forever.

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## Outlines

The subject of this text on which, of course, the theme must be built, is its inner significance, the revelation it makes concerning Jesus, and the import of this revelation for us as his followers. Some will be inclined to allegorize the text, since this is comparatively easy, but this always loses some of the strength of the text and makes a weaker, if more flowery, sermon. We have displayed here: The infinite and beneficent power of Jesus when he walked upon the sea — what a revelation — what consolation! — Jesus walking on the sea is to give us a proper conception of his greatness — he is the omnipotent Son of God — the all-efficient Savior — our everlasting hope and trust. — Jesus, Master of the storm and sea — what that mastery means — why that mastery was revealed. — One word shines out with supreme splendor in the text, and many will desire it as a theme: “It is I; be not afraid!” — I, to whom all power is given — I, whose power is for your benefit and help — I, whom you must love and trust. — Christ Kyrie, come to us on the sea! — “While the waters nearer roll, while the tempest still is high —” Hide me, O my Savior, hide, till the storm of life is past — “Safe into the haven guide; O relieve my soul at last!”

### **“All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name!”**

1. Realize that power.
2. Trust that power.
3. Glorify that power.

### **The Voice of Christ upon the Waters: “It is I; be not Afraid!”**

1. The voice of power supreme over all the forces of nature.
2. The voice of assurance supreme over all our fears.

3. The voice of promise supreme over all our need.
4. What shall we answer that voice?

### **“It is I; be not Afraid!” — Get rid of your Fears.**

1. Not indeed by underrating danger and overrating your own ability.
2. But by learning the power of Jesus and trusting his help.

### **Why Jesus Walked upon the Sea.**

1. To reveal his infinite power.
2. To prepare his disciples for his Word.
3. To indicate the triumph of his work.
4. To conquer all fear and establish faith.

# 14. The Feast of the Soul. The Fifth Sunday After Epiphany. John 6:30-35.

They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. (John 6:30-35)

"Ho! all ye starving souls,  
That feed upon the wind,  
And vainly strive with earthly toys  
To fill an empty mind;

"Here wisdom has prepared  
A soul-reviving feast,  
And bids your longing appetites  
The rich provision taste."

WHEN JESUS SPREAD HIS TABLE in the wilderness with earthly bread 5,000 men were only too glad to sit down and eat, but when he invited some of these same people to eat the heavenly Bread of Life, they turned away — it was not what they wanted. Men still are very anxious to care for and to feed their poor earthly bodies, soon to be turned to dust, but their immortal souls seem not to trouble them at all. And yet what shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world and lose his own soul. Thank God for earthly bread, but thank him a thousand times more that in Jesus Christ he has spread for us



## The Feast of the Soul.

### I. For Soul-Hunger

That feast is intended for soul-hunger.

The people in our text who listened to Jesus telling them of the Bread of Life vaguely felt that there was something beyond earthly bread and treasure that they needed. That is why they said: “Lord, evermore give us this bread.” It was the effort of Jesus to make them realize fully what they needed, in order that then he might satisfy that need by giving them himself and the salvation he had brought.

When the children of Israel journeyed through the desert God fed them with a wonderful bread called manna, which he caused to lie every morning, except the Sabbath, in little round pellets on the ground around their camping place. All they needed to do was to go out and gather it, and then prepare it for eating in all kinds of ways. It was a miracle continued for almost forty years. But Jesus tells his hearers that even this wonder-bread was not the true bread. It fed only the body, it stilled hunger only for a time. It was thus exactly like our own food today — for the body, for a little while. And bread is by no means an exception. It is thus with everything earthly — our clothes last for the body only so long, our houses fall into decay at last, our wealth is only for this life, and often takes wings before that life is over, our joys are all like flowers withering in the end. That would not be so bad if we were like the brute creation about us, intended only for a brief existence on earth, their lives then disappearing forever like the flame of a candle when we blow it out. It ceases to exist. But God has given us immortal souls. We are to live forever, and even our bodies are to be joined again to our souls after death and to exist with them to all eternity. The moment we think aright of these things, all earthly treasures and satisfactions appear in their true light — they are for a day, while we are for eternity. And the first question of soul-hunger begins to stir us: What have we that will give us satisfaction, happiness, blessedness forever? And the answer is: Nothing — as we find ourselves here among all the fading things of earth, absolutely nothing!

But soul-hunger cannot stop here. It must ask: Did God make us so? create us for a blessed eternal existence, and yet leave us without the very gifts

which would produce that blessedness? We have the answer in God's revelation as to how he made man, in his own image, holy and blessed, in harmony and fellowship with God and heaven, to live eternally in God's presence, like his own holy angels. Why are we not so now? — drifting here amid empty treasures, withering pleasures? You know the answer of God's revelation: sin has ruined and robbed us. It has cut us off from God, from holiness, righteousness, blessedness: it has weighed our souls down with guilt and brought us the certainty of punishment here and hereafter, and the fear that this punishment now already inspires. Sin has even darkened and deadened our souls so that we are blind to our own guilt, indifferent to our own loss and danger, ignorantly satisfied with what we know cannot last, and thus drift to the brink of eternity. Read the 90th Psalm, and you have God's own description of what our life is amid these vanities, far from him in sin. And that is exactly why Jesus comes to us, and calls to us, laying bare all our desperate need, and holding up to us the deliverance and satisfaction he has made ready for us. He opens our eyes, he stirs our hearts, that we may see the emptiness of all earthly things and begin to long for release from sin and guilt, for fellowship with God again, and for the life, joy, and glory that shall never fade. That is soul-hunger, and without it there is no salvation. For this soul-hunger God has prepared the feast of the soul in his own Son Jesus Christ. Behold, he calls you today; Come, eat of the true Bread out of heaven; stop trying to find satisfaction where it can never be found, your soul needs what God alone can give you in his Son. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled"

## **II. The True Soul Bread**

The feast of the soul which God provides for you gives you the true soul-bread.

What was it that Jesus told the Jews when they came to him the day after he had fed them so wonderfully with only five loaves? He urged them to seek, not the meat which perisheth, but the meat which endureth to everlasting life. And then he offered it to them, saying; "I am the Bread of Life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

It is a figure, of course, but perfectly plain when we see who Jesus is and what he has done for us. Bread, even that for our bodies, is the gift of God. He alone in his wonderful way lets it grow out of the earth that we may be fed. Even more so the Bread our souls need is his gift. But just as our souls are not from earth and clay, but the breath of God's own mouth, so the Bread they now need in their sinful, sad condition is one that also comes, from heaven, from God himself. It is God's only Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Do you ask how we need him, and how he is the Bread for our souls? It is because no power on earth, only the eternal Son of God himself, and he only by his holy blood shed for our atonement on the cross, can rid our souls of the guilt and penalty of sin, and thus join our souls again to God as his children forever, and heirs of his eternal joys. We are justified, writes the holy apostle, that is freed forever from the guilt and penalty of our sins, "by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Rom. 3:24. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace," Eph. 1:7. We were redeemed, writes St. Peter, "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot," 1 Pet. 1:19. Our souls need a Redeemer from sin, a Deliverer from their lost condition, a Savior from death and hell, an eternal and all-gracious King and Lord to open heaven for us once more. This is Jesus who "is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption," 1 Cor. 1:30. He is the Bread of Life, the soul-bread we need.

But we must add the Gospel, the precious Word and doctrine in which Jesus reveals himself to us in all his redemptive grace. So he himself proclaimed to the Jews: "I am the Bread of Life." He had his holy apostles continue the proclamation. We ourselves have their word as God made them write it for all time by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, and now we are able to read and hear it. When God made his Son the Bread of Life for our souls he meant that this Bread should indeed be ours, for us to partake of it. There may be plenty of the finest bread in the world, and yet people often starve because it is not their bread, but far from them. So, because Jesus and his grace is made ours by his Word and Gospel, this Gospel itself is called the Bread of Life for us, or with the other figure, equally significant, the Water of Life. God's grace is complete, lacking nothing; intending to feed our famishing souls he gave us the Redeemer in the Gospel of salvation, indeed and in the fullest sense the bread from heaven for our souls.

### III. Soul-Eating

The feast of the soul sets this heavenly bread before us and bids us eat — it is soul-eating.

Do you ask how the soul can eat? Jesus gives answer: “He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” To eat the Bread of Life we must receive our Redeemer Jesus Christ by faith as our only Savior into our souls. To eat spiritually is to believe and trust with our souls.

The whole work of Jesus among men is to make us realize who he really is, in order thus to create confidence and trust in our souls. He comes with his truth dispelling our false notions about sin and its eternal consequences. He comes with his love winning our hearts to appreciate what he has done to atone for our sins. He comes with his greatness impressing us with his deliverance as indeed all-sufficient with God. All three, his truth, love, and greatness, act as a mighty influence to draw us unto him and to awaken faith in us that he is indeed our Savior, and that clinging to him we are safe now and forever. Thus to believe in Jesus Christ is to eat the Bread of Life and to experience its heavenly power.

The soul that eats thus will never hunger or thirst again. How can it? When my sin is gone, my guilt purged away, what more can I want? “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us,” Ps. 103:12. “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” Is. 43:25. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” Ps. 32:1-2. With our sins gone our souls are truly satisfied, for we are then the children of God again. “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” Gal. 3:26. “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” John 1:12. “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” Rom. 8:17. Can our souls desire more than these guarantees of heaven and eternal glory?

Alas, that so many souls will not eat the true Bread from heaven, will not trust the only trustworthy One, but prefer to trust themselves or the foolish

words of men who give them other counsel and advice. Can there be greater folly than to cast aside God's son and rely on our own works, that may seem good to us, but that God has told us are full of sin and even if good could not cover our evil works? Can there be a more fatal mistake than to decline the one pardon which cost God so much and which alone he says will suffice, and try to enter heaven with excuses which we may invent, or the false estimates of sin which others may persuade us are correct? Let no man mislead you with vain philosophy — except ye eat by faith the true Bread of heaven, ye shall not see heaven, nor taste of its joys. Faith saves, because it holds to the true Savior.

## **IV. True Soul Life**

And so we add, since the true Bread from heaven is called also the Bread of Life, that the feast of the soul gives us the true soul-life.

Sin and death are indissolubly linked together. God warned Adam of that, and when Adam sinned he learned by his own terrible experience that it is true. The soul exists, indeed when the curse of sin is on it, but it is shut out from God and blessedness, and that is death. This death is on every soul that lies in sin. A man with such a soul goes on with his earthly affairs as if little or nothing were wrong, for his soul is hidden within him, but there is nothing in his soul save this hidden curse of God. When his earthly life goes out, his soul sinks with the weight of that curse into darkness and night. "Depart from me," says Christ, "ye that work iniquity." "He that believeth not shall be damned."

From this curse Christ, who is the Life, has come to deliver us. But our deliverance can be only this, that we take him, who is the Life into our souls and thus ourselves become spiritually alive again. That is why he calls himself the Bread of Life, which if a man eat 'by faith he shall live and never die. Here the heavenly Bread exceeds all that earthly bread is able to do, even as God's Son is infinitely greater than any earthly thing we can compare him to. Earthly bread cannot make a dead man alive, it can only help to keep the living alive for a little while; and earthly bread must be eaten daily anew even for this. But Christ taken into the soul dead with sin expels the death and puts life in its stead. Christ made ours by faith joins us by that faith to himself and to heaven, the home of life. No bodily death can harm

that life. When we who have the true soul-life in Christ leave our earthly home, Christ lifts our souls to himself, that where he is we may be also. His word is: "Because I live, ye shall live also." John 14:19. And the apostle writes: "Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Gal. 2:20. And again: "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." Rom. 14:8. Thus to be the Lord's is to have the soul-life, which shall never die.

Thank God for the feast of the soul which he has prepared for us poor sinners in his Son, our Savior. It is intended for soul-hunger; it brings us the heavenly soul-bread; it enables our souls to eat by faith; and gives us the soul-life that never dies. Blessed are the guests at this feast; they shall eat the bread of eternal joy in heaven.

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## Outlines

The entire text centers in Christ's declaration: "I am the Bread of Life," so that almost every proper theme will turn on this word. We may take the word itself: "I am the Bread of Life," and divide: 1) "The bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven." 2) Which "giveth life unto the world." 3) And "he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." — Or: The Bread of God — Christ — faith — life. — Or: "My Father giveth you the true Bread from heaven." — His Son. — Life through his Son. — Life through faith in his Son. — The Epiphany idea may be utilized in the sermon, since the text presents a revelation of Christ in his saving grace: How Christ revealed himself as the Bread of Life: — he revealed our need of this Bread (for all other bread fails to give us life, even Moses' manna) — he revealed the power of this Bread (it alone bestows deathless life) — he revealed the only way to eat this Bread (cometh to me, believeth on me).

### **Christ's Wonderful Word: "I Am the Bread of Life."**

1. O food divine!

2. O eating and drinking that satisfies!
3. O deathless life!

# **15. Let The Greatness Of Jesus Show You Why Faith And Unbelief Are So Decisive. The Sixth Sunday After Epiphany. John 3:31-36.**

He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. (John 3:31-36)

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE who have trouble to see why the Bible promises so much to faith and threatens so severely against unbelief. It seems to them as if salvation and damnation ought not to be decided in this fashion. Secretly they feel as if there is a sort of injustice in this decision. Here is a miserable sinner, a criminal perhaps, like the malefactor on the cross, or the prostitute in the house of Simon the Pharisee, and these people believe, and lo, heaven's door swings open before them; while here are men of standing, respected and honored in their communities, like the Pharisees of old, with great men like Gamaliel among them, governors, princes, kings perhaps, whose names adorn history, some of whom men call great, and yet just because they did not believe in Jesus they are to be damned forever. No, we hear some say openly, we believe no such doctrine; either God is going to be kind to all and allow them all to enter heaven at last, or he will surely take all who have tried to do right, and banish only those who are utterly vi-



cious. This is the doctrine that appeals to people, not this old Bible doctrine which makes everything turn on faith.

What shall we say? The doctrine of works is as old as heathenism and the blindness of sin. It is the devil's bait at which these blind sinners like to bite and be caught. It is the doctrine that needs no Christ, no Bible, no church, in fact often enough does without them, or uses them only as a pretense. The damnation of God is sure beyond a question to all who follow this doctrine to the end. But the doctrine of faith is God's own revelation, the central light in all the Bible, the crown of Christ's blessed work, the one hope for every sinner, the joy of all who believe. Here you have it again in the blessed words; "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." And here you have this doctrine explained by what precedes it, namely by what one of God's own prophets proclaimed concerning Christ in whom we must believe. Hear his word, and

**Let the Greatness of Jesus show you Why Faith and Unbelief  
are so Decisive.**

## **1. A Simple Thing To Enter Heaven?**

Some people think it is quite a simple thing to enter heaven. Just try to be good a little, and the doors will swing open. Will they? Who really knows? These people who think so, or God who dwells in heaven? I believe that God alone knows, can tell us, yea has told us. What does he say? This, that it takes God's own Son to admit anyone to heaven. He alone has eternal life to give; no man can get it without him. And this is why faith and unbelief are so decisive.

Faith bows to the Son of God, acknowledges that he has the keys of heaven and hell, worships his greatness and mercy, honors his name as the only Savior. What does unbelief do? It ignores, rejects, spurns the Son of God, and declares it will obtain everlasting life without him. Do you see why faith and unbelief are so decisive. Imagine a great palace which the king has given to his son. Do you suppose any beggar can enter and live there who insults the king's son, mocks at his greatness and goodness, and boldly tries to live there in spite of that? Why, a thousand retainers of the

great prince will put him where he belongs with his rebellion and presumption. Those mighty palace gates open only at the prince's command. And he will surely make his word good that he will admit none but those who esteem him for what he is and honor his royal name. That is why we are told by God's Son "that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father, which hath sent him."

And so we say with God's holy Word: faith and unbelief are decisive the moment we think of the greatness of Jesus. FAITH HONORS JESUS THE SON OF GOD, UNBELIEF SPURNS HIM. No man can hope to be received by Jesus except he honor him by faith.

## **2. Jesus' Word and Gospel**

I marvel at people who think it makes no difference how they treat Jesus' Word and Gospel. They neither read nor hear it; they live and die without paying any attention to it. And they think they will be saved. Will they? They might know if they glanced at that Word. Even honorable men count their word dear. They keep their word. Can God, and the Son of God be less honorable? "He that cometh from above is above all," declares his holy prophet; and again: "He that cometh from heaven is above all." Can he possibly break his Word, just because unbelievers presumptuously deny it? "What he hath seen and heard that he testifieth," says the prophet of God, namely what he saw in heaven, what God himself bade him declare and promise, that he told us in his Word. Do you for one moment think he will deny his own Word, God's own Word, because of any man, to say nothing of wicked unbelieving men?

Now this is his Word: God has opened heaven for sinners under certain clear and gracious promises. The Son says you cannot enter with your sins, these must be removed. You cannot remove even a single one of them, but the Son says: I will do it for you. It requires my blood shed for your sins in expiation. I have shed it. With it I will wash away your sins now, then you shall enter. That is his Word. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 1 Pet. 1:18-19. Now

I ask you: having given that Word and promise, which involves his own blood, do you suppose God's Son will keep it?

Unbelief rises up proud and haughty and says: What do I care for the Son's Word? I deny that Word! So unbelief casts it aside, and will not even look at it except to raise objections against it. What would you do, if you had given your word, at such a price to yourself, with such love and mercy, to miserable sinners who deserve not one syllable of it? Faith accepts that Word. It is the very essence of faith to do so. It knows it can enter heaven only on the pardon and grace named in, that Word, and it is filled with delight to have it to rely on. That is why Peter of old said to Jesus: "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." Jn. 6:68-09. Faith lets the Son wash away the sin with his blood, and holds back no single sin. It is sure that this is enough, just as the Son says. Will the Son now make good his Word? You know he will.

And so again you see from the greatness of Jesus why faith and unbelief are so decisive. Faith accepts the Son's Word, unbelief denies it. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but his Word shall not pass away. Jesus is God's Son, and only they who are covered by his Word and promise can hope to be received by him.

### **3. Any Good Government Will Crush Rebellion**

It is surely an elementary fact that any government worthy of the name will suppress and crush rebellion against its authority, and acknowledge only its loyal and obedient citizens. It is simply astounding to see people ignore this fact when it comes to God and his Son Jesus Christ, and imagine they can live and die in rebellion against Christ and still enter his kingdom above. Hear the Word of God, spoken by the prophet sent by God and to whom he gave his words, and his Spirit in large measure properly to tell us these words. He declares that "the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand." David said the same thing long ago. God declares: "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion." And that King announces: "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for

Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Ps. 2:6-9. On his throne of glory Jesus now rules all things, and his divine power is even over all his foes.

Let no man deceive himself because this power is now coupled with patience and does not at once crush the rebels. It is the Son's grace which seeks to win his foes to obedience, faith, love and loyalty. His apostle writes: "Despise thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Rom. 2:4-5. For remember that this divine patience has its limits. Do you know what happened to the ancient world when it persisted in its rebellion against God? It was destroyed in the flood. What was done with Sodom and Gomorrah when its cup of disobedience was full? Fire and brimstone from heaven consumed it. And when the Jews would not have this man Jesus to rule over them, exhausting the patience of him to whom God had given all things, Jerusalem was razed to the earth, not one stone left upon another, and the Jews made a sign to all coming generations, without a country, without a government, scattered over the face of the earth, but still Jews, separate and distinct from all other people. Those are the Son's warnings against all who rebel against him. Unbelief is rebellion against Jesus, the Son whom the Father loves and has given all things into his hands.

It laughs at the authority of him who when he had risen from the dead and was about to ascend to his throne above declared: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Unbelief ignores that power, orders its life contrary to it, and yet thinks this Almighty King whom it scorns must admit it to heaven. Will he do it? For this very reason that he may bar all rebels out the Father gave him that power. Faith bows to the divine authority of Jesus. With David it kneels at his feet and calls to all men: "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." Ps. 2:12. Faith obeys the voice of this heavenly King and worships his glory. Its one delight is to do this forever. Therefore, whosoever believeth shall be saved.

Here once more see by the greatness of Jesus why faith and unbelief are so decisive. Faith bows to the Son's rule, unbelief rebels against it. As

surely as God's Son has all power, so surely will he cast all unbelief from him and receive to himself only those who come to him by faith.

## 4. Gifts

Men like to receive gifts. Our children are happy at Christmas time because of the gifts they then receive, and older people are just as happy to receive them. Make a man some costly gift, one which fills some great need of his, and see how he will act? Give a poor pauper clothes, food, a fine home, and a sackful of money — what will he say? Give some poor prisoner liberty and honor again — what will he do? Lift some sufferer from his bed of pain, out from the shadow of death, to life, health, and happiness — what response will you get? But one of the incomprehensible things among sinful men is that the moment the Lord Jesus comes to lift them out of the beggary, bondage, and deadly malady of their sin many of them hurl his gracious hand away and scorn the gift. And when he shows them that this gift is nothing less than eternal life, a gift so great that only God's Son can give it, because all things are in his hand, a gift so precious that it cost his own blood before even he could bestow it, for this very cause they will have none of it. Where every reason in the world, and the most elementary good sense prompt to instant acceptance of such abounding grace of God, unbelief refuses, and proudly declares it will do without it, or earn life and salvation with its own efforts.

Of course, for any man to accept this gift he must admit that he needs it and that he cannot get it by his own reason or strength. That is just what unbelief will not do, although it is so plain that a child can understand our plight. Unbelief will not have heaven itself if Jesus must give it. But faith acknowledges our poverty, guilt and bondage, our doom and damnation under sin, and when the Son of God comes, mighty to save and to bless, with his blood-bought gift of heavenly life and salvation, faith grasps it with both hands, crying: "Lord, I believe, help mine unbelief." Faith hears with joy the divine declaration: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2:8-9. Faith presses to its bosom the precious promise of Jesus: "Because I live, ye shall live also." Jn. 14:19. And then faith overflows in grati-

tude, worship, and praise. “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” 2 Cor. 9:15.

What will the mighty Son of God do meeting this double response to his heavenly gift? What would you do if you offered such a gift? Here is the answer: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” Yes, the greatness of Jesus shows why faith and unbelief are.

## **5. The Associations of Faith and Unbelief**

All that we have said culminates in the significant associations which faith and unbelief produce, and it is surely remarkable that anyone should refuse to see their significance. Here is God’s holy prophet, St. John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus, proclaimed him as the Savior, and turned his disciples, and tried to turn all other men to him. The company thus formed continues to this day. Faith draws men to the great Son of God; faith binds them together as his followers. They are one in Christ Jesus, of the household of God, no more strangers and foreigners to him and his kingdom.

Unbelief does the very opposite. When St. John pointed the Pharisees and Sadducees to Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world they went in a different direction; they would not be identified with his followers. And this has gone on likewise to the present day. When Christ’s confessors assemble, the crowd of unbelievers is found elsewhere. Song, praise, prayer, confession, preaching, benediction resound, unbelief loves different music. See its halls of pleasure crowded to "the last place — standing room only. See its secret assemblies with rituals and ceremonies minus Christ. Anything to occupy the soul so it may remain far from the blessed Son of God.

Does that mean nothing? Will the eternal Son of God ignore it when he himself and his blood-bought salvation form the line of divisions? It is impossible. Coming events cast their shadows before. The associations into which men settle here will continue hereafter. When the last great day comes the followers of Jesus will still be his followers and he will acknowledge them as such, and the despisers of Jesus will also be such, and these too will he treat as such. Then as now they will not, cannot stand together; the one will be placed at Christ’s right hand, the other on his left. For “he

that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not shall not see life.” They who loved the narrow way will reach its shining goal; they who were determined to keep to the broad way will not be able to avoid the terrible destination to which it leads. If Jesus were nobody, if his salvation were little or nothing, then it might make no difference whether in faith you joined his followers, or in unbelief joined other unbelievers.

But now the eternal greatness of Jesus shows us why faith and unbelief are so decisive: faith joins to his followers, unbelief joins to his foes. The ways that part here into faith and unbelief end over there in eternal salvation and eternal damnation.

That, then, is the reason why the Bible promises so much to faith and threatens unbelief so severely. They who reject Jesus, the eternal Son of God, their Savior, deny his Word, rebel against his rule, cast away his gift, scorn his followers, cannot stand beside those who honor that Son and Savior, accept his Word, bow to his rule, take his gift, and remain among his followers. Put away the notion as if this were a question about a few poor human works more or less. It is a question of the great eternal Son of God and of the relation of your immortal soul to him. Let his grace make that a relation of faith, then and then alone heaven is yours.

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## Outlines

The main avenue into this text lies in its statements on the greatness and glory of Jesus. Back of these statements is his divinity — he is the Son. But his greatness here shines out in the revelations he is able to make, in the power that is placed in his hand, in the life he is able to give, in the judgment he will surely render. These statements as they stand may be used to outline the sermon. Any one of them may be lifted into prominence so as to embrace the rest. We add one tentative suggestion: Eternal life is the gift of the Son: this he brought from above — offers by his grace, Word and Spirit — assures by his power.

### **Christ the King of Salvation.**

1. His royal descent.

2. His royal rule.
3. His royal gifts.
4. His royal servants.

## **The Revelation of the Son's Greatness and Glory.**

As displayed in his person — Word — rule — supreme gift.

## **The Eternal Supremacy of Jesus.**

1. His revelation is supreme.
2. His salvation is supreme.
3. His domination is supreme.



# The Lenten Cycle

## 16. The Secret of Jesus' Beatitudes. Septuagesima. Matt. 5:1-12.

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (Mat 5:1-12)

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS full of blessedness!

Yes, you may say, that kingdom far away beyond the skies; and a sigh fills your heart that you are here below amid the sin and misery of earth. Hear then that the kingdom of heaven has come to earth — Jesus the King brought it and all the blessing that is in it. He brought it both to awaken and then to still that sigh in your heart. Here in his Word he opens the door of that kingdom wide, lets all its blessed treasures sparkle before us, reaches into our very hearts to draw us into that kingdom, and having drawn us to

keep us in it and make us partakers of all its blessings. Blessed — blessed — blessed! you are to be blessed, your immortal soul, your whole life, now, every day that you live, and forever.

But how? Indeed there is a secret about it, for thousands have looked at these beatitudes of Jesus, have heard them preached on and perhaps have in some fashion preached on them themselves, and yet have failed to discover the secret, and remained unblessed. What is

## **The Secret of Jesus' Beatitudes?**

It is a double secret. The key to the first four beatitudes is just the one word: *Receiving*. The key to the second four is the additional word: *Returning*.

### **1. Receiving**

How can any man say that the poor, the mourners, the meek, the hungry and thirsty are blessed, when it is all too evident that these are the very ones who lack everything, have lost everything, and thus are not blessed, but unblessed? But Jesus does say it, and his words are true beyond the shadow of a question. He purposely says it in a way that sounds strange, even contradictory to ordinary ears, in order to challenge attention and make us seek and discover the secret of his words. And that secret when discovered lights up his words like heavenly sunshine, revealing them to our hearts as the inner truth of all God's grace and gifts to us poor sinners. I have told you the secret. It is *receiving*, just receiving, nothing but receiving, from the gracious hands of God through our great Mediator Jesus Christ.

Of course, this means real receiving, not like when you give somebody a Christmas gift that really he does not want and takes only with his hands, wishing that you had kept it. Such a thing is impossible with the kingdom of God and its blessings, for here the receiving is one of the soul, either an actual receiving or none at all. There is no sham receiving for the soul. Between God and your soul no pretense is possible.

And now you see why the poor in spirit are blessed. These are souls who have come to realize their poverty, stripped and robbed of every true inward good by sin, standing as absolute beggars in God's sight. Whatever they have is only temporal, counts only for this life; if it be ever so much,

money, goods, friends, kingdoms and crowns even, it does not count one particle for the soul or the hereafter. The moment a soul realizes that, ceases to deny, forget, or hide it, but comes just as it is to God, bringing nothing but its emptiness, loss, absolute need, that moment, though it seem utterly unblest, Jesus declares it blest, for the soul that comes thus can do the one essential thing which none other can do it, can receive; and the whole secret of the kingdom is to receive, just to receive, just to let God give, not one or two helps, but everything, absolutely everything. Blessed are they that have nothing, for coming thus God can and will give them everything. Blessed are the beggars that come with their souls as beggars to God, for to these alone can and will he give his kingdom and in it make them kings.

To teach us this secret Jesus adds the mourning. When we realize just how beggarly and destitute our poor sinful souls are, we are bound to lament. How can we help it — unless we want to deceive ourselves? But this very sorrow and lament opens the door for God to give us the true comfort he has prepared for us, the cleansing from sin through Jesus' blood, the adoption as children in his kingdom and all the cheering gifts and promises which go with that. It is once more the secret of receiving and just receiving. Dropping all false comforts, simply coming with no comforts of ours to God, for him to comfort us in Jesus, our Savior.

The same secret lies in the blessing of the meek. The soul that feels its poverty and is filled with lament will not act proud, mean, arrogant, vengeful toward others. Filled with its own utter unworthiness that soul will be humble, suffer wrong patiently and without resentment, like Jesus who reviled not when he was reviled, nor threatened when he suffered, but committed himself to God. But this very meekness which puts itself into God's keeping Jesus calls blest, for it is again the attitude of receiving, just receiving. The meek shall inherit the earth — God himself will make a place for them, and they shall hold it as a gift and heritage from him. "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked," for he has it with God's blessing, and the wicked have all that they grasp for themselves only with God's curse. That is why they cannot prosper in the end. God's promise to his children stands, that when they seek first his kingdom and righteousness, he will add unto them all other things; the Bread of heaven will have beside it the bread of earth. Only the great Giver ever makes the greatest gift the chief thing, and adds the lesser gift in such measure and

manner as will aid us in having and holding the greater one, and the meek are ever content with the portion of earth which he assigns.

And so the first circle of the beatitudes closes by naming this highest gift directly, in order that none of us may mistake it. It is righteousness; and beneath it shines this secret of receiving, just receiving, once more. Righteousness is the approval of the heavenly judge. The terrible mistake of men is that they think they can win or earn that approval by efforts of their own. Everlastingly they bring their virtues, good deeds, charities, sacrifices, hundreds of them just self-invented, saying to God: Surely, O God, now I have done enough and you must let me pass! But all our righteousnesses are filthy rags. Blessed is the man who has learned that, and comes as he is to God:

“Just and holy is thy name;  
I am all unrighteousness:  
False and full of sin I am;  
Thou art full of truth and grace.”

His one plea is: “In my hand no price I bring.” But will not God cast out all who come thus? That is the secret of the beatitudes. They who have no righteousness of their own, and do not try to deceive themselves and God as if they had one, but hunger and thirst after righteousness, holding their empty hands and hearts out to him, to them God himself gives the righteousness he has prepared for them, the all-sufficient, perfect, divine righteousness of his Son Jesus Christ who paid his life to purchase it for us. They shall be filled is Christ’s assurance — their souls shall shine with this righteousness and taste heavenly satisfaction. Daily and richly God will bestow it upon them, giving them in Christ Jesus grace for grace, till at last they stand in the glory of everlasting righteousness in the kingdom above.

That is the secret of the first four beatitudes. O learn it by the grace of God! The kingdom, its comfort, its earthly blessing, above all its blood-bought righteousness, no man can have except God give him these true riches of the soul; and it is impossible for God to give them, impossible for us to have them, except by our learning this secret of his giving and our simply receiving them. Blessed are they who let God give, for they indeed shall receive and possess.

## 2. Returning

And now the other side of the secret. The reflex of God's giving and our receiving the true soul treasures is that inevitably there follows a *returning*. No soul can receive the treasures of God's kingdom without returning to the Giver a life filled in some measure with the power and fruit of these treasures. Thus the last four beatitudes grow out of the first.

The soul that has tasted the mercy of God in Christ Jesus through his pardon is bound to show mercy to others. Therefore, blessed are the merciful who return to God this fruit of his own mercy to them. For Christ's sake they forgive those who wrong them, bearing no grudge or ill-will. For his sake they help the needy, relieve the suffering, clothe the poor, aid the stranger, and try to relieve the misery caused by sin in the world. And doing it for Christ's sake they ever direct those who suffer to the fount of mercy they themselves have found. And lo, the God who made them merciful through Christ rewards them for showing this mercy, by letting his own mercy continue to bless them. It is a secret indeed — returning because we have received and thus receiving again.

But beware lest you do any of this returning with secret mercenary thoughts, with a selfish, hypocritical reckoning as that you will do this or that for God in order that you may get more in return. That is a cunning trick of the world. Only the pure in heart, who are true and sincere shall be blessed. For God ever sees the heart and its secret intent. If there is true gratitude and love to him who has done all for you, his blessing is bound to follow. They who reckon always on what they shall get, shall be told to take what they got and go, as Christ told us in one of his parables. But the pure in heart, the faithful and sincere shall see God. "Come ye blessed of my Father," says the Savior, "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." As his true children the Father will assemble them about him, and they shall be filled with the bliss that goes out from his heavenly presence.

Next to mercy and purity of heart Jesus puts the spirit of peace in our return to God. Blessed are the peacemakers, who have tasted of the peace of God in Christ Jesus which passeth all understanding, who have thus learned to love and follow the heavenly Prince of Peace, and in the power of his peace now work for peace on earth among men. As far as in them lies they

live at peace with all men, and help others to forsake quarreling, strife, contention, and war, both within and without the church, pointing them to the true fountain of peace which they have found. Can we make any other return to him from whom we have received so much? But even as we make it Jesus says God's blessing is the answer from above. We shall be called the sons of God, acknowledged as his own true children and heirs of his eternal kingdom of peace. What a returning, followed again by such receiving!

Yet let no false expectation mislead God's children while in this wicked world. Though they be merciful, sincere, lovers and makers of peace, and preach and live the Gospel of peace, for this very reason they will be hateful to the world and meet its persecution in countless ways. As the wicked world crucified Christ, because he wanted to turn it from its wickedness, so it has no use for the Gospel of Christ and its followers when they try to do the same thing. This hostility slumbers at times, but it is always there, and who knows how much of it we are to bear? The more we stand for the Gospel of the kingdom in its fulness and truth, the more will we have to suffer for it. Let no man think the days of the martyrs are past, they always return. But is this not sad and deplorable? Jesus answers with a double blessedness, and adds: "Rejoice and be exceeding glad!" How can he? Because this very suffering places us correspondingly higher in the kingdom, along with the martyr prophets of God in the olden times. "Great is your reward in heaven," in fact, greater than we can now conceive. All God's children shall enter heaven and shine there as the very stars now, shine in the sky, but some shall shine with a greater glory, even as one star now surpasses another in glory. So shall they who suffer innocently, for righteousness' sake, for Christ and the Gospel's sake, shine above with greater glory. Again it is a most wonderful returning. We who ought to be glad to suffer everything for him who suffered so much for us, shall have this undeserved and abounding reward for the little we may be counted worthy to endure for him.

That, then, is the secret of the beatitudes of Jesus — a divine secret. Grasp it in true faith; it is Jesus' blessed revelation: the secret of receiving, just receiving, without a shadow of money or price, from the infinite grace of God in Jesus, followed by the secret of returning from what we have thus received, only to receive still more. Blessed are you if the revelation of this secret is not in vain for you!

## Outlines

This is one of the great texts in the Bible and should be treated as such in preaching. We may take it as a string of jewels which Jesus places on the neck of the believer: The chain of blessings in the Beatitudes. Both ends are fastened by the diamond of the kingdom, the sum of all the blessings, and there are pendent from it three great plain jewels: grace; care on earth; imputed righteousness; and three jewels banded in gold: mercy answered by mercy; purity coupled with the vision of God; peacemaking and the name of sons of God. — There is a straight perpendicular split down through the entire text: first the persons are named and described; then the blessing is pronounced. Each of these halves again divides horizontally in the middle, the first half dealing with the essentials of faith, the second with the central marks of the life. Divisions for the sermon may be made accordingly. — One may use the figure of the ladder: the heavenly ladder in the Beatitudes: the rungs upon which we lose ourselves; those on which we find God (Ahlfeld). — Or we may take the figure of the seals: The seals of divine blessedness — treating the eight seals in simple order, or in two groups.

### **The Portal of the Kingdom with its Inscription: Blessedness**

1. It is open to all who lack blessedness,
2. All who enter receive blessedness.
3. Those who have entered continue in blessedness.

### **The Great Question Which The Beatitudes Leave With All Of Us: Is This Kingdom Of Heaven Yours?**

1. Do you answer its requirements?
2. Do you enjoy its possessions?
3. Does its power appear in your life?

### **The Key to the Kingdom of Blessedness**

1. The grace which prepared this blessedness.

2. The grace which bestows this blessedness.
3. The grace which works in and through this blessedness.

## **The Kingdom of Christ is Full of Blessedness**

1. It is full of blessedness when we look at our faith.
2. It is equally full of blessedness when we look at our life.



# 17. Whereunto shall we Liken our Generation? Sexagesima.

## Matt. 11:16-24.

But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children. Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee. (Matthew 11:16-24)

[Jesus loved comparisons] {smallcaps, because when properly handled they are highly effective. He uses two of them in our present text, the one is the play of children in the marketplace, the other the stern realities in the history of heathen cities. In both of them he goes to the root of things, reaching men's consciences and hearts. By his effective comparisons he exposes the hardness of men's hearts, if possible by his mighty words to break down that hardness and put repentance in its stead.

If Christ should speak of our generation would he use the same or similar comparisons? He surely would, for these things were written for our learning that through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope. In fact, these comparisons are offered to us that we today may apply them to ourselves. Christ wants us to ask of our generation, as once he did of his:

**Whereunto shall we Liken our Generation?**

The answer is plain: *Use first the figure of the wayward children in the marketplace; then add the reality, the cities of the Jews and Gentiles of old.*

## **1. The Wayward Children In The Marketplace**

We know how children like to copy their elders. But do we know too how many times they illustrate the very spirit of their elders? That is what Jesus saw when he watched them playing in the cities where he wrought his greatest miracles. Many a time some of them were bound to play wedding, and when the rest would not follow and skip in dancing to their whistling of the wedding march, they complained. Again, some determined to play funeral. They started to wail like the old Jewish mourning women hired for that purpose. They demanded that all the other children should beat their breasts like the Jewish mourners used to do. When these others would not those who started the game complained again. It was exactly the way their elders acted when God sent them the Law and the Gospel through the great prophet John the Baptist and through his own Son Jesus Christ. They wanted to play wedding when John preached repentance to them; they wanted to play funeral when Jesus preached the kindly grace of the Gospel of salvation. Mark it: they felt that they alone had a right to choose the game. God had to do as they saw fit; and because he did not, and in fact could not, they complained and turned from him. They called his prophet and his own Son hard names when these did not do and say what they wished. They wanted the Law of God changed to suit their notions, and the Gospel of God altered to meet their whims. Thus it was that they lost both. They were like their own trifling children, never realizing their hour of grace, refusing all that God was offering them.

Is our generation like that? Alas, it is! The way of salvation has not changed, cannot change. It is still as narrow as the true repentance which the Law would work. But men cry out against it and demand to have it wider so that they can keep some of their sins. It is still as wide as universal grace, admitting every poor sinner who repents. But men object to that and will not go in alongside of this or that other great sinner. They want the way narrowed by setting up their own good deeds and righteousness before God. Always there is this presumption of men that they know, and that the way to heaven must be as they say, as they want it. They will not listen to the di-

vine Word; they change that to suit themselves. And when we refuse to change it with them, they revile us and oppose us, as once they did with John the Baptist and God's Son Jesus.

Let God's Word attack the worldliness of men, and see whether they will leave it. They must have their carousing and dancing, their shows and plays, their Sunday amusements and other so-called good times, no matter how much sin and godlessness is involved. Do not be so strict! is the cry constantly raised. Let the Law show men their natural depravity, and the impurity of their hearts. At once you will hear complaint. The old pride begins to boast of good intentions, of a better self, of goodness in this and that, of excellent deeds here and there like some of these Gospel-less preachers, who praise every miserable sinner they bury and somehow squeeze him into heaven. Never for a moment will this blind pride see that all such boasts are hollow, for the very thoughts and desires of our hearts are stained and diseased with sin until Christ cleanses us. Let God's Law point men to their individual sins, the one to his anger and oaths, the other to his lies and hypocrisy, the third to his selfishness and greed, the fourth to his shameful thoughts and lusts, the fifth to his touchiness and pride, and all of them to their lack of the fear and love of God, to their distaste of his Word and ways, and what will you hear? Men will tell you they do not want that kind of preaching, they will revile you, do without preaching, but go on in the same old wicked course as before.

But surely they like the Gospel? They treat it in the same way. It is preposterous to them that Christ's blood should take away our sins — they think it ought to be done, if necessary at all, in some other way more to their notion. They feel it an insult to be asked to come only as humble sinners to God's mercy-seat in Christ; if they deem it necessary to come at all, they want to come as they think would be proper and fit. When God reveals the mysteries of the Gospel, his own wonderful being, the holy Trinity, his Son both God and man, the cross as the only door to heaven, the sacraments as fountains of salvation, regeneration in Baptism, Christ's body and blood in the Holy Supper, what happens? The haughty reason of men sets itself up to judge these divine mysteries. Just like foolish children people think they know better. In thousands of cases they follow their own folly and deny what God reveals. Nor does the life outlined by the Gospel meet their superior approval — to love and worship God is too much trouble; to read and study his Word takes too much time; to sing, pray, hear, confess, and give

— well, they know something better than that. Such is the story of the Law and the Gospel in our generation.

Now the great question is how much of this picture of Christ's generation and our generation is duplicated in us. Look close — are you really in accord with God's Holy Word as John the Baptist of old and as Jesus have brought it to you? At how many points do you dislike it, set it aside, conveniently forget it, love, trust, obey something else? Do you give it the time and attention it ought to have? Do you feel the loss, the shame, the regret you ought to feel when you fall short of what this Word sets before you? Is your soul's hope really based on the cross, and on the cross alone, and your life bound fast inwardly to Jesus as your Savior alone? Christ drew this picture of his generation for you. Make it the mirror for your soul, and whenever you see the sins of his generation repeated in our own generation, then always ask first of all how much of just that sin and folly is still left in your own heart. Cleanse that away by the grace of Christ, and then help others do the same.

## **2. The Cities Of The Jews And Gentiles Of Old**

Whereunto shall we liken our generation? Its distaste of God's Word and ways is coupled with its hardness of heart, and therefore we must bring in comparison with it, not a figure only, but also the reality of the old Jewish and Gentile cities.

It is Christ, the infinite Judge himself, who here tells us that the Jewish cities in which he did his mighty works showed themselves worse, far worse than the old pagan cities, like Tyre, Sidon, and even Sodom itself. How can he say that? Because unbelief is worse than blind pagan idolatry, and obduracy [being hardened] against all the grace and salvation in God's Son worse than open pagan shame and vice.

Surely, Tyre and Sidon were evil cities. Their people practiced the most abominable form of idol-worship, that of the monster god Baal, burning their own children in his iron arms, wallowing in lust to honor that god. And Sodom was worse still. Its sins literally cried out unto heaven. Its licentiousness was so extreme that to this day for some of its unspeakable sins we have only the name sodomy. God's doom was pronounced on Tyre

and Sidon; there is barely a trace of them left today. And Sodom with its sister city Gomorrah was overwhelmed by a rain of fire and brimstone from heaven, so that the very ground on which it stood was consumed, and to this day all that locality is a dead, lifeless, salty waste on the shores of what is rightly called the Dead Sea.

There is no question about the abominations and crimes of these old heathen cities, and of their merited destruction. But in one vital point, Jesus tells us, they were not as bad as were the cities of Jesus' own nation where he lived and labored so long.

They were not so obdurate, not so hard and desperate in their resistance. Works as mighty as those Jesus did, he himself says, would have made at least some impression upon them; but all these works of his made no impression upon the adamant hearts of his own Jewish cities. All his works did not stir their unbelief, did not shatter their self-righteousness, did not frighten them of God's judgment, did not lower their unholy Jewish pride. What if they did not worship Baal and do the vile sins of Sodom — the one thing that was worse than that they did: cast the miracles of the Son of God aside, spurned his work and his message, and after his work stand farther from God than before. As great as the light is against which men sin, so great is their guilt, so great shall be their judgment. As great as the measure of grace is which men receive, so great is their sin when they obdurately resist that grace, so great also is their judgment.

“That servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.” Luke 12:47-48.

That is what makes this comparison so pertinent to us. Where do we stand? Far above Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. We are in line with Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, in fact, we are given more even than these. Ours is the whole Bible, the completed work of Christ, the entire Gospel of grace in Christ, the church with all its ministrations and gifts, the long ages of its history and the cloud of witnesses, and martyrs even, that grace it. Now what is the result of all this grace in our cities? Thousands will not even go near the church, though its bells din constantly in their ears; will not even read the Bible, though it is scattered in millions of copies; will not even

name the Holy Savior's name in prayer; will not acknowledge that from the Gospel alone flow even the temporal blessings they enjoy. Woe unto this generation of flinty hearts and dead consciences! It shall be more tolerable for the men of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom in the final judgment than for them. Yes, there are others. They have their religion, their temples, their lodge chaplains, their rituals, their teachers, their so-called services. They may use even the holy name of Jesus. But how? His cross and blood, his holy ransom and sacrifice they eliminate. They have emptied the Gospel of all its Gospel truth; they have put in place thereof the old heathen philosophies, the old prideful Jewish self-righteousness and Phariseeism under new names. It is thus only another form of the same old obdurate blindness and resistance to light and grace. Woe unto this generation of sham Christians, perverts, not converts of the Gospel! It shall be more tolerable for Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom in the final judgment than for them. Would that the rest were true as they should be. But even among these many confess with the lips and deny with their hearts; join the church, but fail to join the Savior; hear his Word, but fail to do it. All this is open and plain in the sight of the eternal Judge. Woe unto these also, who cry Christ while thus they deny Christ! It shall be more tolerable for Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom in the final judgment than for these.

Mark well then what this comparison means, between those who had so little and those who have so much. How you treat what you have decides now, will decide then. Oh that we would wake up from this sleep of indifference as if the grace of God and all the gifts that go with it are a cheap thing with which we may do about as we please, and suffer little in consequence. Away with this coldness and hardness that lets all God's grace slip off from it as water from a stone. The very abundance of our grace multiplies the responsibility from which we cannot escape, once that grace has come to us. But O the blessedness of its possession, when our eyes are opened, our hearts melted by repentance, and the power of that grace becomes effective in our hearts and lives! No longer like foolish children do we call for this or that, while the true treasure is not even seen. No longer like the blind heathen do we stumble in the darkness only to disappear at last in night. Nor like those obdurate Jews do we cling perversely to our sham righteousness, only to receive the greater condemnation for rejecting the true. He who knows what the grace of God really means has his soul

cleansed, his life drawn upward to God, and an eternity of bliss awaiting him at death.

Those children in the marketplace, those cities blessed so highly, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, are set for our warning. God grant they may not be set thus in vain.

## Outlines

The text is largely negative. The negative always presupposes the positive and cannot be properly presented and understood without. The sermon will thus take care to present the proper measure of positive truth in expounding this negative text. — The text falls naturally into two sections, which may govern the sermon accordingly. The first section: men's distaste of the Word; the second: men's obduracy of heart. So we may cast the theme: What is wrong with our generation, and how may we escape that wrong? Against men's distaste of the Word let us put true love of that Word (knowledge, faith, obedience) — and against men's obduracy let us put true repentance. — The text is treated also as a call to repentance. Christ's Woe on the Jewish cities a call to us to repent: recognize his grace and gifts to you (Law and Gospel, John and Jesus; more even than the Galilean cities of old) — take warning from others (their distaste of the Word; their hardness of heart) — repent of our sins and believe. — Christ's woe marks the text When 'Christ began to cry Woe to his own generation: he meant to warn them of their growing guilt and impending judgment — he meant to turn them to his grace and pardon.

### Christ and the Spirit of our Times

1. He shows what is wrong with this spirit.
2. He announces what will become of this spirit.
3. He reaches out to free us all from this spirit.

### Christ's Woe on this Generation

1. Let its fickleness turn you to the wisdom of Christ.
2. Let its obduracy warn you to heed the mighty works of Christ.

3. Let its judgment drive you to accept the pardon of Christ.

## **When Christ Called Woe to the Cities of Galilee**

1. He exposes our guilt.
2. He warns us of judgment to come.
3. He moves us to repentance.

## **Which is the Worst Sin?**

We may look at it from different angles.

1. To reject God's Word — avoid it by gratefully accepting that Word.
2. To remain obdurate — avoid it by true repentance.
3. To despise and neglect God's grace — avoid it by thankfully trusting that grace.



# **18. The Story Of The Wicked Husbandmen: The Way Which Led Jesus To The Cross. Quinquagesima, Or Estomihi. Matt. 21:33-44.**

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. (Matthew 21:33-44)

THIS SUNDAY places us on the threshold of Lent — next Wednesday we enter that sacred, solemn season. It is the time when we and thousands of our fellow Christians meditate on the holy Passion of Jesus, following in thought the way that Jesus went till for our advantage he was nailed to the cross. While the Passion History as such is thus bound to occupy our thoughts in a special degree, it is Jesus himself who expands our vision to take in all that his mighty sacrifice involves. He does it in the parable before us, and in what he adds from the 118th Psalm concerning the chief corner stone. The

way which led Jesus to the cross reaches far back and is wonderful in every feature of it. Let me trace it for you in

## **The Story Of The Wicked Husbandmen: The Way Which Led Jesus To The Cross.**

### **1. It Is A Way Dark With Sin.**

Who is this man that planted a vineyard, made it safe by a strong protecting hedge, equipped it with a winepress and a guard-tower, and then let it out to husbandmen to care for it and return to him his portion of the fruit? It is God who made Israel of old his chosen people, gave them his Word and grace, sheltered them from all the idolatrous nations round about, appointed them a priesthood and spiritual leaders, in order that he might have from his people the fruit of faith and a holy life, and finally use them in sending salvation to all the world. What was the story of that vineyard, the history of the chosen nation? Jesus tells us. The very leaders of the Jews turned against God and used their position to make themselves independent of his grace and blessed plans. It is a story of sin, dark from beginning to end, and growing darker as it proceeded. For these servants sent by the owner of the vineyard to receive the fruit due him are God's holy prophets, sent to the chosen people one after the other. What did they receive? Instead of faith, abuse; instead of obedience, murder. The great prophet Jeremiah, Jewish history reports, was stoned, to death by the Jews, and the still greater prophet Isaiah was sawn asunder by order of the Jewish king. What a story black with sin! No wonder Jesus cried out: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee!" And afterwards the martyr Stephen: "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them, which showed before the coming of the Just One."

That dark story of sin shows us: the way which led Jesus to the cross. When Jesus spoke this parable he had his very murderers before him, a delegation of the Jewish High Council or Senate. In this parable he tells these men to their faces how they will complete what their wicked predecessors had done in killing the prophets, by killing him whom God had sent them now, namely his own Son. Jesus means himself when he says that last of all

the owner of the vineyard sent his own son to the husbandmen, but instead of reverencing him, they hated him worst of all because he was the son and thus the heir and rightful future master of the vineyard; and they cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. That is the story of the cross as it was actually enacted four days after Jesus spoke these words. The Jews took Jesus out of the city and crucified him on Calvary. Their black course of sin culminated in this most terrible crime of all. The people who should have been God's people cast out and slew God's own Son.

To see the story again, as Jesus here paints it for us with a master hand, must rouse our highest indignation. We feel like calling down all God's holy vengeance upon these men who cast out God's own Son. But it would be a desperate mistake to think that only the sin of these Jews is so black as to reject God's own Son. The fact is that their sin is the revelation of what lies in all sin, in yours as well as mine. Sin has no use for God, for his Word, or any of his messengers, least of all for his Son. These are all in the way when we want to do in sinning as we please, robbing God of the fruits of faith and obedience which we owe him. And so every man, by the measure of sin that is active in him, seconds and supports what the men of Jerusalem did when they rejected God's Son. As it all came from one source, so it is all in reality one thing, this sin which is in men's hearts. It is one wicked devilish power that affects us all. Look not then merely at the hands which led Jesus to the cross, but at the sin which moved those hands and ruled those hearts, and see that this is the black thing in your heart also. Every sinner connected with the tragedy of Jesus' death is a real representative of every other sinner in the whole world. Thus our sin slew God's Son. Well has the poet sung:

“O Lord! it was my burden  
That brought this woe on thee.”

And that is what it means to hear that the way which led Jesus to the cross was black with sin.

## **2. Beautiful With Grace**

Thank God, it was also beautiful with grace.

It was grace which planted that vineyard and planned to make the whole world a beautiful vineyard at last. It was grace which sent those servants, continued to send them, and finally sent even the Son. Now Jesus knew when he spoke this parable that in all the world never a man would do what he said this owner of the vineyard did. The very first servant any husbandmen would kill for an ordinary owner would make him use at once all the force of law against such men, and the last thing he would think of doing would be to place his own son where men like this could touch him. But this is the very thing Jesus wants us to note, for it reveals to us the full mystery of God's grace.

Here is a world full of sinners, all infected completely by the same black, hideous thing coming out in every one of them in all sorts of ways, and the whole of it opposed to God, denying him all that is due him, wanting to use all his gifts in its own godless way. Why does not God strike down all these sinners at once with the terrible might of the just and holy law at his command? Why does he wait one single moment, plant a vineyard, send his Word, his servants, his own Son even to men like that? There is only one answer: it is the unsearchable grace of God!

We deserve absolutely nothing — God brings and offers us everything. That is grace. We should be cast into outer darkness — God invites us into heaven, even sends his Son to bring us in. That is grace. With the devil from whom our sin comes we should gnash our teeth in hell — God opens his hands and heart to us to lift us to his own bosom. That is grace. But the very highest light of this grace is, that God did not withhold even his own Son, but sent him where his prophets had been killed before, sent him for our sakes, sinners that we all were in order that his grace might have its desire in the salvation of these unworthy, guilty, damnable sinners. Who can understand it? It would be utterly incredible if it had not actually all been done, and were not told us by God himself. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It is not expected that we should understand it; it is the mystery into which even the angels delight to look. For it is all unspeakably beautiful. This grace and love of God is his highest glory. Nothing else even in God is equal to it. "God is love" — our poor human lips can say no more. The whole way which led Jesus to the cross is illumined by this heavenly light; it is all beautiful with grace.

### 3. Straight with Purpose

But that means more, as in speaking of it we have already indicated. This way to the cross is one straight with purpose.

When we hear this parable of the wicked husbandmen it almost looks as if God's grace, marvelous though it was, was after all defeated in its blessed purpose. And when Jesus lets his Jewish hearers complete the parable, all they know to add is that those miserable husbandmen must be slain, and others put into their place. They leave out the main thing, that Son whom they cast out and slew. Jesus adds what they omit, namely the victorious purpose of God as it centers in himself, the Son. There shall indeed be a vineyard of which the lord of the vineyard shall have delightful fruit; there shall be faithful husbandmen who will work for and bring to him that fruit. That very Son who was slain shall bring it to pass.

“Did ye never read in the Scriptures,” asks Jesus of his Jewish hearers, “The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” The figure is changed. There shall be a wonderful building, a temple of God built of human hearts cleansed from sin, in whom God can dwell. His blessed purpose shall be accomplished indeed. Do you ask how? Look at the corner stone of that building — it is the stone rejected of the Jewish builders, Jesus, whom they slew, whom God made the head of the corner. As the corner stone controls every angle in the building, so Christ controls all these hearts that form the temple of God. God made him the head of the corner by making him the Savior of sinners, by making his death the penalty for our sins, borne by him who could bear them without perishing forever, instead of by us who would have perished in bearing them. He is the propitiation and satisfaction for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world; God laid on him the iniquity of us all. Therefore God also raised him from the dead, and set him forth to all the world as the one hope and help of sinners. “It is marvelous in eyes,” sang the Psalmist, and we echo his words. God alone could have formed such a purpose and plan for our salvation. God alone could have carried it into effect. See it then in all that was done by these wicked husbandmen; God used their wicked deeds in making Jesus our Savior from sin. The way that led him to the cross is straight with purpose, God's purpose of grace.

## 4. Glorious With Power

One thing more we must add: it is glorious too with power.

God rules in the midst of his enemies. Those Jews of old tried to defeat him, to set themselves up in spite of him. They murdered his prophets and slew his own Son; they thought they had triumphed. Of course, in all this they still claimed to be children of God; but whoever goes counter to his Word or tampers with that, no matter what he may claim, is against God. Men still do the same thing today and think they can succeed. The patience of God endures this opposition, but when his hour comes his mighty power will show itself. Well said those Jews, when Jesus moved them by the picture of the wicked husbandmen: “He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let his vineyard to other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.” Jesus gave them back their answer: “I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” He was on the way which led him to the cross indeed, but that way was glorious with power, for all these enemies the power of judgment. Soon Jerusalem would lie in smoking ruins, the Jews be scattered like chaff, their spiritual leadership gone forever. That mighty corner stone Jesus Christ — whoever falls on him in opposition shall have a brief triumph only, he shall be broken by that stone’s power, and the foe upon whom that stone shall fall in judgment will be ground to powder like the dust at threshing time. Mark well the way which led Jesus to the cross, its every step, as Jesus shows, is covered by his power.

Who now is in the place of those Jews crushed by Christ’s power? Who is this “nation” to whom the kingdom should be given, bringing forth the fruits of it? this wonderful building with the rejected stone as the head of the corner? That little band that wept with broken hearts when Jesus was slain has grown to a vast host through all these ages down to the present day. They are all those who follow Jesus in true faith and loving obedience as their Savior. Of them the holy apostle writes: “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” 1 Pet. 2:9. The very gates of hell shall not prevail against them, for the power of Christ is over them to keep them safe from every foe. Only let us see that we bring forth as we should the fruits of his king-

dom, we his people and our husbandmen, our preachers and pastors in the church. If Christ's power overwhelmed the falsity of the Jews of old, it will do no less with those who prove untrue today. But if we let his grace fill us with fruit, that power will bless us to the end.

Once more the way which led Jesus to the cross is revealed to our eyes in this parable of the wicked husbandmen. May we see it as it is: dark with sin — beautiful with grace — straight with purpose — glorious with power. That way Jesus went for us, that he might reach our hearts, free them from sin, fill them with his grace and gifts, and thus make God have fruit of us now and in eternity.

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## Outlines

It is remarkable how men succeed in preaching on this text without putting Christ into the center. One for instance has for his theme: The History of Israel in brief; followed by three parts: the vineyard, God's kindness; the servants, God's patience; the husbandmen, Israel's guilt. Yet the very climax and point of the entire parable and text is the SON. — Certainly: Christ foretells his own Passion in the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: The cause of it — the fact of it — the result of it. — Christ cast out and slain: the enormity of this deed — the divine purpose in this deed — the glorious outcome of this deed. — We may indeed put the wicked husbandmen into the foreground, if we do not let them obscure the figure of Christ. Perhaps a division like this will answer: When we think of the wicked husbandmen: let us think of sin — of God's grace in Christ Jesus — of his kingdom — of his judgment. — Or: The Story of the wicked husbandmen: what they had — what they did — what they lost — what they got. — Why did Jesus speak this parable of the wicked husbandmen? It was a mighty warning, though in vain; it was a great prophecy, and it came true; it was a glorious promise, and it has been amply fulfilled.

## How Jesus Entered his Passion

He knew:

1. The awful wickedness causing it.
2. The divine counsel controlling it.
3. The terrible tragedy crowning it.
4. The eternal triumph following it.

## **The Wicked Husbandmen and the Passion of Christ.**

Behold here:

1. The sin for which his death was rendered.
2. The sin by which his death was brought about.
3. The sin over which his death triumphs.

## **The Story of the Son and the Stone.**

A story of sin — of love — of redemption — of grace triumphant — of judgment.

## **The Great History of which Christ's Cross is the Center.**

1. The Jewish history which led up to that cross.
2. The cross itself.
3. The Christian history which flows from the cross.



# 19. The Sign that Decides. Invo- cavit. John 2:18-22.

Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said. (John 2:18-22)

IS THE GOSPEL REALLY TRUE? Sometimes a kind of unbelief stirs in the hearts of Christians even and tries to raise that question. We know that men around us raise it openly, and we know too the scoffing answers they give. The Gospel is true. It bears its own unmistakable stamp of truth in every part of it. Every one of its gracious gifts and blessings proves it true. They know who have these blessings. Is honey sweet? Taste it, and you know it is. The Gospel says it is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. They who have tasted it know and need no further proof. Is sunlight bright? They who go out and live in it know. The Gospel light says that it is brighter than the sun, as bright as God himself in his grace. They who walk in that light know. But there are men who are not satisfied with this proof, they demand something more decisive still; and they act as if they are going to be aggrieved if they do not get it. Well, they shall have even what they want —

## **The Sign that Decides.**

### **1. Unbelief Demanded That Sign**

Long ago, with men then exactly as now, unbelief demanded that sign.

Jesus had come as the Messiah and Savior promised of God by all the prophecies he had given his chosen people for a thousand years. Everything about him and his Word and work proclaimed him the Savior. But there were men who loved their sins so much that they wanted to take them along to heaven, and when this Savior came who was determined to separate them from their sins in order really to prepare them for heaven, they refused to believe in him as the Savior, and challenged him for a sign to prove that he really was the Savior. They wanted a decisive sign, not one which might be enough for willing believers, but one which would convince even them, the most unwilling and unbelieving. "What sign showest thou unto us?" they said, "seeing thou doest these things," claiming thou art the Messiah and Savior. It almost had a sound as if they were really fair. But in fact it was a denial of all the proofs Jesus had offered them in his heavenly grace, a denial of any proofs which his grace could yet add. For only unbelief, set on remaining unbelief, will ask to see a sign decisive beyond the signs of divine grace in Christ Jesus.

Let us learn that. There are two ways of asking for signs in regard to Jesus and the Gospel. The one is like the question of the frightened jailor in Philippi: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" or like the cry of the anguished father from Capernaum: "Sir, come down ere my child die!" or like that other father named Jairus: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!" or just like that wail of the Syro-Phenecian woman: "Lord, help me!" All these and others who feel their great need and helplessness, especially those who let God show them the terribleness of their sins, demand no extreme sign at all. They grasp at the grace that is offered them in Christ Jesus and find it satisfactory and blessed indeed. Like a hungry man, the bread is sweet to them; like a man sick unto death, they willingly submit to the healing hand of the physician. It is different with unbelief. It has no such inward desire, and refuses to have God awaken anything of the kind. If ever people of this kind feel a sense of need, helplessness, misery, they think they know where to get sufficient relief themselves, and with that they shift along. The humble bread of grace is the very thing their proud hearts will not taste; the sin that is ruining their souls like a deadly disease, they have learned to love so that never in the world would they have it cut out by repentance, and true righteousness put in place of it by faith in Jesus. And when Jesus comes to these people, they demand more than his heavenly grace, help, and redemption is able to do, as a sign that he is indeed the divine Savior. It is not true

that they would believe, if only a sign decisive enough could be furnished them. There is no sign to bring about faith and salvation, except the signs and works of grace. When John the Baptist in prison was troubled with doubts in his mind, whether Jesus was really the Savior, or whether there should be another, what answer did Jesus send him to revive and satisfy his faith? This blessed answer of his works of grace: “The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me;” Matt. 11:5-6. Let us learn to distinguish clearly, even in our own hearts, between the voice of faith, and the voice of unbelief. Only the latter demands the extreme sign, the last sign that decides.

## **2. Prophecy Promised That Sign**

Now prophecy promised that sign.

Since unbelief is bound to have it, unbelief shall have it. It is the sign of Christ’s victory, and thus the judgment of unbelief. And that is the sign that decides forever.

When the unbelieving Jews challenged Jesus for this sign he did not say there is no such sign. That is perhaps what they expected, intending then to scoff more than ever. The fact is that Jesus had this very sign in readiness; he would work it in due time. And so without a moment’s hesitation he answered their challenge: “Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.” This was the sign promised by divine prophecy which would settle forever even their unbelief. The answer of Jesus astounded the Jews. This beautiful Temple of theirs — they pull it down themselves? — when they were even now rebuilding it part by part, and had already at enormous cost and labor spent no less than forty-six years at this work? It sounded preposterous to them. And then Jesus saying he would raise it up in three days — would he use some superior magic, and do in three days what had already taken forty-six years and promised to take many more years still? They thought his prophecy absurd. That is the trouble with unbelief, it is blind. They did not see the evident mystery in Jesus’ words, which the apostle John points out to us, when he says that Jesus was really speaking of two temples, that grand Temple of the Jews and the temple of his own body.

These two belonged together, and in what would be done by the Jews and by Jesus with these two temples they would get the promised sign of Christ's eternal victory and of their own eternal judgment, to the everlasting undoing of their wicked unbelief. It was a mercy that the sign was delayed for a time and not wrought at once as the Jews demanded. By being given the prophecy of it first they were warned to desist; the time of the many signs of grace was continued, for there were those who would accept them and believe. Only when the measure of unbelief would be filled up, then — but then without fail — the final decisive sign for them would come.

The prophecy of the decisive sign which Jesus gave in answer to the challenge of the old Jewish unbelief is a portion of the prophecy of the same sign, only in still greater proportion, and with a decisiveness absolutely final, which is awaiting all unbelief now. For at his trial, when the Jews were condemning Jesus to death without a cause, he told them, and with them all unbelievers: “Hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” Matt. 26:64. What the Temple destroyed and raised up again stands for will take place as surely as did the destruction of that Temple, and the raising up of what that Temple signified. Thank God that here too there is a time of grace which delays the coming of the all-decisive sign, and how too multiplies the signs of pardon and grace in the Word and church of God, so that many are won from unbelief to faith. But those who in spite of warning and in scorn of all grace go on in unbelief shall not be disappointed in the end — they shall get the decisive sign, even as the Jews got their preliminary portion of it.

### **3. Fulfillment Wrought That Sign**

The word of Jesus came true: fulfillment wrought that sign.

The Jewish Temple was a wonder of God's grace, for in it and by it God dwelt among his people. But blessed as that was, no temple of wood and stone could really join sinners to the God of holiness and righteousness. It would require a better temple than that. Therefore, God had arranged for the Temple of the Jews to be for them a picture and image of that real and everlasting temple by which he would indeed join himself to us, purge away our sins and make us acceptable in his sight. That blessed temple foreshadowed and promised by the Jewish Temple was the human body of the Son of God

by which he would work out our eternal redemption. In Christ dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. That body of Christ was the temple in which our sins would indeed be removed, the temple by which we indeed might come to God.

Now you will understand the decisive sign which Jesus gave the Jews, and what that sign means also for us today.

The Jews hated Christ and all he brought them of divine grace and pardon. They took the holy temple of his body and nailed it to the cross. That is how they treated the true temple of God in which salvation came to them. Do you know what that did to the Temple which foreshadowed Christ? It destroyed that Temple also. They had worked forty-six years at it already; they worked forty-six years more. Then, six years after they had it done, the terrible fulfillment of Jesus' words came. By their own unbelief, by trying to destroy the true temple of their own Savior's body, their nation was destroyed, they were driven from the Holy Land, Jerusalem and their grand Temple leveled to the ground, not one stone left upon another. Their own unbelief had destroyed the Temple — and themselves! It was impossible for them to destroy the true temple of the body of Jesus. They killed him indeed, but on the third day Jesus raised his own body from the dead, glorified it by divine exaltation, then rose to heaven and sat on the right hand of God, — our Redeemer, our Savior, our mighty Lord and King forevermore. His judgment brought the fruit of the Jews' unbelief upon their heads. In that destructive and terrible judgment they had the decisive sign they had clamored for, rejecting every sign of grace. Then their scoffing stopped, but the hour of grace was gone. They had lost both temples, the one that pointed them to Christ, and Christ himself.

When Christ lifted the temple of his body from the grave and glorified it with divine power, then, St. John the apostle tells us, he and his fellow disciples recognized his great victory with the eyes of faith and remembered that this was the beginning of the sign of judgment which Jesus had promised the unbelieving Jews. They knew then that the destruction of that other Temple would come indeed and with it the destruction of those who in unbelief had demanded the fatal sign. It is written for our warning in these latter days. For now Christ sends out once more his Gospel and grace, but now to all the world. Remember the decisive sign in Jerusalem. It will be wrought once more, and then for the last time, for the new unbelief that will not accept the grace of Christ — the sign of another judgment, not for one

evil nation alone as then, but for all the world of unbelief, finally and forever.

## 4. Faith Today Is Warned By That Sign

With the holy apostles of Jesus faith today is warned by that sign.

Behind the blessed grace of Jesus there stands his power and majesty. He who died on the cross sits enthroned on high. Let no man treat his sweet words of pardon and forgiveness, his glorious words of eternal promise lightly, or demand any other sign than the work which this grace is now doing in lifting men from sin and restoring them once more to God. If ever a thought like that comes to our minds, let a look at the Jews as we see them to this day satisfy us — their Temple gone, their nation scattered over all the earth, outcast of God, yet preserved, a sign for all times and all men of the just judgment that overtook their willful unbelief. Many an effort has been made to build their Temple in Jerusalem again; in all these hundreds of years those efforts have never succeeded. And just as certainly as that judgment came to the Jews, so certain will the final judgment on all who refuse to believe now. They who demand more proof to remove their unbelief shall surely receive it in the end. When the Son of man shall come in his glory with all the angels of God about him, and shall sit upon the throne of his glory to judge all who have rejected him — then indeed all doubt shall vanish, but not in faith and joy, but in consternation and terror.

From that judgment faith alone delivers us. It knows that no sinner can escape his guilt except by the pardon of him before whom all sinners must appear in judgment. That pardon he bought for us with his blood and death on the cross, bearing in his own body the penalty of our sins. That pardon he offers us and now makes our own by faith. It is fatal to reject it, to raise up doubts, to hold fast to objections, to demand other proof than that which love and grace have provided. Let those who will, appeal to the sign decisive, and rejecting the warning of grace, meet the overthrow lying in their own demand. Faith takes the warning, is satisfied with grace, and lives in the joy and hope it gives.

Yes, there is a sign that decides. On the day of judgment unbelief will cease. Blessed are they for whom grace and faith are enough.

# Outlines

Nesselmann has the theme: “Christ’s Great Word of Consolation: Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” which he applies first to the natural body of Christ, and secondly to his spiritual body, the church. The second part, naturally, is largely inference. Three gates open into the heart of the text. The central portal appears in what Jesus said of the Temple, illumined by the word of John on “the temple of his body.” Christ’s mighty word on the temple of his body — a crushing reply to unbelief — a glorious ground of faith. The mystery of the temple destroyed and raised up again: it is the mystery of Christ’s passion and resurrection — it is the mystery of his judgment on the Jews and on all unbelievers. The second gateway is the strong note of victory. The victorious word of Christ: “Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up!” He spoke of the victory of his grace — and of the victory of his judgment. Or, we may say in a simple manner: Christ reveals the victory of his passion and death: a victory which established salvation — crowned faith — sealed the doom of unbelief. The third gateway is the question regarding the sign: The supreme sign — Christ’s passion and resurrection: its supreme grace — its supreme power — its supreme effect.

## **The Prophecy of the Two Temples.**

It foretells:

1. The certain judgment of unbelief.
2. The equally certain joy of faith.

## **The Temple of Christ’s Body.**

1. Destroyed on Good Friday.
2. Raised up on Easter Morning.

— KOEGEL.

## **The Riddle of the Two Temples.**

1. Its answer is the Christ who died and rose again.
2. Blessed are they who find the answer in time by faith.
3. Woe unto those who find it too late because of unbelief.

### **The Indestructible Temple.**

1. The body of Christ in Which God dwells.
2. The hearts of all in whom God dwells through Christ.

### **Christ Announces his Victory: “Destroy this Temple, and in Three Days I will Raise it up.”**

1. It is his victory for us.
2. Shall we share it with him?



# 20. The Significant Deliverance of Jonah from the Belly of the Great Fish Reminiscere. Matt. 12:38-42.

Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. (Matthew 12:38-42)

OF ALL THE MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE that of Jonah has received the most abuse from skeptics and unbelievers. First of all they fell upon the word "whale," and mocked at that, because the whale, with all its great, size, has a throat so small as to prevent it from ever swallowing a man. But the word "whale" disappears the moment the Bible is properly examined. Jonah himself wrote simply "a great fish," never naming it. When Jesus repeats the story in the New Testament he uses the Greek word "sea-monster," also adding no name. Only our English translator used the word "whale" in the latter case, and it takes little learning to know that in any argument we are bound to go back to the original word. Science knows more than one great fish or sea-monster able to swallow a man alive.

But the claim is made that it would have been impossible for Jonah to live in the belly of the fish. Impossible? Who is able to state in every case just what is possible and what not? Aside from the wonderful deliverances the Scriptures record, we hear down to this very day of the most astounding

cases of preservation in cyclones, explosions, earthquakes, accidents, and other dangerous situations. Men return alive of whom none of us would have thought it possible. Those who know God know too that his power and providence is behind these marvelous preservations. It is folly to deny it in the case of one of God's great prophets, and that when God himself declares it, when God's own Son twice corroborates it. It actually seems as if Jesus did this purposely in regard to the miracle of Jonah to settle in advance the scoffings of modern skeptics. He puts his word squarely against that of foolish men. And we have no trouble to decide which to believe.

But there is far more in this miracle of Jonah than the question of whether it really occurred or not. The Savior speaks of it to point out its mighty significance regarding, himself and regarding all men down to the end of time. He connects this miracle with his own saving work and with our own eternal salvation. It makes a tremendous difference on this account whether we believe his word or accept the contradiction of skeptics, a difference involving the salvation of our own souls. Give heed then to what Jesus says about

### **The Significant Deliverance of Jonah from the Belly of the Great Fish**

That deliverance prefigured the passion and resurrection of Christ; foretold the coming of the Gospel; and calls on us to prepare for the judgment to come.

## **I. Prefigured The Passion and Resurrection of Christ**

The deliverance of Jonah is one of the great miracles of the Bible, not because Jonah returned alive from the depths of the sea, but because his miraculous return was a picture of what God would do when his own Son came to work out our salvation. Jonah's deliverance prefigured the passion and resurrection of Christ. It stands forth as a shadow and image of the most blessed of all God's deeds, when Jesus was swallowed by death and the grave, when Jesus returned on the third day with eternal salvation for us all.

“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three night in the heart of the earth.”

The miracle of Jonah was designed by God. He could have delivered Jonah in a thousand different ways, without the great fish, without letting the fish swallow the prophet, without the stay of just three days in the belly of the fish, without having the fish cast him ashore again. Who can count the possible means of deliverance in the hands of God? But God chose this specific way of dealing with Jonah: he carried him down into the jaws of death; he kept him there three days; and then he sent him to fulfill his great mission. Why? Because, together with many another deed of God, this miracle wrought upon Jonah was to picture in advance the far greater deed God intended to do for the salvation of the world.

Thus the miracle of Jonah stands out as one of the great signs of God. Its very strangeness marks it as a sign, for even stranger, more wonderful and astounding was that other deed God purposed to do in our behalf. But the chief thing in this sign of God, as in all the others that point to our salvation, is the grace and mercy that God displays, to make us look to that greatest of all the gifts of his mercy which he prepared for us in his Son. So he kept the prophet alive when all men would have thought him dead and gone forever, yea, he brought him back alive to carry out the work assigned to him in the mighty city of Nineveh, This is what Jesus urged upon the Jews when they kept asking him to “see” a sign. They thought only of some astonishing sight. Yet what would it have profited them if Jesus had moved the sun to and fro in the heavens, blotted out the clouds with a word, set a thousand comets in the sky, or filled it with millions of falling meteors like sky-rockets bursting from the heavens? It would have been a display of fanciful power, and nothing more. What these men needed was a power to save, heal, help, and deliver. Such were the blessed miracles of Jesus — full of wonderful grace; and such was this miracle of Jonah, full of power indeed, but power directed toward a glorious goal, deliverance, salvation, mercy for us who need mercy first of all. The miracle of Jonah was a sign of the greatest of all God’s deeds of mercy. This was what Jesus wanted men’s hearts, and not merely their eyes, to see, and seeing thus to believe.

And so Jesus pointed to the great significance of this sign wrought in Jonah. Was it wonderful that Jonah should have been swallowed by the great fish and carried down into the dark caverns of the sea? God would do a greater thing, yet imaged by this smaller one to prove his purpose and de-

sign in advance — he would give his own Son into death itself to lie in its black caverns even as Jonah lay. Did it seem as if Jonah was lost forever, without hope or possibility of return? So God intended to place his Son, but in actual death, with all men certain that he was lost, and with all hopes placed on him seemingly swept away forever. And then those three days that Jonah lay in his living tomb — God counted them exactly, as the precise time set for his own Son to lie locked in the darkness of the grave — not an hour longer, not an hour less, for the one was to be the true shadow of the other. Then came what no man would have dreamed — out of the deep Jonah returned through the power of God — alive. The monster of the sea gave up his prey at God's command. Once more Jonah walked upon the earth. Surely, here the image is plain, and the hand of God visible to our eyes. For even so the monster, death, would open wide his jaws and at the mighty command of God yield up his infinitely more precious prey, him who was dead indeed, but could never be held by the bonds of death, God's own Son, rising from the tomb to live in majesty and glory for evermore. Slain for our offenses, he was raised on the third day for our justification. One more line completes the wonder sign. Jonah returned from the deep, went to Nineveh, and preached repentance to the multitudes of her citizens, and his work succeeded. It is a miniature of the great work of salvation which began with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead — out into all the world he carried the Gospel by his heralds of peace, and his glorious work has succeeded, like Jonah's, but infinitely beyond his. That is the significance of the sign of Jonah, made such by God and sealed as such by the death and resurrection of his Son. Faith reads the sign and thanks God for the saving work of his Son.

## **II. Foretold The Coming of The Gospel**

The significant deliverance of Jonah from the belly of the great fish in prefiguring the passion and resurrection of Christ at the same time foretold the coming of the Gospel.

The miracle of Jonah, as repeated and augmented in Jesus is itself the substance of the Gospel . The ordeal through which Jonah passed was by no means for his sake alone, it was wholly on account of Christ and the wonder of grace wrought in the fulness of time in and through him. So also the dy-

ing and rising again of Christ. Why should the Son of God go through the terrors of death at all, and why should he ever have required a resurrection? Both his death and resurrection were accomplished solely for our sakes. They are the sign of Jonah written in large and golden letters for our salvation. They are the supreme sign of God's grace toward us poor sinners. Without that sign as the death and resurrection of Jesus completed it we today and all men would be helpless, hopeless, lost forever. A greater monster than the one that swallowed Jonah would stand ready to swallow us, with no shadow of hope for our deliverance. That monster which Jesus slew for us by his death would be opening wide his jaws to devour us, and from its terrors there would be no escape. For whether men realize it or not their sins make them all victims of death — not merely of what we call temporal death, the separation of the soul from the body, but of eternal death, the curse that separates forever from God, life, heaven, blessedness. When life here on earth is done whither shall our souls laden with sin and guilt go? Let men imagine what they will, the curse of sin is eternal death, and no man can escape from it by power of his own, as little as Jonah could have freed himself from the monster fish. God brought him forth, to show how he would bring Christ forth from death itself, and through Christ free us from death. For when Christ, the Son of God died he gave himself into death, that by dying he might pay the penalty of our sins, and thus shatter the hold which death had on all sinners. To show that death was conquered for us indeed, Christ who died rose triumphant from death to bring that triumph to us all that we may share in it now and forever. This is the inner meaning of the miracle of Jonah as revealed in Christ's saving death and resurrection, it is the heart and substance of the Gospel.

In the preparation of this wonderful Gospel with its power of Christ's death and resurrection there was necessarily included its proclamation for men to hear and to believe it, and thus to be saved. That too is why Jonah is a picture of Jesus. He was a prophet of God, and Jesus is the greatest of all prophets. Jonah's message was only the stern Law of God to the men of Nineveh, that of Jesus is the full Gospel of salvation. But more than this: Jonah was sent after his deliverance to a great heathen city with his message from God. It was an image of the far greater work of Jesus, when after his resurrection from the dead he would send the Gospel far beyond the borders of the Jewish land to all the heathen nations of the world. Those men of Nineveh, heathen though they were, believed the word of Jonah. So shall

the precious Gospel of Jesus find believers and followers in the world on through all the ages. The sign of Jonah shall not fail — thousands shall be rescued from their doom of sin by its power and grace. Today when the sign is brought to us may we not fail to heed it and to make its deliverance our own.

### **III. The Judgment To Come**

But in spite of all that God has done and still does some will not believe. Therefore the significant deliverance of Jonah from the belly of the great fish, prefiguring the passion and resurrection of our Savior, foretelling the coming of his saving Gospel, carries with it a mighty warning, for it bids us prepare for the judgment to come. Let men, if they will, refuse to believe; he who prepared and sent them all his grace in his own Son will call them to a mighty reckoning at last.

Think what the miracle of Jonah means, namely, the wonderful grace it portrays, Christ's atonement and victory for us, and this brought to us to be made our own by the Gospel. Let no man fail to estimate that grace aright. Jesus helped the Jews, and helps us likewise, on this vital point by showing us what followed the miracle of Jonah in the heathen city of Nineveh, and by giving us a glimpse of what shall follow on the great day of judgment to come. Jonah carried his message to Nineveh and the men of Nineveh heeded it; they repented in sackcloth and ashes. On that great day they shall be called to stand up before the great Judge, to receive their sentence as he will render it in justice and in mercy. On that great day the Jews, to whom Christ himself preached, for whom all that the miracle of Jonah portrayed was wrought, shall likewise be called. And, we must add, we too shall be called, who have today all that the Jews had, and the warning of their unbelief besides. What will the great Judge say when he notes what the men of Nineveh did with the little they had, and what the Jews did with the abundance they had, and what we are doing even now with the still greater grace vouchsafed to us? Dare he in justice disregard the comparison? Impossible. The repentance of the men of Nineveh will condemn the unbelief of the Jews, and that condemnation will be just. Will it be compelled to condemn still more our unbelief, if we today neglect our wonderful measure of grace? Weigh these things now, and do not wait until that day overtakes you. Let

no foolish ideas about the miracle of Jonah itself, no false conclusions about the work of Christ, no indifference to our sin and need and the help sent us by the Gospel cloud our vision and mislead our hearts. “Behold, a greater than Jonah is here!” Weigh well the greatness of our grace. It is bound to count in the judgment. If the men of Nineveh repented at the message of Jonah, shall not we repent, believe, and rejoice having Christ and his Gospel, and thus obtain in the judgment a verdict of grace, and not of wrath and condemnation?

Jesus adds another comparison in bidding us to prepare for the judgment to come. Jonah was sent to Nineveh; Jesus came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; the Gospel with all its treasures of grace and heavenly wisdom is brought to us. Let us use the day of grace and embrace our golden opportunity. For in the day of judgment not only will the men of Nineveh be called to whom the prophet was sent, but also the queen of Sheba to whom no prophet was sent, who lived a thousand miles from the people of God, and only heard rumors of the wisdom of their great King Solomon. That was enough, however, to draw her; an opportunity so slight she grasped and used to the full. She spared neither time nor expense, let neither distance nor danger deter her, but came to Jerusalem to hear the wisdom of Solomon. When in the day of judgment this woman is called, and beside her the Jews who did not need to go a thousand miles to hear Christ, since they had him all his life long in their own midst, and we too are called who also need not go to distant lands to hear the saving wisdom of the Gospel, who have had it in our midst from our infancy on — will not the great Judge judge fairly and justly between us all? He surely will. The queen of the south with her faithful use of her slight opportunity will condemn the men of Christ’s time who would not use their wonderfully great opportunity. What will our sentence be? “Unto whom much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.” Luke 12:48. That woman went a thousand miles, many today cannot go one mile. With the Gospel and church at their very doors they pass by both and seek something else. That woman sought the wisdom of Solomon. “Behold, a greater than Solomon is here!” and he seeks us. Let her shame us now, that we may escape shame and receive the gracious commendation of our Savior and our Judge on the last great day.

Significant indeed is the deliverance of Jonah. May it show us the great miracle of salvation in Christ, the blessedness of the Gospel, and the prepa-

ration of faith which we need now and on the great day to come.

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## **Outlines**

How this text is preached on may be gathered from some of the outlines offered by Langsdorff: The Lord's grave complaints and charges — The Christian and miracles — Why do we not believe? — We need no new miracles — Terrible is the judgment of God on unbelief. As the themes, so the division — all on the secondary figures of the text, not on the primary one, Christ, and this during Lent! An unjustifiable mistake, yet made on many a text. Let us avoid it. The burden of the text is Christ and his death and resurrection. This Jesus himself calls a sign, and as such lifts up above all other signs: The greatest sign of God's grace in Christ Jesus — pictured in the sign of Jonah — realized in Christ's death and resurrection — made ours by the Gospel. Or: The greatest sign of grace in the Gospel — pictured by the miracle of Jonah in the Old Testament — wrought by the power of Christ in the New Testament — made decisive by Christ on the day of judgment. If we make the secondary personages prominent in the sermon these must all be used only as looking to Christ. Why Christ called the Jews an evil and adulterous generation: they recognized neither the greatness of God's grace — nor their blessed day of grace.

### **Do You Know the Sign of Jonah?**

1. What this sign really is?
2. What this sign really offers?
3. What this sign really forebodes?

### **The Sign for the Men of this Generation**

1. It signals grace.
2. It signals judgment.

### **So Who is Going to Stand up with us in the Judgment?**



1. Jonah. —2. The men of Nineveh. —3. The queen of the south.

**“Behold, a Greater than Jonah is Here!”**

1. Of whom Jonah was only an image.
2. To whom Jonah still points us.
3. Before whom Jonah will at last face us.

# 21. Christ's Gracious Purpose to Seek and to Save. Oculi. Luke 19:1-10.

And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. (Luke 19:1-10)

IT WAS A GREAT DAY for the city of Jericho when Jesus, on his way to Jerusalem to lay down his life for us all, entered the beautiful city and passed through it. The whole town turned out to see the wonderful man of whom they had all heard, who had done so many miracles, who had even now, just outside the city, healed two poor blind beggars by a mere word. There were the beggars now, following in the procession behind Jesus' disciples, as he walked ahead of them along the street. Everybody was excited to see, to take it all in, the crowd was packed close along the whole way, nobody wanted to miss anything if perhaps another miracle would be wrought.

But if we look a little closer we will find that what I have just pictured about the people, is really all there is to say. The text states that Jesus "entered and passed through Jericho." Do you note the implication? The people of Jericho did not surround Jesus and cry: Lord, stay and teach us thy Word! Lord, help our souls to find salvation! The real purpose of Jesus in all his

work, in his presence now in their city, in the journey he was now taking to Jerusalem to give his life for them all, they did not and would not understand. So they just let him pass on through. And he might have gone on without stopping in Jericho at all, if it had not been for one man. Thank God, there was one at least, not indeed better than the rest, in fact worse than many when we look at his sinful life, yet one whom God had led to worry about his sins. For that one man Jesus stopped. He found him perched high in a sycamore fig tree, because he was such a little man, and could not get to see at all in the crowd below. In that man's heart Jesus saw that his purpose could be realized. And so he stopped under the tree along the road, called the man down, invited himself to his house, and did on this man's soul what he had come for, come into the world, come to Jericho that day, come to us today for in his Word. Do you want to know about that purpose? Blessed are they who do. Only too many still let Jesus go by, as did the people of Jericho that blessed day when he came to their city. May God touch our hearts to understand aright

### **Christ's Gracious Purpose to Seek and to Save.**

## **I. Flows From Infinite Love**

If we think for a moment who Jesus was and then consider to whom he came and what he did, we will find there is only one explanation that we can give for it all: this purpose of his to seek and to save — it flows from infinite love.

Look at these people in Jericho — miserable sinners every one of them, nearly all of them self-righteous and blind, refusing even to see their sins. Why, you and I, if we followed our own inclination, would turn in disgust from them and leave them to their sins and pride, and the deadly result that surely must follow. And this man who had some conception of his sin, whose heart the holy Law of God had begun to reach, he was the chief among the publicans, supervisor of the tax collection business in Jericho. Even the people called him a sinner, and he confessed it himself that he had taken money from people by false accusation, that is false tax charges. He was only another of all this mass of people, absolutely unattractive, stained and filthy with all sorts of sin.

And now think of Jesus, sinless, pure, holy — Jesus, the eternal Son of God himself, come down among these people, walking there in the streets of Jericho to draw nigh to these people to seek and save them from their sins.- They fail to appreciate it all. They crowd around him with no sense of their sin or of his gracious purpose. They merely gaze and marvel at his miracles, and let that excite and draw them. And even the heart of Zacchaeus, the publican, how blind it was, how little he too knew of the true purpose of Jesus. Why, again, if you or I had been in Jesus' place and had followed our natural bent, we would never have bothered about people like this. "Let them go," we would have said, "no use to try to do anything for them, to say nothing of saving them!"

Yet there is Jesus, and in this city of Jericho, in the very house of that publican and sinner he declares: "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost." Explain it. You cannot if you look only at motives such as you see among men. You have to go to heaven to explain it. And even in heaven you have to go to the heart of God to get the real explanation. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." That, and that alone, is the explanation of this purpose of Jesus as you see him among men, in Jericho, in Jerusalem, on the cross, and here now in his Word preached to us.

"His love what mortal thought can reach!  
What mortal tongue display!  
Imagination's utmost stretch  
In wonder dies away."

When you let this love stand out before your heart, then this whole text about Jesus and Zacchaeus, in fact the whole Gospel, will begin to look different; it will glow and shine and take on a heavenly radiance. It will warm and win your heart, and draw you to the feet of Jesus. The world has never seen and never will see such another miracle as when the Son of God came down to a world of sinners to seek and to save that which was lost.

## **II. A Desperate Need**

Yes, the great purpose of Jesus to seek and to save flows from infinite love. And now add — that love goes out to meet a desperate need.

Take Zacchaeus, the publican, the confessed sinner, as we see him here in the text when Jesus came to Jericho. Take his family, who certainly were like him, with the same or similar sins in their souls and lives. And the whole population of the town — the proud priests, many of whom lived in Jericho, all of whom thought, just because they were priests, they were better than other people; and the Pharisees, who were still worse, arrogant in their holy claims, sure they were the chosen of God because they fasted and prayed and paid special tithes to the Temple of God. All this mass of people down in the mire of sin and getting in deeper and deeper the longer they lived. Just like any city today with its different classes of people, some criminal even, thousands arrogant, self-satisfied, setting up all kinds of claims of their own over against God, all of them guilty over and over again of thousands of conscious and unconscious transgressions of God's holy Law, their very souls corrupt and diseased with sin. And all these people going on thus from day to day, till the cruel hand of death sweeps them away from sight to go to their doom forever.

If you uncover it all, let the light of God shine into it, put away the lies with which men try to hide it at least in part, then look at the holiness of God, at the purity of his Law, at the severity of his righteous judgments, fear like an avalanche must fall over us. Where is there any help, deliverance, shadow of hope? Yes, some cry; Here! some cry: There! But when you look it is nothing but the old deceit, like that of the priests, Pharisees, Jews in Jericho, who dreamed they had a way out, yet never even knew how badly they were in, and had nothing but a dream, a deadly lie, locking them only the more firmly in their prison house of sin and unforgiven guilt. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none that doeth good, no, says the Lord, not one. And “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven,” writes the holy apostle, “against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.” Rom. 1:18. And the Psalmist adds: “Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee.” Ps. 5:4. “The way of the ungodly shall perish.” Ps. 4:6. This reveals the desperate need which so many refuse to see, which stands out in all its terribleness the moment you drop the delusions and see things as they really are.

Is there no hope then? no real help? nothing but final judgment and despair? Look at Jesus in Jericho and hear his word: “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Mark the purpose of which he speaks, and see the love which conceived that purpose and went forth itself to carry it out. That is the true answer to all this desperate need of sin and guilt. It is the one bright star of hope in all this world of night, the one way of escape from this vast charnel house of death. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4:12. Jesus declares: “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” Jn. 14:6. With these blessed assurances ringing in our ears, looking up out of the depths of all this need, its terrors and impending judgment, to Jesus, to his purpose and love, and what it does to seek and to save the lost, once more we sink in adoration at those holy feet and open wide our hearts to all this love which goes out from his heavenly heart to meet our desperate need. Let the men of Jericho pass that wondrous love by; realizing in any right manner the reality of our need we can only fly to it for refuge.

### **III. A Mighty Sacrifice**

If thus the thought of God’s love and of the desperate need it goes out to meet with the purpose to seek and to save must impress our hearts, this impression will be deeper still when we see how that need requires a mighty sacrifice.

Do not forget that Jesus is in Jericho, six hours walk from Jerusalem, on his way to Jerusalem, for the last time on his way there. What does that mean? Gather it from his own word that the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Not by teaching alone, not by loving and working miracles alone, not by a holy life and example alone could he ever hope to lift one sinner out of the chains of his sins, to cleanse one heart from its deadly guilt, to carry one soul out of this wilderness of woe back into the fold of heaven. The whole Old Testament revelation of God taught this one central truth — there is no way to remove guilt except by blood. That is why those ceaseless sacrifices were offered of old. They kept before the hearts of the Jews the image of one mighty sacrifice to come, which would really do what all these other sacrifices constantly promised on God’s assur-

ance, and what nothing else possibly could do, take away, cancel, expiate, cover, remove, annul the sin and guilt of the whole world, of every sinner in it. And, the New Testament seconds the Old, for here at last this all-sufficient sacrifice is revealed — God’s own Son gives his life for the world on the cross on Calvary. Every page of the New Testament is part of the revelation which sets this sacrifice before the eyes of the world. Jesus came indeed to seek and to save the lost, not merely to try it or do something toward it, but to carry it out to the fullest success. He did it by his death on the cross. So precious was the life he offered, the blood he shed, that its expiation was enough for all the world.

The whole story of Jesus going through Jericho and stopping at the house of Zacchaeus appears in a new light when we see the sacrifice included in the purpose of love to seek and to save the lost. Zacchaeus was brought to repentance and faith. He confessed his sins when he promised to restore fourfold what he had wrongfully acquired. He confessed his faith and gratitude when he voluntarily vowed to give the half of all his goods to the poor, as a thank-offering for the grace he had received. Then do you hear Jesus say; “Today is salvation come to this house”? And the significant addition: “forasmuch as he also is a Son of Abraham”? God himself taught Abraham about the sacrifice of Christ to come when he bade Abraham sacrifice his own son Isaac. Of Abraham Jesus says; “He rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad.” Sons of Abraham are all those who have the faith o’f Abraham, and that faith centers in the sacrifice of Christ and in the pardon through his blood. He who comes alone with his sins to God will indeed be lost; but he who comes with Christ, letting him bear them, shall be saved. What a price for Christ to pay! Thank God, that in our need there came to us love so great as to bring the sacrifice that would really avail. Let us worship this glorious Savior, cleanse our souls with his sacrifice, and live ever in the soul-renewing power of it.

“Lord Jesus Christ! Thy precious blood  
Is to my soul the highest good:  
Of all my sins a perfect cure,  
It quickens me and makes me pure.”

## **IV. A Glorious Salvation**

And now look upon the man in our text, and see how that sacrifice brings forth a glorious salvation.

“This day is salvation come to this house,” says Jesus, “for the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” What had happened with Zacchaeus. See it yourself — he was a changed man. Jesus had brought him what the priests and Pharisees had failed to bring. They insisted on doing all kinds of works in order to get the favor of God and a place in heaven. But what if a man had lived like Zacchaeus in works of sin? What if a man had no good works at all to bring? nothing but a stained, sinful life? They had no answer. They did not understand the meaning of their own Jewish sacrifices which pointed to the sacrifice of God’s Son, and thus in advance offered pardon through him. They simply shut men like Zacchaeus out. But when Jesus came to Zacchaeus the first thing he undoubtedly did was to tell Zacchaeus and his whole house the glad news of God’s mercy toward sinners, even also to such as they were — not the false notion of mercy as if God merely sets aside sin, but the true mercy which blots out sin with atoning blood. That Gospel shone bright in every word of the Old Testament which pointed to Christ. That was the Gospel Zacchaeus heard from Jesus’ lips. His heart was opened for it by faith. He arose as one from the dead. A glorious faith and hope filled his soul. See how he lays his sins at the feet of Jesus in an open confession; see how he utters his faith and gratitude in making a vow and voluntary promise. Yes, the man that was lost, completely lost in sin, like all those poor sinners in Jericho, was saved. Salvation had come to his house, even as Jesus said, glorious, blessed, divine salvation through Jesus Christ sent to take away our sin. Jesus himself pronounced his absolution, and opened the door of heaven for him by saying: “He also is a son of Abraham.”

Need I say what all this means to you and me? Here is the Savior now in his holy Word, with the same purpose to seek and to save, the same love behind that purpose, reaching out to us in the same deep need, only now with his mighty sacrifice, made once for all, long completed, extending the same pardon and salvation to us. Surely, it is not in vain. “Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” Come as Zacchaeus came and say with him:



"I lay my sins on Jesus,  
The spotless Lamb of God;  
He bears them all, and frees us  
From the accursed load.

I bring my guilt to Jesus,  
To wash my crimson stains  
White, in his blood so precious, Till not a spot remains."

Then add the note of joy:

"Believing, we rejoice  
To see the curse remove;  
We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice,  
And sing his bleeding love!"

Thus in you too the great purpose to seek and to save shall reach its goal.  
And the heart of Jesus shall rejoice once more to see his purpose crowned  
with your salvation.

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## Outlines

Whatever is made of the publican in this narrative one thing ought to be clear, we ought not to let him overshadow Jesus, for this is a text on Jesus first, and on Zacchaeus only second. Then also, let us beware of the synergism likely to creep in from some of the treatments accorded this text by commentators or expositors. Monergism alone solves the problem of the change wrought in this publican. We unhesitatingly reject a theme which asks for "the conditions under which salvation may be secured" (Sommer), and then enumerates: longing, overcoming obstacles; obeying Jesus' orders, confessing sins. Our theme should at least be something like this: How Jesus changed Zacchaeus; and we may enumerate: 1) What Zacchaeus had heard of Jesus in advance of his coming; 2) The action of Jesus in inviting himself to the house of Zacchaeus; 3) The word of Jesus spoken in Zacchaeus' house. But that word ought to attract us most of all: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" — the love that lies in this

purpose — the work involved in this purpose — the end achieved by this purpose. Or the other word: “This day is salvation come to this house” — in the Savior — by his message and gift — through the faith and joy wrought in our hearts. This method may also be made to serve: view first Christ’s great purpose to save as he was carrying it out and proceeding to Jerusalem — then secondly, view this purpose as he carried it out upon the individual Zacchaeus and his household.

### **When Jesus Invited Himself to Zacchaeus’ House.**

1. The self-righteous were offended.
2. Zacchaeus received him gladly.
3. Jesus brought Zacchaeus salvation.
4. Zacchaeus entered a new life.
5. The great purpose of Jesus was carried out.

### **“Today I Must Abide at thy House!”**

1. The need that called Jesus to the house of Zacchaeus.
2. The help that Jesus brought when he went to the house of Zacchaeus.
3. The divine purpose which lay behind both the need and the help when Jesus entered the house of Zacchaeus.

### **The Blessed Story of Jesus and Zacchaeus.**

We may read it in three chapters, marked by three words in our text:

1. "He sought to see Jesus, who he was — need.
2. “Today I must abide at thy house” — salvation.
3. “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost” — redemption (love and purpose).

### **Zacchaeus: God’s Hour of Grace.**

1. It may come unexpected — yet God prepares it.
2. It always brings salvation — Christ’s help and pardon.
3. It invariably leaves a great change — repentance and thanksgiving.

## **The Savior's Blessed Purpose to Seek and to Save that which was Lost.**

1. What this purpose cost him.
2. What this purpose brings us.

## 22. Christ's Vision of the Cross. Laetare. John 12:27-33.

Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die. (John 12:27-33)

THE OLD CHURCH NAME for this Sunday is Laetare, which means: Rejoice! You may ask whether this is proper considering that we are in the season of Lent. It will help you to know that Lent includes only forty days, from Ash Wednesday up to Good Friday, and has just forty days by counting out all the Sundays. Sunday commemorates, not the death of Christ, but his resurrection on Easter morning, and that makes every Sunday, also those during the season of Lent, days of gladness and rejoicing. Not that the death of Christ is not mentioned during these Sundays, quite the contrary; we do mention it, we even dwell on it. Our text says in so many words that in what is here told us Jesus signified "what death he should die." But note in this very text how he spoke of his death. He knew all its terrors for his soul and body, for here he himself tells us how at the near prospect of it his soul was troubled and shaken. Yet he saw more, immensely more, than this dark side of his death. As he looked into the supreme hour opening before him with the cross rising just ahead on Calvary's height, a heavenly light of glory was poured out over it from on high. There was the black, forbidding, terrifying shadow indeed, but behind it, and breaking forth out of the night above it, a radiance exceeding all that earth ever saw. This is what our text reveals for us likewise to see, that we may understand the death of Christ as

he himself beheld it when with unfaltering steadfastness he went into it. Look, then, with the eyes of faith on

## **Christ's Vision of the Cross,**

a transcendent vision of glory, of triumph, of salvation.

### **I. Glory**

Never for one moment was the death of Christ anything for him but what the Scriptures report when they tell us the story of it — the supreme ordeal of torture, suffering, agony. The physical side of it “is awful enough — the bonds, blows, mockery, thorns, nails, hours on the cross, till finally the soul left its body. But this is the least of it. Who can tell what his soul endured when God laid our guilt and the curse of that guilt upon Jesus and at sight of that guilt himself turned from Jesus, and let him drink out the gall and fiery bitterness of it in actual death! Jesus never died as we die — he could not. The sinless, holy Son of God was in no way subject to death. He could die only by willingly putting himself under our sin, by thus willing to die for us. That is why he held still and uttered never a complaint when in his passion men piled upon him all the sins, cruelties, and tortures they possibly could. He took the whole load because he had come to bear it. And what we see thus laid upon him is only the outward side of what God himself did in that hour of passion and death, when, as the prophet Isaiah says, “God laid on him the iniquity of us all.” That is how Christ died. For any man to die with a single sin upon him is to be swept instantaneously into the black abyss of hell. God’s Son, dying with all our sins upon him, died indeed, tasted and felt the awfulness of all this curse, but by that very act of his conquered, destroyed, removed the curse completely.

All these terrors Jesus saw when he looked toward Calvary and beheld there the vision of the cross. Not one particle of these woes was hidden from his eyes! So real were they to him, even before he touched them, that his soul shook and quivered, and the words were pressed from his lips: “Now is my soul troubled,” and he asked whether he should pray his Father to deliver him from this hour. Never for a moment estimate the cross of

Christ less than Christ himself did. Cover it with all that you have ever heard of the reality of sin, its curse, and penalty.

Then, however, look again. As the fearful hour looms before the Savior, shaking his very soul, he sees there on the cross another sight — the vision of all the plan, purpose, and promise which God in heaven had centered in the cross. Since Adam's fatal sin every revelation of God to man had pointed to this cross. "For this cause," Jesus declares, came I unto this hour." The agony is there, the curse and doom with not the least subtraction. But infinitely more is there — God's name, God's revelation. God's mercy to man, God's promise of deliverance for man — all that is there — the Cross, and Christ upon the cross, is the heart of it. Take the cross away, or Christ from the cross, and the sin, curse, penalty will remain, but then upon us, upon all men, and for evermore. That is what Jesus sees, and as he sees it there comes from his soul the mighty prayer that takes all this in: "Father, glorify thy name!" What does it mean? From the vast space of the sky above there sounds forth a mighty voice in answer. Men stood amazed. Some cried that it was thunder; some: "An angel spake to him!" It was the Father in heaven answering that prayer of his Son: My name — "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." Once more we ask: What does it mean? It means the cross — Christ sees it; the Father sees it; we are to see it: the cross — a vision of glory!

It is the glory of God's mercy to man realized; the glory of God's sacrifice for man's sins actually made; the glory of the redemption of the world by his own Son's death accomplished. In the cross all this is revealed as a reality — as if the curtain of heaven is withdrawn, and God's heart of love for us, with all its blessed thoughts toward us, is laid open to our gaze; and even beyond that — God's plan of deliverance for us is set before us there in the cross all carried out to the full, to stand henceforth forever unchanged. Oh, it is a vision of glory indeed. It goes infinitely beyond anything man's heart could possibly conceive. Heaven opens for sinners in the cross of Christ.

With that vision of his cross Christ went forward to place himself upon it. The glory of it made him steady and strong. Let it fill our hearts with faith and joy.

## **II. Triumph**

Our sin brought Christ to the cross; his voluntary sacrifice for our sin is the glory of the cross. But sin does not stand alone. It is never a thing by itself. We must get the right view of sin, especially when we look at the cross of Christ. Sin is part of a vast power that goes way beyond us. It extends through the whole world and binds fast all men. And then it extends into the unseen world beyond, into hell itself; and there, as the great prince and ruler of all this terrible realm, is Satan with the wicked angels that have t fallen from God. That is how we must look at sin. It is never a thing just by itself, or one in you alone, or that concerns you alone. Every sin we commit and every corrupt condition in us is the dark power of hell and Satan reaching up out of the abyss and locking itself fast in us to make us victims of its power.

Now the moment Christ came to deliver us from our sins he came into mortal conflict with this vast and hellish power and the prince of hell and of the world of sin who exercises and controls this power. No sooner did Christ assume his office as our Savior than he was tempted of the devil for forty days — Satan tried to get him too under his power. That was the opening battle, and Satan did not succeed. All through the ministry of Christ this battle continued in one way or another, because Christ had come to destroy the works of the devil, as the Scriptures say. But the final conflict took place on Calvary, on the cross. There the last decision was made. It was between Christ and Satan, but it concerned us. Would the strangle hold of the devil on men through the deadly power of sin and guilt be broken, or would it go on in spite of Christ and his efforts, and would we, lost as we were under that power, remain lost forever?

This was what Christ saw when he entered the mighty hour and went forward to the cross. This was what he meant with his prayer: “Father, glorify thy name!” and what God meant with his answer: “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” Jesus declares: “This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes.” The Father was with the Son in this coming battle on the cross. The outcome was never in doubt for a single moment. Jesus proclaims the outcome here in advance: “Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” Now — in this hour of passion and death. The victory of Christ over all this power of sin that holds us with a thousand bonds is absolutely assured. This is Christ’s vision of the cross — it is a vision of triumph, of conquest and glory beyond anything that we can imagine or think, for it extends not only through all the

world and all its ages, but likewise through the vast abyss of darkness and hell itself. Jesus Christ on the cross destroyed the works of the devil forever, and broke to pieces his mighty realm of sin and death on earth. The whole structure of it received there the one terrific blow that caused it to sink and bend to its fall. This sinful world is doomed now and will sink in ruins with the prince that built up its sin and rules it, into the yawning gulf of eternal darkness. The bonds of sin are all broken by the triumph of Christ's cross — we all can escape and reach safety through Christ, but all the rest will go down to destruction forever.

What a mighty vision of the cross! How we ought to see it aright and mark its significance for us all. The world still stands, men still sin, Satan still tries to rule. .Be not deceived. The judgment of death and defeat is upon all this realm. It is bending now like a great tower to its fall. In a little while the mighty crash will come when it will disappear forever. Christ gave it the death-stroke when he atoned for sin on the cross, and by his atonement broke the curse of sin and tore its bonds in two. As a mighty victor Christ went into that battle. Fierce, awful beyond comprehension though it was, the outcome was triumph. Christ saw it and rejoiced; we are to see it now and to rejoice with him.

### **III. Salvation**

But all this includes another part, the one that now deals with us, as the great outcome of what took place on the cross. Here we are in this sinful world, and all of us sinners still. But again let us see it aright. There is not only sin and men living in sin. There is now through the cross of Christ an open door of escape for all sinners, a door that shall never be shut. Christ points it out to us all when he says: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." And John who recorded these words for us adds, in order that we may understand them correctly: "This he said, signifying what death he should die" Christ was lifted up upon the cross, but that was the lifting up of the victor on his throne. The cross conquered sin, death, and hell. Through the cross Jesus was lifted to his heavenly throne of glory on high. There he sits now and rules with majesty and power forever. And right in the midst of this world of sin he has established his kingdom of grace and salvation for sinners. Through all this world of sin his saving



Gospel is preached, which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. This is the drawing he speaks of: “I shall draw all men unto me.” His church, his Gospel, his salvation, the forgiveness offered in his name, the power for us to become his disciples, children of God by faith and trust in his name — these are the evidences of his triumph. By all these he draws us to escape the impending doom of the world. In all these is the open door by which we can escape. Whosoever believeth in him ‘shall not perish, but have everlasting life: yea. he that believeth is already passed from death unto life. He is out of the kingdom of this world, he is in the kingdom of Christ. He has thrown off the bondage of the devil, he is under the rule, protection, and blessing of Christ. When the great world with its sin and judgment falls into eternal destruction, he shall not fall with it, but rise to safety, carried aloft by Jesus’ hands. For the world passeth away and the lust thereof, but they that do the will of the Father, believe and hold to Christ, shall abide forever.

This is the vision which Christ had of the cross, of what it would bring when the hour of his passion would end. It was a vision of salvation extending through all the ages, even unto eternity itself. It lifted up his soul, it gave him steadfastness and joy. And as this vision is unveiled to our eyes now it is to show us aright all the inner things of the death of Christ, that the glory, the triumph, the salvation of it, achieved by Christ for our sakes, may be made our own by trusting in him and in his cross.

Blessed are they who see the vision of the cross as Christ unveils it for them, and by its power are drawn unto him.

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## Outlines

The central thought of the text deals with the glory of Christ’s death, i.e., with the revelation of the glorious things involved in that death. John’s last remark is highly significant here, as also the opening statement, that the soul of Jesus was troubled. So we may preach on: The Glory of Christ’s Passion — the glory of his sacrifice (as this glorifies the “name,” i.e., all the saving revelation of God’s mercy and plans) — the glory of his victory (v. 31) — and the glory of our own deliverance (drawn unto him). — How God glorified his name in the cross of Christ. He made his plans of mercy — and

his judgment on all opposition — shine forth to produce our salvation. — A few contrasts lie embedded in the text. We may utilize them in several ways, for instance: How Christ faced the hour of his Passion: he realized the suffering awaiting him, but knew too its purpose to glorify the Father's name — he anticipated the fierceness of ' the coming battle, but was absolutely certain of the glory and the triumphant victory — he measured the greatness of the sacrifice to be made, but he beheld also the wonderful salvation this was to bring. —From another angle of the text we add: How the cross of Christ draws our hearts: there we see all God's grace and mercy — all man's bondage and danger — all our hope and salvation.

### **When the Son of God Went to his Death.**

1. The Father's name was glorified.
2. The world and its prince were judged.
3. The success of the Gospel was sealed.

### **The Most Glorious Thing that Jesus Did.**

1. Die to conquer hell.
2. Die to glorify his Father's name.
3. Die to draw us to himself.

### **The Supreme Hour in the Whole Course of Time.**

1. Supreme for God and his Son.
2. Supreme for the world and its prince.
3. Supreme for you and me.

### **What Happened when Christ Died?**

1. Cod glorified his name.
2. The world's judgment was sealed.
3. The great drawing of hearts to heaven began.

## **23. Caiaphas, and the Doctrine of Substitution. Judica. John 11:47-53.**

Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death. (John 11:47-53)

A MEETING OF THE VERY GREATEST IMPORTANCE took place in the city of Jerusalem shortly after the Lord Jesus had wrought one of his greatest miracles. Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary in Bethany, had died, and four days after his burial Jesus had raised him from the dead. Immediately after the news reached the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem they called a meeting of the High Court or Senate of their nation to determine what to do against Jesus. They came to the conclusion that there was only one thing to do, namely to kill Jesus or to have him killed.

One is almost dumbfounded to hear what our text reports concerning that meeting and the decision it reached. The Son of God had appeared among these men, for the third time he had raised a poor mortal from the dead, this time by one omnipotent word bringing back to life one from the dark prison house of the grave. Instead of acclaiming the deed, acknowledging Jesus for what he evidently was, believing and worshiping him, the entire High Council of the Jews resolved to do the very opposite, to kill this Prince of Life himself, in fact, they added to this the determination to kill in addition the man whom this Prince had raised from the dead. The facts in the case are unquestioned. The Jewish High Council not only resolved on

this murder of Jesus, they actually carried their resolution out a few days later.

But a remarkable thing is told us about this meeting. The president of the Council, the high priest himself who directed it, proposed that Jesus should be put to death. In making that proposal, which the whole assembly forthwith accepted, he used the statement “that one man should die for the people.” He appealed to the doctrine of substitution, that wonderful doctrine which forms the very heart of the Gospel. This is what rivets our attention to that meeting in Jerusalem. We must hear what our text says on

### **Caiaphas, and the Doctrine of Substitution.**

How Caiaphas perverted and abused this doctrine, and how God corrected and used it.

## **I. How Caiaphas Perverted And Abused This Doctrine**

What is the doctrine of substitution?

It is this: one person pays, suffers, or, if the case be such, lays down his life instead of another. Jesus states the doctrine in its most exalted form: “I lay down my life for the sheep” St. John states it doubly: “Herein perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” 1 John 3:16. St. Paul writes of two noble Christians, the tent maker Aquila and his wife Priscilla, who rose to this height: they “have for my life laid down their own necks, unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles” Rom. 16:4.

Not only the Scriptures know this doctrine, we meet it frequently in life. A mother in her great love will give up her own life if need be to save her own child. Many a true friend has paid the debt which would have meant ruin for his friend. In battle hundreds of lives are lost and wounds incurred to shield the loved ones at home. All that is high, noble, grand, praiseworthy in the human heart comes out in the sacrifice which the doctrine of substitution includes. We often call this sacrifice a vicarious offering — one by which one man voluntarily takes the loss of another or dies in his place.

This precious doctrine Caiaphas perverted and abused by his hate of Jesus.

The Savior's heavenly love, his deeds of help and healing, his purity and holiness in turning men from sin, his majesty as the Son of God made man for our sakes, his kingdom in which we are to be the children of God — all this, instead of drawing the heart of Caiaphas, petrified it, because he was filled with the lust of power and refused to yield to the mercy of God. The more Jesus impressed the people, the more they asked whether Jesus perhaps was not the Messiah sent of God, the more Caiaphas was filled with jealousy and envy, till he reached the point where he determined to have Jesus killed. But that would be a cowardly, dastardly crime! To secure his wicked object, and yet to mask its wickedness to a certain extent, Caiaphas invoked this doctrine of substitution. He tried to make it appear as if the whole Jewish nation were in danger, and as if the death of Jesus alone could save it. This was the means his hate employed — a perversion and abuse of the noble thought of substitution, which shocks every honest and upright mind.

The hate of Caiaphas left out the chief essential in the noble idea of substitution.

Why do we count it a magnificent deed when one dies for another? when one suffers or pays in the place of another? Because he does this of his own free will, from love or a similar lofty motive. This was the very thing Caiaphas left out. No wonder, for hate is always blind; and how could the wicked hate of this unscrupulous high priest reckon properly with the idea of a willing, loving sacrifice? He said indeed: Let one man die for the people — let Jesus die to save the Jews: but he did not mean: Let Jesus give himself for the Jews: he meant: Let us kill him for the benefit of the Jews. This left the form of substitution, but turned it from a deed of noble self-sacrifice into a deed of rank injustice and bloody crime. Glory to the man who gives himself to save another, but woe to the man who for his own ends sacrifices another. The one is a deed all right-thinking men must acclaim, the other a deed all right-thinking men must utterly condemn.

This grows clearer still when we see how Caiaphas made his own interest and gain the purpose of the false substitution he proposed.

Why did he want Jesus to die? He tried to make it appear as if the existence of his own nation was at stake. He claimed that Jesus might make himself a king and thus bring the whole military power of the great Roman

empire down upon the already oppressed Jewish nation to take its last bit of liberty away. But what he was really after was to keep his own place of high priest, his own power as the chief ruler of his people. He feared this might be taken away from him if Jesus continued to live. And so he proposed that it was best for Jesus to die. He was going to pay the blood of Jesus to -buy position and power for himself and the men associated with him, to kill another in order to get something valuable for himself. Can you think of a more terrible perversion of the great doctrine of substitution?

When thus we set before our eyes the perversion and abuse to which Caiaphas put the doctrine of substitution, the black hand of hell busy to bring about the death of Jesus is revealed.

When that High Council met in Jerusalem to consider Jesus and his work they had to acknowledge: "This man doth many miracles." That last miracle, when Lazarus was brought to life from the grave, they acknowledged with all the rest. What was their answer? The answer of hell itself — Jesus must die for doing these glorious deeds of divine power and help. When they seek for a reason why he should die, what are they able to find? A false pretense of danger to their nation, and the basest promptings of self-interest and wicked ambition. Satan was leading them on. When with all this wickedness they try to put a fair color upon their decision that Jesus must die, what is the outcome of their effort? A shocking perversion and abuse of a great and precious doctrine, that of substitution, of vicarious suffering and death — to gain their ends they determine to spill Jesus' blood. A devilish power was blinding their eyes and driving them on to crime. Thus alone could Jesus be killed. The chief advisor, the real president in that meeting, was not Caiaphas, but the master whom Caiaphas served, the prince of hell, who was bent on Jesus' death — and he more than all these men.

To see all this aright is to realize that the hand of hell is busy in the same direction still.

All to whom Jesus, the Gospel, and his salvation come today. who reject him and prefer the things of this world and their own selfish, worldly, sinful desire and interests, in their way second the action of Caiaphas who substituted himself and his desires for Jesus and his kingdom of grace. It is the same old doctrine of substitution, with the same old perversion and abuse, instigated by the evil one — away with Jesus, that we may get what we want., and do what we please! That vote in the council hall at Jerusalem has been repeated over and over again in countless variations, with the devil be-

hind the ballot. What if Jesus is great and glorious, what if his mercy and grace are wonderful, what if his purpose is heavenly and blessed — he stands in the way of men's gain, ambition, pleasure, pride, perverted desires, lying beliefs — he must be put out of the way. So they trade him again for what they want: they sacrifice him and all he stands for, that they may stay as they are. They make a substitution, and persuade themselves that it is right, good, profitable to themselves. But look at Caiaphas, and you will see fully and clearly what that substitution really is. Hell helped to make it. Caiaphas damned himself in what he did; and so will every man who thinks it is best to give up the Savior that his earthly desires, gains, and pleasures may stay as they are. God preserve us from a substitution like that!

## **II. How God Corrected And Used It.**

But look at the text again and see how this doctrine of substitution, so shamefully perverted and abused by Caiaphas and all who choose as he did, is most gloriously corrected and used for our salvation by God.

God himself holds to the doctrine of substitution.

Twice St. John reminds us in our text that Caiaphas was the high priest in that year — that notable year when the Lord Jesus was brought to his death. In the old days of Israel the high priest was the one who inquired of God for the people to secure his direction and will in vital matters. Now the hand of God once more showed itself in this most vital matter of all; the greatest and gravest which ever had come to Israel. Jesus was rejected by the Jews, but when Caiaphas proposed that rejection God overruled the words in which he made it. In those words he indeed uttered his own devilish wickedness, but he had to do it so as to appeal to the doctrine of substitution: Let Jesus die for the people. Caiaphas never knew it when he said it, but his words were a prophecy, an utterance of God's own holy and gracious intention regarding his Son. There was to be a substitution indeed, far different than the one Caiaphas meant, one that God meant — the divine substitution planned by mercy and grace not for one nation only, but for all, for the whole world.

See the great substitution God had in mind.

For centuries he had been teaching Israel that: salvation from sin would be by substitution alone. No man can bear his own sins except to be damned forever by their guilt. If he is to be saved another must be brought to bear the sins for him. God taught this doctrine to his people by means of all their bloody sacrifices. An animal was made the substitute. On it the sins were laid and then it was killed in sacrifice to take the sins away. The animal died at the altar that the man might live and be free. But no animal could possibly take away the sins of a human being. The blood of no beast could ever be a substitute for the blood and death of a guilty man. All these animals, slain in substitution, were only preliminary to the real substitute, the Lamb which in due time God himself would provide. Their blood pointed forward to the blood that would be mighty and valuable enough really to take away human sin and guilt. That Substitute to come was God's own Son made man for this very purpose. His blood would be a propitiation indeed, making good all that the blood of those animals had indicated, and not for one nation alone, but for all men everywhere. Every true Israelite who brought an animal in sacrifice according to God's direction by that act declared his faith in the great sacrifice and substitute which God himself would offer in his Son. Thus and thus alone were those animal sacrifices effective. They were the temporal substitutes to join the hearts of sinners to the permanent, divine Substitute. And now at last the time was at hand for that divine substitution to be made. Wicked Caiaphas, because he happened to be the high priest, had to declare that the death of Jesus would be a vicarious death, a death of substitution.

And God's substitution was the highest and holiest ever made.

The vital thing in any true substitution is that it must be both voluntary and adequate. The substitution of God's Son for us was indeed voluntary. The very purpose of his coming into our flesh was to take our place under the curse and penalty of our sin. to be made a curse for us, in order to free us. Caiaphas thought he could take the life of Jesus, but Jesus said: "No man taketh it from me. but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." John 10:18. The glory of Christ's sacrifice is that he made it voluntarily in love for us miserable sinners to rescue us from hell. — And his sacrifice was sufficient. This man, the Scriptures declare, "now once in the end of the world hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself": and again: "So Christ was offered to bear the sins of many." Heb. 9:26-28. His sacrifice obtained eternal redemp-



tion for us, “who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” 1 Pet. 2:24. He, the just, died for the unjust. And because he was the Son of God himself his blood, shed in willing substitution for us, did indeed prove a sufficient price and ransom for us all. And this is what God meant when he made the wicked mouth of Caiaphas once more, now that Jesus was to die, declare in involuntary prophecy that Jesus would die for the people.

Thus too this holy and blessed doctrine of substitution, as used by God in the sacrifice of his Son for our sins, is to be our one hope in life and in death.

Luther in one place writes that our sins must lie either upon our own necks or upon Christ. If they remain upon us we are lost forever, but if they lie on Christ we are saved. Take whichever you will, he says. Can there be any question which we will take? Let men pervert the doctrine of Christ’s substitution as much as they will, let them misunderstand the whole Word of God and the greatest deed which it records for our good, we will cling to our great Substitute and pray in humble faith:

“All sin hast thou borne for us,  
Else would despair reign o’er us:  
Have mercy on us, O Jesus!”

In the face of our end, when we shall be called to meet the great Judge on that day, let us add this other prayer:

“Lord Jesus Christ! Thy precious blood  
Is to my soul the highest good:  
Of all my sins a perfect cure,  
It quickens me and makes me pure.  
Thy blood, my spotless glorious dress,  
Thy innocence, my righteousness:  
Before my God I pardoned stand,  
And enter, crowned, the heavenly land.”

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## Outlines

A strong dramatic element pervades this text, which may be utilized effectively in descriptive sections: When the Sanhedrin met to vote that Jesus must die: 1) the prince of hell stood behind its president, Caiaphas — 2) God stood behind their victim, his Son Jesus Christ. — The heart of the text lies in the explanatory word of John: God's counsel that Jesus should die for all men: he had it proclaimed — he carried it out — on it our salvation rests. — KoegeFs theme: The children of God gathered in one, may be elaborated in a way different from his: they are joined together by one sacrifice — in one faith — to be one body — for one eternal home. — Langsdorff follows the order of the text, using the theme: The counsel of Caiaphas to kill Jesus. His parts are: the lack of counsel on the part of Jesus' foes — the false counsel of the high priest Caiaphas — the true counsel of God which prevailed. — This text too shows striking contrasts; we state the following: they who were called to be the servants of God appear in the service of the devil — He who was the victor of death was himself to be robbed of life — The nation Caiaphas tried to save he by that action helped to destroy — He who was to die for the benefit of Caiaphas did die, but for the benefit of all — He who will judge all men with righteousness is here judged by unrighteousness — They who scheme wickedly for themselves are made to aid him who lovingly planned for us all.

### **Christ's Foes must Serve him.**

1. As witnesses of his glory.
2. As prophets of his redemptive death.
3. As instruments of God's counsel of grace.

— LESSMUELLER.

### **Christ Rules in the Midst of his Foes.**

1. They condemn him, but in doing so must testify to his power.
2. They take counsel against him, but must prophesy his redemption.
3. They seek for means to destroy him, but must wait for God.

**“That One Man should Die for the People.”**

1. The council of deadly hate.
2. The plan of divine love.
3. The message of blessed salvation.

— ZIETHE.

## **“The Children of God shall be Gathered Together in One.”**

Thus was it

1. Prophesied by one of God’s prophets.
2. Confirmed by divine interpretation.
3. Made possible by a sacred sacrifice;
4. Brought to a glorious consummation.

— KOEGEL.

## **The Wonderful Mystery of the Death of Jesus Christ.**

Jesus died:

1. A victim of human hate.
2. A sacrifice of divine love.

— LINDEMANN.

## **One instead of All.**

1. It does seem wrong.
2. It surely is right.
3. In fact, it is noble.
4. And in Christ it was made divine.

(Wrong, when injustice kills the innocent and lets the guilty escape. — Right, when justice accepts the offer of one for another. — Noble, when

one offers himself in the place of another. — Dizzne, when the God-man chose this way for our redemption.)

# **24. Hosannas and Palms for the Savior King! Palm Sunday.**

## **John 12:12-19.**

On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord. And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt. These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him. The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record. For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him. (John 12:12-19)

“HOSANNA! Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord!” An enthusiastic multitude with waving palm branches in their hands raised this cry when our Lord Jesus Christ made his entry as the King of grace and salvation into the ancient city of Jerusalem. They went to honor the Savior that day, to acknowledge the wondrous miracles he had done, to greet him as indeed the long expected Messiah, the hope and crown of their nation.

What the multitudes of festive pilgrims did that day on the road into Jerusalem has left an indelible impression. Those shouts of Hosanna have found a mighty echo, those waving palm branches still stir enthusiastic honor in men's hearts. We too know this great King Jesus, know him better and more fully I hope than all that multitude of old. You, my dear catechumens, have sat at his feet these many days to learn all that he did for you, all that he does for you, all that he will yet do. And this day, called Palm Sunday in memory of that great past day, is to be your day for publicly pledging your hearts to your King and Savior Jesus Christ in humble faith and loyal

obedience. By your confession and vows you lay the palms of honor and devotion at his feet today, and raise once more the blessed prayer of Hosanna, which means: "Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity!" Ps. 118:25. And we, my friends, who have made this vow and pledge in years that are past, as we hear it repeated again by these young Christians are to feel anew and in fuller measure if possible what then filled our hearts. These years should have taught us by many a blessed experience what the grace of our Savior King really is, how rich his gifts, how strong his help, how blessed his fellowship in every hour of life. The vow once made is thus to be renewed in us today with greater vigor and more depth of meaning. As this text shows us once more the multitudes at Jerusalem honoring and praising Jesus as the Savior King, we in spirit and by every act of our worship today join them, and in this way, which we know is acceptable to him, we offer Hosannas and palms for the King.

### **Hosannas and Palms for the Savior King!**

Surely, with word and deed we must say it for the King's own sake.

## **I. For the King's Own Sake**

They called him the King of Israel as they brought him on his way to the Holy City. He was that indeed, in a higher and more blessed sense even than those people thought. Prophets had spoken of his coming and described it in advance. Zechariah had told how he would do the very thing he did there in Jerusalem, enter as the King of grace, not on a proud chariot or charger surrounded by an army and military power, but riding without a sign of earthly pomp, on a humble beast, the foal of an ass. Psalmists had sung his praise and described the salvation he would bring and the gifts he would bestow. Israel's kings, David and Solomon, the greatest of them all, had looked forward to this still greater King to come, to the spiritual, heavenly, and thus eternal kingdom he would establish. And now he was there, doing all that God had foretold, a King indeed, a King of salvation, bringing eternal blessings to the souls of men.

He came as the King of divine grace. "Fear not," but "rejoice greatly," the old prophet had written hundreds of years before: "Daughter of Sion, behold thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt." Why did Jesus ride thus as a King into Jerusalem? He came with power indeed, for a few days before at his royal word death itself had obeyed and given up its prey at his command, when Lazarus, four days in the grave, came forth alive again. It was the power of God come to deliver us from sin and death. It was the power of heavenly grace to free us from sin and its terrible results. It was the power of redemption which would break the power of sin by this blessed King's own blood and death. Even now he was come to offer up that sacrifice that we might be free, made the children of God through the forgiveness of his blood by faith in his sacrifice for us. So he came in lowliness, not in pride: in humility, not in pomp and show. He was on his way to Calvary, to the cross, to the sacrifice for our redemption. That was the kind of a King he was.

And that is why the cry of Hosanna fits him so well, and the waving of palm branches at his coming. The people caught up that word from the 118th Psalm which they recited and sang at the Jewish Passover, the old festival God had given them when years before they were rescued from the bondage of Egypt. There, when they were, slaves, the night that God delivered them, the first-born in every Egyptian house, from the king's palace down to the lowest hut, was slain by the angel of death who passed through the land, because the Egyptians would not let the people of God go free. That angel spared the houses of the Israelites because God had told them to mark every door with the blood of a lamb slain in sacrifice. Year by year, in memory of God's deliverance, at his own bidding they slew the Passover lamb and sang the Psalm with its prayer Hosanna — "Save now, O Lord, I beseech thee!" Yes, the Hosanna fit this King of salvation, for he was himself the Lamb, who would save the people from a far more terrible bondage, that of Satan through sin and guilt and the punishment of God. His blood would bring them eternal release and lift them from all this world of sin to the true Canaan of peace and joy in heaven. And the palms fit this King, for they symbolized the life and salvation he brought in his deliverance.

Therefore I say: - Hosannas and palms for the Savior King, first of all for his own sake for his power and mercy and the gift of his salvation. Shall our hearts remain unmoved when we see what the Jews of old did to welcome and honor this King? If they in some degree recognized his greatness

and blessedness, do we not recognize it still more? He is our King, our Savior, and for all that he is we honor and magnify his name today.

## II. For Our Own Sakes

And we do it also for our own sakes. Our faith, our love, our joy in him demand that there be Hosannas and palms for the King. It will ever be thus — a fire must burn, a light must shine, and so faith must confess, love must honor, joy must sing out its delight. He is the King! shouted the multitude on the way to Jerusalem. They meant: He is our King! It was a joyful and happy confession that came from their lips. By all their actions they wanted to tell what was in their hearts and thoughts. They were trying to show the loyalty, gratitude, expectation, and joy they felt. With their hearts surcharged like that they could not keep still. They would have been false to themselves if they had.

What if the adherence of many to Jesus that day was superficial, their joy and enthusiasm one that did not go deep enough? That does not change in the least that these people were right in showing what moved them, and that a truer faith, a more genuine love and gratitude, and a deeper joy must not do what they did, come out and display itself for its own sake in honoring our King.

In a little while we will hear these catechumens make their public confession of Christ before this assembled congregation. We have come here for the very purpose of hearing it. In fact, our hearts want to join that confession and do join it in even part of this service which is all for the honor of Christ our King. Not that he needs this honor from us. He would be what he is if none of us now or ever believed in him or confessed his name: but we would not be what we are if we today withheld that faith and honor from him. He is not made richer by our faith, but if we are without it and have no faith to voice today, we are infinitely poorer, for the treasures that might be ours are then not ours, we are empty and destitute. O think for a moment what our faith means to ourselves, how it makes this King our King, takes all his gifts, places us in his Kingdom here and assures us of a place in his kingdom there, and you will see that for our own sakes we must bring Hosannas and palms for the Savior King. Only see that your faith and trust in him be true indeed, that he may acknowledge it and bestow upon it his



grace. Let it be strong and enduring that you may keep that grace forever. For our own sakes let us honor Christ our King by trusting him with all our hearts and thus this day and always honoring his name.

### **III. For Love's Sake**

The same is true of love. It is vital to ourselves that we have and show such love. For remember the love of all true believers for Christ is only the answer of their hearts to his love.

Always and always Christ first loves us and by his love awakens our love in return. Ever it is his love that kindles ours. That means, if our hearts remain cold and loveless it is because we have spurned his love and loving gifts. If we can see a response of Hosannas and palms like this in our text, without a stir in our own hearts, then not Christ but we are to be pitied. Have we actually taken nothing from him? Has all his love been in vain for us? Are we going through life and into eternity alone? Think what this means, and then take anew the measure of this great King's love for you, as you see it in his death for you, in all his spiritual blessings, in all his golden promises. Let all that love of his come into your hearts, let it come in ever anew by means of his Word and sacrament, and see what it means for you now and to all eternity. Then will your heart be warmed with an answering love and a gratitude that grows steadily greater the more you realize what this Savior King is for you. For our own sakes we must love him thus and ask him to increase our love and to help us show it. Yes, Hosannas and palms for the King, for his sake since he deserves them, and for ours since we are blessed in bestowing them.

### **IV. For His Foes**

Then, too, for the sake of his foes.

Alas, there were such, and are such still! When Jesus made his entry into Jerusalem as the Savior King there were some who did not join in the Hosannas nor offer him palms. The Pharisees never stirred to greet him. They were the ruling class of the Jews and turned in wicked opposition against him. They had given orders to arrest Jesus in order to stop his teach-

ing and work, but had failed utterly so far in interfering with him. And now when the people acclaimed Jesus they stood by with hostile eyes and envious hearts. St. John tells us how they spoke to each other: “All the world is gone after him!” and in their hearts they resolved more than ever that this King of Israel must die. We know how they did bring him to his death, not by power of theirs but by love of his, since his death was to free us from our sins and bring us back to God.

But why do we say that for the sake of such enemies of Jesus there should be Hosannas and palms for him from us? In order to separate ourselves more completely from them. Shall we who know this blessed King, who realize what our own faith and love to him mean for us, ever leave it in doubt on which side we belong? Shall we by our coldness and indifference ever help to strengthen the opposition of those who reject his love in order to go on in their blindness and sin? Surely, we will want to do the very opposite, in fact, must do it if we really mean to honor him. Just as we want Jesus to acknowledge us to-day, to receive us when we die, and to accept us at the last day in his eternal kingdom, so we must want to separate ourselves as widely as possible from all his foes now. Our honor of Jesus is a mighty protest against all the opposition of men to him. It may bring us their ill-will — it is sure to do so. But let it. He bore the cross for us, we will bear for him whatever is laid on us for his sake. “Blessed are ye,” says Jesus, “when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” Matt. 5:11-12. And again he says: “Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God. But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.” Luke 12:8-9. He that is not with the King is against him. Therefore, also because of those who are against him our Hosannas and palms, our honor and praise shall proclaim that with all our hearts we are with him.

There is another reason. You see it when Jesus made his entry into Jerusalem. To the last he sought to win those who needed him so much, yet would not receive him hitherto. That is the wonder of his love — it is so strong, so patient, so enduring, so single in its great aim of saving us. And that is why our praises of that love must continue to go forth even also for those who stand aloof from Christ and have not yielded to his love. Who knows how many were saved by the love of our great King, when this love

held on so long? Who knows how many will yet be moved to yield their hearts to our King when they see and continue to see our faith and love of him in the Hosannas and palms we offer him? He bids us to let our light shine before men that they may be brought to glorify God. His holy apostle admonishes us that we, the Savior's chosen generation, show forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. 1 Pet. 2:9. So our mission among men is to point them all to the great King of Salvation, and that we do by our Hosannas and palms, by every honor we show him, every confession we make of him, every bit of true gratitude we show toward him. God make us faithful and zealous in thus holding up the name of Jesus even before the eyes of his misguided foes.

Down through the ages the echoes of that first wonderful Palm Sunday have come, reaching even to us this day. Those Hosannas and palms of that far off day stir our hearts now to offer like praise and adoration to our Savior King for his sake, for our own sakes, and even for the sake of his foes. As we joyfully answer this call, let us remember how the great procession of Hosannas and palms, of loyal hearts honoring Christ and proclaiming his praises among men, will move on down the coming years, until at last the great King of salvation steps forth from his throne to receive into eternal honor those who have thus honored him. God grant that none of us may ever leave that procession, and that our Hosannas and palms may greet the King with all the rest on that great coming day.

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## Outlines

Palm Sunday has its own effective appeal, and our text fully answers it. The central figure is Christ the Savior King; upon him we must focus the entire sermon. We may sound as the festive note: Our welcome to Christ our Passion King! — as he comes to us with all his saving grace — as that grace draws our hearts in faith and adoration. Or we may take up directly the ancient refrain: Blessed the King that comes to us in the name of the Lord! — we bless him for all that he did when he came to Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday — we bless him for all that he does in us now, on this Palm Sunday. — We may also dwell on: The heavenly attractiveness of our Passion King: its power (meeting all our deepest needs, our highest aspirations) — its suc-

cess (resisted only by those who will not be saved; praised and glorified by all who yield in faith). — Confirmation may lead us to sound the note of loyalty: Be true to Zion's King! — true in faith and devotion to him — true in the fellowship of his true followers — true in our resistance to every foe of his. — The King who deserves our Hosannas and palms: he has earned them — our joy should be to offer them — let no man induce us to withhold them.

## **Come, Let us Honor Christ our King!**

Why? Because of the excellence of his person; because of the greatness of his grace and sacrifice; because of the infinite value of his gifts to us.

How? Let us learn from his friends — their palms, their praise of his works, their hosanna of prayer and expectation. — Let us learn from his enemies — for their hatred put love; for their hostility put obedience.

## **Palms for the King**

1. There never was one more worthy of them.
2. There is no greater blessing than to bestow them.

## **Zion's Palms.**

1. Her prayers. 2. Her praises. 3. Her vows.

## **Hosanna to the King!**

1. Save, Lord, from our sin!
2. Save, Lord, by thy grace!
3. Save, Lord, for thy glory!

# 25. How the Savior died upon the Cross. Good Friday. John 19:28-37.

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced. (John 19:28-37)

ONLY ONE THING will satisfy the Christian's heart today — to go up in spirit with the holy evangelists to Calvary, to let their sacred words unfold once more to his soul that momentous scene when the Lord Jesus Christ, God's own Son, our blessed Savior, gave up his life that we might be saved. The one of all the evangelists who himself stood on Calvary during all those six hours when Jesus passed through his last great agony, who saw him yield up his spirit unto his Father, who watched all that was done to the last, who himself then with a few faithful helpers carried the sacred body of our Lord to its resting place in the tomb — he is to be our guide in this solemn hour. His holy words shall show us

**How the Savior died upon the Cross.**

## I. “It Is Finished!”

The end had come. The three fearful hours of darkness from noon till three o'clock were ended. The agonizing cry: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” had been wrung from the Savior's lips. Once more the sun broke through and flooded all the scene. The final moment was at hand — Jesus, our Savior, was dying. But mark well how he died. There is something stupendous in these last moments when life leaves the Savior's body on the cross. He dies as our Savior indeed — as the victor crying in triumph: “It is finished!”

Our Savior dies with the great work for which he had come into the world triumphantly brought to an end. He had come to redeem us from our sins, to remove our guilt by the shedding of his blood, to open heaven and blessedness for us by his death that we might enter in. That glorious work was now finally done. Not one stroke more needed to be added, not a single further effort, was required. The glorious goal set by God and clearly imaged in the prophecies of his Word was now attained. Jesus had redeemed the world — salvation was won for man. What a moment of triumph for the Savior's soul. The stains of his battle are still upon his body, but the victory, the eternal victory over our sin, guilt, and death are in his hands. It is this that fills his soul now and makes him cry with all his might: “It is finished!” Thus he died.

Think what that work cost and you will understand the better how Jesus died thus. “It is finished!” — oh what all lies behind that word! The Savior's whole life in lowliness as man in this sordid, wretched world of sin and sinners. His battles with Satan from the first temptation on to the last conflict on the cross. The hard pilgrimages from one end of the land to the other with often scarcely a place to lay his weary head. The constant contact with men who loved sin better than salvation. Satan more than a Savior. The base ingratitude which saw all his love and loving gifts of healing and help, and yet would not understand their true purpose. The final Great Passion itself, the unjust condemnation, the bonds, the blows, the crown and mockery, and then this terrible cross, and in those last three hours the greatest bitterness of it all, when even in his Father's sight he was made a curse for us and in our stead, and for our sakes hung forsaken of God on the cross. And now it was all done. This tremendous price for our sins was all paid — all

paid down to the uttermost farthing. O the triumph and blessedness of it! It is thus that the Savior died crying with a mighty voice just before his spirit took its flight: "It is finished!"

But the future is also locked up in that word and the victorious work of which it speaks. He uttered it, therefore, in the fervor of his soul not only for God to near, but also for men; and St. John today helps us to hear it. Those parched and burning lips which had tasted no drop of drink since the early hours of the night before, after all that Jesus had endured, could not have cried aloud. So Jesus, knowing that the great work was all done, and that he might die with a shout of triumph on his lips, said: "I thirst." The soldiers brought the rod of hyssop, the sponge, and vinegar they had ready for the crucified when they would moan from thirst. They wet the Savior's lips and mouth, and then there rang out for them all to hear this mighty word, which still sounds forth to all the world in the holy Gospel of St. John — "It is finished!" They stopped, listened, wondered — finished, yes. a greater thing than they all knew, one which most intimately concerned them all, and will to all eternity, was finished. For all men and for all time, for you and for me and all the millions then unborn, for all the generations yet to be born, down to the end of time and even for all eternity, the great work of redemption was finished on Calvary. There now it will stand unchanged forever. By one all-sufficient sacrifice all is paid. The great fountain of pardon in Jesus' blood flows on and on in an undiminished stream for all who will to drink and be blessed. And ever as men's hearts yield to the love which won that salvation for them, their hearts will respond to the Savior's cry of victory "It is finished" in songs of praise and gratitude.

"Be praised, O Jesus, without end,  
That thou from heaven didst descend,  
And hast for me a ransom paid —  
For all a full atonement made."

## II. The Passover Lamb

When the word of victory had been uttered St. John tells us that Jesus bowed his head and gave up the spirit. But now a strange thing happened, not only the signs which the other evangelists record, which John therefore omits, the earthquake, the rocks rending, the veil in the Temple torn in

twain, but something pertaining to the holy body of Jesus itself, something which shows us again how our Savior died upon the cross, namely as the Passover Lamb giving his life for us.

St. John tells us that the Jews who had brought Jesus to his death, while they triumphed in their monstrous deed, did not like to see the bodies of the men crucified on Calvary remain there in full view on the Sabbath, especially since the Jews all considered this Sabbath in their holy Passover week especially great and high. Men nailed to crosses often lingered on for three or four days before they finally died. So the Jews asked the Roman governor Pilate to have the execution hastened in the terrible manner then customary, namely by ordering the executioners to take heavy clubs, and reaching up from the ground crush and shatter the legs of the victims, thus killing them. The Roman governor consented. St. John stood by and saw how the first malefactor thus had his legs broken, ending his miserable life. Then the second was dealt with in the same way. Would the soldiers carry out their orders as men like this almost always do, without further question, and crash their heavy clubs down upon the body of Jesus also? They came to his cross — and paused. Jesus was already dead. What of it — crush his legs anyway! they might have thought. But no. they did not. An invisible power held them. It was the hand of God. St. John beheld and marveled; for he saw then how Jesus had really died, as God's own precious Passover Lamb prepared for our deliverance.

Hundreds of years before, when God delivered His people Israel from the bondage of the Egyptians he had ordered them to kill and prepare for each family or group of ten or more a lamb; they were to treat it as sacred and holy, and in the killing and preparation not a single bone of it dared to be broken. All these hundreds of years, at every coming Passover, down to the one which had been celebrated the very night before, the Jews had followed these instructions. Never a bone of any Passover lamb had been broken. Why this ancient, strange command of God? Because all those lambs were types and images of Jesus; because they all pictured his sacrificial death for us. And that there might never be a doubt about it this mark was affixed of God to all those Jewish lambs and to this great heavenly Lamb of his own: "A bone of him shall not be broken." When every one might have expected those soldiers never to stop for an instant, but at once to swing their clubs against that holy body — they did not do it. God protected his



holy sacrifice, as he said he would by the prophecy concerning the paschal lambs.

But see what all this signifies for us. If Jesus is the great Paschal Lamb of God, then all those other paschal lambs slain at God's command picture to us what our Savior's death really means. That night in Egypt the angel of death went through the land and killed the first-born in every Egyptian house, but the blood of those paschal lambs protected every Israelite's house. More than this — that night when they ate of those lambs as God bade them the order would come from the Egyptian king ending their terrible slavery and bondage forever, they would go free under Moses, their leader, to serve God in a new land. It was all a show and image of the salvation which God would prepare not only for the Jews but for all men in his own chosen Passover Lamb Jesus Christ. They who trust in the blood of this Lamb of God slain on Calvary, they who by faith receive unto themselves his holy sacrifice are thereby delivered from a worse death than that which swept through Egypt that night, and are set free from a worse bondage than that from which the Israelites were delivered that night. God's Passover Lamb by his death frees us from the eternal death which comes as the penalty of sin and from the eternal curse and bondage which unforgiven sin brings upon men. All who believe in the Savior slain on Calvary are by that faith made God's own children to serve him here in his holy church on earth, and then at last taken to the blessed church above to serve him there in joy and holiness forever. This is how Jesus died — not a bone of his was broken: he died as our Passover Lamb — death and damnation shall pass over us and spare us for the sake of Jesus' blood. St. John saw it and recorded it for our faith and consolation. We see it with him and sing:

“Paschal Lamb, by God appointed.  
All our sins on thee were laid;  
By almighty love anointed,  
Thou hast full atonement made.  
All thy people are forgiven  
Through the virtue of thy blood:  
Opened is the gate of heaven,  
Peace is made 'tween man and God.”

### **III. Bringing Grace and Judgment To All**

Not a bone of our Passover Lamb did the soldiers on Calvary break, but they did something else, again altogether unexpected, but foreseen of God, and again an act so significant that when St. John points it out to us we must see with him that this too shows us how Jesus died. The Savior died on the cross as the mighty Messenger of Jehovah bringing grace and judgment to us all.

Those cruel clubs were not raised to shatter the bones that dared not be broken. But as St. John stood by he saw one of the soldiers raise a spear and plunge the sharp blade of it into the side and thus into the heart of Jesus' dead body. And when he withdrew the spear blood and water came from the great, deep gash. In a strange way the holy body of Jesus was thus marked once more, not by sparing it this time, but by wounding it. And St. John tells us that this was done likewise under the directing hand of God, for centuries before he had pointed all his people to this coming sacrifice which he would make of his own Son, and had his prophet Zechariah declare: "They shall look on him whom they pierced." Behold here, what St. John shows us the body of God's own Son pierced indeed, not merely by the cruel nails in his hands and feet, but also and most significantly by this mortal wound which pierced through his very heart.

But again note well what this great sign and mark upon the holy body of Jesus means. When the prophet foretold it he coupled it with the gift of God's spirit of grace and supplication, but at the same time he foretold how Israel would mourn at the sight of him whom they pierced, mourn as one does for an only son or for the death of his first-born. St. John himself tells us what this mourning will be, when in the book of Revelation he speaks of the final judgment, of Jesus coming in the clouds: "Every eye shall see him. and they also which pierced him; and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him" Who is this of whom the prophet foretold that he would thus be pierced, and that both grace and judgment, supplication and mourning would be connected with him? Zechariah called him the Angel of Jehovah, and the word "angel" means messenger. Who this Angel or Messenger is we see when he speaks as the Lord God himself and when he is himself called Jehovah. It is God's own Son. Him the wicked nation of the Jews would pierce to death — did pierce thus with a wound deep and wide through his very heart when he died as the God-man on the cross of Calvary. And now you see why hundreds of years before already God had his prophet speak of grace and judgment in conjunction with this Messenger,

his own beloved Son whom he would send to Israel and whom they would pierce and mark with the great death wound.

Jesus died as God's great Messenger — the cleft in his side marks him. And all they who pierced and marked him thus shall look upon him, either now in grace, or on that last great day when he returns in glory, in judgment. They who look as did the 3,000 in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost when St. Peter preached unto them Christ crucified, who see the atoning blood that flowed from his heart, who accept the grace of pardon in that blood, who believe with repentant hearts — they shall be blessed by this great Messenger of salvation. He will pardon their guilt and save them. But all who refuse to look thus upon his grace shall look at last in another manner. Marked by his holy wounds as the Messenger of Jehovah's grace whom they slew, they shall see him in his eternal majesty on the last day. Then terror will take hold on them; they will mourn, even as the prophet said; they will wail, as St. John wrote in Revelation. For all who reject the grace sent them by God through his Son slain for them shall be cast into outer darkness to wail there forever.

This great mark in the holy body of Jesus is a sign first of all for the Jews, for they are the people who inflicted that mark upon him. But who will say that it does not refer also to us? But for our sins neither the Jews could have wounded the holy Son of God, nor could that soldier have plunged his spear through our Savior's side. Rightly, therefore, do we sing:

“Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in thee;  
Let the water and the blood,  
From thy wounded side that flowed,  
Be of sin the perfect cure;  
Save me, Lord, and make me pure.”

Yea, let us this day bow our heads and mourn in the sorrow of godly repentance and then look with faith upon the Savior's open side where the blood of our atonement flowed. And may God preserve us from the unbelief which by its rejection of Jesus pierces his side again; for all they who pierce him thus, Jew and non-Jew alike, shall howl in terror at last when they see, then too late, him whom they pierced. When the final shadow sinks down over us may we pray as our last prayer:

“Secure I hide in his cleft side  
My failures ev’ry one.”

These great and holy visions of the death of our Savior let the apostle St. John help you today to carry away in your hearts from the sacred hill of Calvary — the vision of the victor crying: “It is finished!” that of the Passover Lamb buying us free from bondage and death, and that of the Messenger of Jehovah bringing us grace and judgment. With these visions drawing your hearts ever back to the cross you will this day have not been in vain in spirit with St. John on Calvary.

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## Outlines

The central thing in the text is the death of Jesus — all else focuses its light upon that. We may take the simple theme: How St. John describes the death of Christ to us — so that we see God’s hand in that death — the work of redemption complete — and may thus believe even as St. John did. — In treating the word “It is finished!” the preacher is tempted, in order to get divisions under this theme to make the catalog: the life of Jesus — the predictions — the suffering — his life’s work — our redemption. A little reflection should show us that this is really improper. We must take that sacred word only in the sense in which he meant it: the work of redemption is finished. But we may divide on this work: this work assigned to Jesus by the Father — which required such a sacrifice — which was done with such obedience and love — which is so blessed for us all. Homiletical desires, or shall we call them needs? dare never lead us to violate true exegesis. We may also put it thus: “It is finished!” Behold the Savior’s great victory! Behold the Lamb’s great sacrifice! Behold God’s great fountain of grace!

### **“It is Finished!”**

I. The passion. — 2. The sacrifice. — 3. The redemption.

### **The Word of our Dying Savior: “It is Finished.”**

1. The battle is fought.
2. The sacrifice is made.
3. The sanctuary is opened.
4. Satan is conquered.
5. Death is swallowed by life and immortality.

— THOMASIIUS.

## **The Supreme Moment on the Cross.**

Supreme for the Savior.

Supreme for the work of redemption.

Supreme for us all.

## **Let St. John Take us beneath the Cross.**

Let him show us the price of our redemption

Let him move our hearts to accept this redemption by faith.

# The Easter Cycle

## 26. The Great Easter Gospel Of Our Lord's Resurrection From The Dead. Easter. Luke 24:1-12.

Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words, And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass. (Luke 24:1-12)

“Hallelujah! Lo, he wakes!  
Lives! o'er death and hell victorious;  
Earth in awe and trembling quakes,  
As the hero rises glorious:  
He who died on Golgotha,  
Jesus lives, Hallelujah!”

THIS IS THE ECHO of the great Easter Gospel as it rings through the ages since that wondrous morning in Joseph's garden near Calvary's, hill — the mighty response this Gospel meets in every Christian heart on this new

Easter morn. “He is risen; he is risen indeed!” And there is but one care for our joyous hearts as we Hear the Easter Gospel once more — that we may grasp and make our own all that its blessed message brings. To aid us most effectively, here in our precious Easter text is one of God’s holy evangelists who under God’s own direction states the great facts for us in due order, that step by step we may follow him and thus penetrate indeed with all its heavenly meaning

## **The Great Easter Gospel of our Lord’s Resurrection from the Dead.**

St. Luke bids us contemplate: the useless spices — the empty tomb — the shining angels — the startled women — the doubting disciples — and by the aid of them all he bids us fill our hearts with Easter faith and joy.

### **I. The Useless Spices**

“Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.”

Can you think of anything sadder than these women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and others, going out in the gray light of that Sunday dawn to finish the task they had been compelled to do so hurriedly that Friday afternoon when at sundown the Sabbath began and the sepulchre had to be all closed — for as Jews they dared to do no work on the sacred day? Think of the love of their hearts which made them hasten thus, now that they dared to turn to the tomb again. But what a broken love! They hasten so because they fear decay was already beginning to work its ravages upon that precious body. All they had been able to do was to wrap it in long strips of linen sprinkling an ample amount of powdered spices between. They want to anoint the body itself, as the Jews loved to bury, rewrap it more carefully and completely, and so leave it forever with all that love could do in this tenderest, saddest service of all.

“Bringing the spices.” writes St. Luke, the costly aromatic ointments they had prepared. What a world of meaning lies in the words!

Think of those spices, and then think of him for whom they were intended!

Beneath all the cruelty, pain, and tragedy of our Savior's death there throbbed a mighty victory. When he bowed his head on the cross he had died indeed, but he had also laid his life down himself by a voluntary act of sacrifice. When his limp body was lifted down from the cruel cross, it was still the body of God's own Son who had commanded storm and waves, sickness, demons, and death, and in every case had been instantly obeyed. When they wrapped it in linen like other dead, that body was utterly unlike those dead, for by it sin and death themselves were broken and could never harm this holy body by their touch of corruption and decay. David already had prophesied of the body of Jesus that it would not see corruption. They laid it down on the rock-hewn couch in the fine new vault which Joseph of Arimathea offered for its rest, thinking that here the body would stay till it crumbled to dust and ashes, when in reality he to whom that body belonged meant for it to rest in this quiet place only till the third day when he himself would bring it forth in all the glory that really belonged to it. And now that mighty moment had come. Even as the women went on with hurried steps, as the shadows grew lighter and the first streaks of the dawn lit the east, the great Easter miracle was wrought — Jesus Christ, slain for our sins, having canceled our sins, arose in triumph from the grave. Behold the useless spices — a few moments more and they will drop to the ground and be forgotten by their bearers, for they themselves will see and hear the great Easter Gospel of our Lord's Resurrection. And they, and we all, whenever we hear those spices named again, will feel the power of that Gospel strong and mighty with joy in our hearts.

That is what the useless spices proclaim on Easter morning — useless indeed — for the body of God's Son was incorruptible — it rested for our sakes in death — it slumbered thus only for a little while — then all its life returned and its glory shines forth forever. And we who see it all, like the women in our text, are filled with a joy that shall never end.

## **II. The Empty Tomb**

“And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre,” writes St. Luke. “And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.”

If ever sad hearts went out to a grave those hearts were sad that Easter morning. Here was one more than merely loved by those near and dear to



him, and now torn from them by the ruthless hand of death. They had believed in Jesus as the Christ, as the Savior of Israel and of the world. Mary Magdalene had experienced his power when he freed her by one mighty word from the possession of evil spirits; there were others of the women who had received his miraculous help. A new life, a new joy, one which really came from heaven had entered their souls. Then this fearful death of Jesus at the hands of his enemies had crashed down upon all their hopes like an avalanche, and with their own trembling hands they had laid him in the grave and rolled the stone before its opening. More than their love lay buried there — all their faith and trust in God's promises, all their hopes for time and for eternity. That was the grave that loomed before their thoughts when they went out that Easter morning from Jerusalem.

Keep that picture in mind, and then see what St. Luke writes — the grave is wide open — the grave is empty, the body of Jesus gone!

Here is the Easter Gospel in its fulness. A grave was needed indeed, when our Savior laid down his body in death for our redemption. And God saw to it that one proper in every way was at hand when the great hour came, not a pit to be covered with heavy clods of earth, but a roomy rock-hewn vault with niches cut in the walls for the bodies; not an old tomb with the molder of death in it, but one wholly new and just finished, fit for the rest of the incorruptible body of our Lord. No prison-house was this tomb to be for our Savior, like ordinary tombs for men's bodies. Where was there a tomb which could lock in the body of him who had shattered the gates of hell itself? This was to be a place of sweet, untroubled rest after hard labor and pain. When the work was done for our redemption on the cross the weary body of Jesus rested — in the highest and holiest sense it rested, even as his spirit was refreshed by holy angel ministrations in heaven. — And when those sorrowing women drew nigh, when the hour set by God himself came, the great Easter deed was wrought. The soul of Jesus returns to the body in the tomb, and in the next instant alive, glorified, using now all the heavenly powers that had belonged to it from the very beginning, the body of Jesus passes out through the living rock walls of the tomb to enter upon its new existence in the fulness of divine majesty and glory. Thus was the tomb empty — an emptiness absolutely different from every other tomb on earth from which ever a body on earth has been taken. For this body, when its death had destroyed death itself, arose itself in a divine life never to end. St. Paul writes: "Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no

more; death hath no more dominion over him.” Rom. 6:9. — And now to reveal that wondrous emptiness to men an angel came, like a flash of lightning from the morning sky; he touched the stone that locked the empty tomb, hurled it from its place, and laid bare the change that had been wrought within. Then the women reached the tomb — all was ready for them to come and see: the empty tomb proclaiming the Easter Gospel of our Lord’s Resurrection from the dead. When their hearts grasped it, a joy unspeakably great and as deathless as he whose resurrection they now saw overcame them.

O let the message of that empty tomb bring the same Easter joy in all its fulness to you today. Christ’s empty tomb means that death could not hold his body, the grave could not bar him in. It means that the body slain for our sins is transformed, glorified, using all the power and majesty belonging to it. Time and space and all earthy limitation cannot hinder it or set limits for it. And all the life and glory of that exalted body is intended for us, that by the power of Christ’s salvation even our bodies shall at last be made like unto his. Take in the joy, and with the prophet Hosea and the apostle St. Paul sing the Easter song of triumph: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? ...But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”

### **III. The Shining Angels**

“And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold two men stood by them in shining garments.”

What had those women expected to see in the tomb of Jesus? You know — the sad image -of death and its terrible ravages. For this they had come prepared. They dreaded to think of it, and yet they could not stay away. They knew that tears would suffuse their eyes, that the wounds still fresh in their hearts would open anew, that their hands would shake from nerves overwrought when they would touch his holy wounds and cover them with precious unguents. And then, when all would be done, they knew how they would leave, with sad and painful reluctance, with heads bowed down and faces covered, wearily going back to dreary, empty lives. Ah, the pity of it when we picture it to our minds. All the sorrows we have ever had are as

nothing to this sorrow — for the highest hopes of heaven lay buried for these women in that tomb.

To realize in your own hearts the full meaning of the Easter Gospel never forget what those women felt when they thought of their work in Jesus' tomb. Against that black background of nameless grief hold the Easter vision that met their eyes.

Always in the great story of our salvation when the cardinal points are reached heaven itself gets into commotion — the angels of God appear. It was so when our Lord Jesus rose from the dead. Into the very citadel of death the eternal spirits of life and light were sent. When the bulwarks of the grave were thrown down the shining dwellers of heaven marched in. Where the stench of corruption had ever ruled before now at last the sweetness of angelic presence spread heavenly delight. It is all symbolic of what the resurrection of Jesus has brought — life in place of death; immortality in place of decay; light instead of the night of death; joy eternal in place of gloom. — And remember the angels of God are his messengers. Whatever their shining presence symbolizes, all that they came to make our own through him who won it for us by his death and resurrection. That is why the shining angels at the tomb of Jesus waited for the women till they came. The women were to see them, to see reflected in them what the Easter Gospel of our Lord's Resurrection really is, and then to receive from them what this Easter Gospel really contains. And not only they, but we all who have eyes to see this blessed Easter vision of the angels of life and light in Jesus' tomb.

Let your hearts rejoice in what is here proclaimed. As dark as was the grave of Jesus when he was laid there, so dark are our graves still. But he is the first fruits of them that slept. The power of Christ's resurrection is over all those who sleep in Jesus now. The life and light that entered Jesus' grave is now invisibly over every grave in which one of his saints slumbers. Only a little while, like the three days of darkness in Jesus' tomb, and the shining angels of God will open every one of our graves and we shall share the life and light which is theirs and which the glorious Easter Gospel of Christ now makes our own.

## **IV. The Startled Women**

St. Luke writes again that the women “were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth.” Then, however, the Easter message rang out: “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” And they remembered his words.

There was something wrong with those women when they made ready those spices and went out to anoint the body of Jesus. Much as their sorrow affects us when we try to imagine it, we dare, not forget what really caused that sorrow and made it so comfortless and deep. They had forgotten! — forgotten the most precious of all the words and promises of Jesus. They said they believed, and yet — the)" had forgotten. When the very things came which Jesus had told them, not only at the last, but already in his earliest teaching in Galilee and all through his ministry, the crowning things to which all the others were only a prelude, behold, these women forgot — they passed through them all as in a maze, a cloud over their hearts and eyes. It was all so simple — if Jesus died as he said he would, died exactly as he said, on the cross, why then this death itself was proof and guarantee that after that death would come exactly what he said would come — his rising from the dead. But they had not believed as they should, and so they even went out to anoint the body of Jesus, when with eager expectation they should have awaited that decisive third day. Even the enemies of Jesus, the men who had killed him, had not forgotten — they placed a guard of soldiers around the tomb, so that nobody could come, steal away the dead body, and then spread the report that Jesus was risen. Those soldiers should have reminded the women and all the rest, if nothing else would: but sad to say, they all forgot.

Here is the part of the Easter message that we dare not forget — the part that points to faith. When the women saw the angels and with faces bowed down to the ground heard those words of loving, rebuke: “Why seek ye the living among the dead? ...remember, remember how he spake unto you!” then they were startled indeed. How it all must have come back to them — all in a flash then at last. Their own dullness of mind and heart must have startled them; the clearness of all those words of Jesus, now finally clear also to them; and the tremendous significance of those words, when now the full reality of what they contained burst upon their consciousness. Shame at their forgetting and failing to believe, at their foolish bringing of

spices when they should have brought remembrance and faith, at their waiting so long and requiring so much to get what Jesus had offered them and tried to give them so long. — The startled women in the tomb of Jesus recall to us how thousands of hearts to this day lie in the maze of forgetfulness and unbelief. Not so had those women forgotten that their memory had become a blank. They knew that Jesus had said those things, but they did not treat them as realities. Just so, who will count them all, and some of them are in our churches this very Easter morning, people hear not only the promises of Jesus' resurrection but the glorious fulfillment of those promises from angel lips, from the pens of God's evangelists, from the mouth of Jesus himself, and yet they do not deal with them as golden realities for life, for death, and for eternity — they pass over them in a kind of dismal forgetfulness. Do we want to wait to be startled too by something more than we already have? The hour is coming when the angels who were in Christ's tomb will appear again; all the angels — of God will be with them, and the risen Savior himself in his heavenly glory. Not you and I alone, but all men alike will see them. But on that day it will be too late for faith. O let this precious Gospel of the Savior's resurrection with the angels' call to the women to remember be enough for us. God give us the true Easter remembrance of faith.

## **V. The Doubting Disciples**

And now St. Luke tells us what the women did: they “returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest... And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.”

Does it jar us to hear that this was the reception accorded the first promulgation of the great Easter Gospel from the lips of the first witnesses? Alas, for the similar unbelief that has followed down to this very day. But these words of St. Luke and the other evangelists were written for the very purpose of preventing such unbelief and of strengthening our faith against it when it meets us among men. Yes, it is true, the eleven apostles themselves did not believe when the women returned and told the things they had seen and heard, and none of the rest believed. They even called the whole report ridiculous, the foolish chatter of women. But in a very little while every one of these disciples, even Thomas who held out longest, did believe. That is

the thing to impress upon our minds — not one continued in doubt or unbelief. Why not? Because the proof of the Lord's resurrection was overwhelming. And so forever the Scriptures record this unbelief at the start to show us how all these disciples were anything but easily convinced, the very opposite of credulous dupes. They were men of sound, solid, practical sense — no half dozen women, even such noble characters as these named by St. Luke, could make them believe what seemed so-utterly improbable, yea simply impossible. But when the Lord himself appeared to them, when Thomas himself was ordered by that Lord to put his fingers in the prints made by the nails in Jesus' hands, and to thrust his hand into the open gash made by the spear in Jesus' breast — then no unbelievers were left. Thus the doubting disciples are made to help proclaim the undoubted fact of the great Easter Gospel for us all.

Let no man say, then, that he cannot believe. Where God has given us so much, where our eternal salvation depends on what he gives us, where heaven and earth combine to draw us to faith and all its blessed fruits, only one thing can keep us in unbelief — a heart that simply will not yield to God's grace and Christ's love. Woe to those who spurn the Gospel of the Lord's resurrection — their present state, empty of faith, hope, true joy and peace, is only the foreshadowing of what their state will be at last, equally empty of God, Christ, salvation, heaven, and eternal blessedness.

## **VI. Easter Faith And Joy.**

We have followed St. Luke's holy record of our Lord's resurrection from the dead. But dwell as we may on any of its individual parts, only by combining all those parts into one tremendous whole will their full effect be realized in our hearts.

There is one center to which every part points, and that is Jesus Christ who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. He who went into the grave laden with our sin and guilt, himself paying the penalty of death for that guilt, arose on the third day glorified and exalted. Were the sin and guilt truly atoned for? one might ask when he died thus —

“He whom blood-stained they buried  
In the still twilight hour.”

Here is the answer: “He is not here, but is risen!” —

“He whom God waked from slumber,  
He who arose in power.”

That word on the cross is true: “It is finished!” God himself accepted the blood and death of his Son; the resurrection proclaims it to all the world, and that proclamation stands to all eternity. Through the grave of Christ the way was opened for us into heaven. The barrier of sin, guilt, and death is broken forever. Heaven’s holy light shines in those angel messengers in Jesus’ tomb. Into that light the women entered and it never left their hearts. Into that light a little later the Eleven and all the other disciples likewise entered, when their unbelief gave way to joyous faith. Christ’s death and resurrection are the portal which shall never be closed. That is the heart of St. Luke’s precious record of what took place on Easter morning, the heart of the great Easter Gospel for us all. Take them all together, the different precious parts, and let them rivet your souls to this golden center where our salvation shines.

And so indeed the result will be reached — hearts filled with Easter faith and joy. Not merely that Jesus escaped from death is our joy, but that his resurrection is now for us the way of escape from death. Not this or that wonderful part of the Easter miracle is our delight, but the miracle itself as it takes in us poor sinners, -breaks our bonds, and sets us on the way that will lead through our own resurrection to him who now triumphs in glory. In a little while all these shadows of earth shall be blown away, all false hope and expectations of men shall pass like the unsubstantial vapors they are. Then shall be left this glorious Easter Gospel alone — the Prince of Life, the Lord of glory, the King of salvation. And all they whose hearts have embraced that Gospel by faith, bound thus to him who is the substance of that Gospel, shall live with him in his heavenly kingdom forever.

“Hallelujah! then I cry;  
Christ too will from death restore me,  
Take me to his throne on high,  
Whither he has gone before me.  
Faith exults: Victoria!  
Jesus lives! Hallelujah!”

# Outlines

There are many ways of approaching this great festival text. We note the three general methods — take the parts of the text seriatim, with a theme to cover the whole and match the formulation of the parts — take out the part chosen to govern the whole sermon, and group all that the text offers in accord with this central feature — take the great fact of the resurrection itself and so formulate the statement of it that the main parts or elements contained in it are brought to view and offer opportunity to weave in the text. The sermon given above follows the first method. The second may be illustrated by the theme: The angel's word: "He is not here, but is risen!" 1) 'He needs no spices. 2) You need to remember. 3) All men need to be told. — Or, simply stating one central fact in a formulation of our own: The empty tomb on Easter morning: 1) "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" — 2) "Remember how he spake unto you." — 3) They "told all these things." — We add a sample of the third method of using the text: The blessedness of the Easter miracle: see how this blessedness shines in the risen Savior — in his resurrection gifts — in the hearts of all believers.

## **The Lord's Resurrection the Greatest Victory in the World.**

1. Behold it in the open tomb!
2. Hear it proclaimed by the shining angels!
3. Realize it in your own hearts with all believers!

## **The Solid Foundation of our Easter Faith.**

1. The Lord's resurrection is a fact which was divinely prophesied.
2. The Lord's resurrection is a fact which actually occurred.
3. The Lord's resurrection is a fact which was really seen.
4. The Lord's resurrection is a fact which is most blessedly experienced this very day.

— SEEHAWER.



## **The Open Sepulchre.**

1. Death is gone. — 2. Life is come. — 3. Faith rejoices.

## **What Means this Empty Tomb?**

1. For him who lay there.
2. For those who went there.
3. For us who would like to have been there.

## 27. The Christian Church and Christ's Resurrection. Quasimodogeniti. Luke 24:36-47.

And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (Luke 24:36-47)

WE OFTEN SAY that the Christian church is built on Jesus Christ. We call him the corner stone, the foundation of the church. Whenever we do this we have in mind his passion and his resurrection. Without these there could be no Christian church. The resurrection, however, always presupposes his passion and death, and so we are' justified in saying that the resurrection of Christ is the eternal rock on which the Christian church is built.

What a tremendous error, then, to deny the resurrection of Christ! We are little concerned about the world which because of its blindness and love of ungodliness is ready to deny anything. But there are people who claim to be Christians, even preachers who assert that they are preaching the Gospel and building the church of Christ, who set up this denial of our Savior's resurrection and mislead the poor souls of men. Once for all we must understand what such denial means. It destroys the very foundation of the Christian church. There is no church of God if Christ did not arise from the dead.

St. Paul has well written: “If Christ be not raised your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.” St. Paul merely restates what Jesus himself showed his disciples the very, evening of the day when he arose from the dead and all through the forty days between his resurrection and ascension — the entire church of Christ rests forever on his glorious resurrection from the dead.

Let us impress upon our hearts this vital connection between

### **The Christian Church and Christ’s Resurrection.**

With the resurrection of Christ the Christian church stands or falls, for we must realize that in this resurrection literally everything is involved — Christ himself as our Savior, the peace he has brought, the Gospel he has sent out, the revelation of which he and his resurrection are the center — and thus beyond question all that is rightly named the church.

## **I. No Resurrection: No Salvation**

For the Christian church the Savior is absolutely essential. Take away the Savior, and there can be no Christian church in the true sense of the word. But on the other hand the resurrection is essential for the Savior. We must solemnly affirm: no resurrection — no Savior.

There is an absolutely vital reason for all these efforts which Jesus made to convince his disciples beyond the least shadowy of doubt That he was indeed risen from the dead. This vital reason is behind the opening of the tomb, the laying in significant order of the linen cloths, the presence and message of the angels, and then of all these wonderful appearances of the risen Savior. Here in our text, the very evening of the day he arose, when the wonderful news had brought the disciples all together again in one place, when they had finished their evening meal, all at once Jesus stood in their midst. They were startled and frightened at first. But he showed them his hands and his feet bearing those significant wounds of the nails; he bared his side showing where the spear had entered his heart. They had to see with their own eyes that it was he himself. More than that — he made them feel of his flesh and bones that they were real indeed, and no phantom appearance or shadowy vision. He made them bring out food, fish and hon-

eycomb, and ate those before them. Not that now in his glorified state his body needed anything like earthly food, but to demonstrate in the completest possible way that he was truly risen from the dead.

What is the vital reason for this strong demonstration and the absolute conviction it produced? It is this that he was the Savior indeed. The load of sin had been heavy — it had crushed him down into the grave. Had it crushed him for good, swept him, like it does the sinner, into, eternal night and destruction? It had not; for here he was. — not merely alive, but glorified and returned from the grave. The sin was gone — Jesus had borne it away — a Savior indeed! He had died on the cross; they themselves had buried him and closed the tomb over his dead body. Had death swallowed him up for good? Had he merely tried to break the bonds of death and failed, going down like others who die to stay in death? No. Here he was, alive, glorified, death and the grave shattered behind him. He had triumphed — the glorious victory was won. Jesus is the Savior indeed, and it is his resurrection from the dead which attests it.

He whom we call Savior must be able to deliver us from sin and death. If he himself sinks down beneath them he cannot be a Savior, such a Savior as poor, dying sinners must have to be saved. No resurrection — no Savior, is the conclusion we cannot escape if Jesus did not arise. And then all would be lost. But see what a glorious conclusion follows when with all the disciples and with St. Paul we are able to sing: “But now is Christ risen from the dead!” Then he is a Savior, the very Savior we need; then we all who are joined to him in living faith are saved indeed, and may gather around him as the company of those who are thus saved, that means as his church.

## **II. No Resurrection: No Peace**

In a different way the same mighty conclusion is reached when we look at the salvation which makes us a church. Take it away, and there is no church left in the real meaning of the word. But the all-important thing to note is that salvation depends absolutely on the fact that Jesus arose from the dead. So again we affirm as beyond Question: no resurrection — no salvation.

When Jesus arose from the dead he appeared alive and triumphant in the midst of his disciples. But perhaps this was only a personal escape of his — a victory and triumph for him alone, leaving all the rest of us just where we

were before. Why then this display of his victory, the tomb, the linen, the angels, the risen Savior himself? No, his victory is for us; his triumph is ours. To settle that once for all the Savior returns in his resurrection with the mighty word: “Peace be unto you!” upon his glorified lips. He comes to bring us this peace which he has gained, which is only another and most expressive name for what we usually call salvation. Nor does he stop with the word peace. He shows the disciples the holy five wounds with which he has bought this peace for us. Those wounds, bleeding so terribly once, now glorified forever, are the eternal guarantees that there is peace for us indeed, On his throne of glory now those holy wounds still mark the body of Jesus. By them in heaven itself our peace is forever established.

Stop and think what this peace really means, and how this and this alone makes us the church of Christ through him who brought that peace to us by his resurrection from the dead.

The Scriptures declare that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sin and all who lie in sin. If one thing is sure, it is this that God is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him. Ps. 5:4. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. Drop the delusion of those who cry: Peace, peace! when there is no peace. Unless the wrath of God is stilled, all dreaming of peace on our part is vain. It is just as if a criminal who has offended against the law of the land and struck at its majesty should imagine that by his wanting peace now he could escape the just penalties of that law. He might dodge the law for a while, but the moment its hand reached him he would be doomed. But with God no man can dodge — we are all in his hands, every hour of our lives. Even when sinners go together, form societies and call them churches, and employ men to tell them that their sins will not harm them, that God is so kind he will not hold them accountable — nothing whatever is changed. Not so, or in any other way of human invention is there peace and salvation for us. To put God at peace with us requires infinitely more. What is required the risen Savior himself shows us when here he proclaims peace indeed and exhibits to us the proofs of that peace as proofs that count indeed with God.

Look at the glorified wounds of Jesus and see there the peace, that is peace indeed, release from sin, deliverance from death acceptance at the throne of God. When Jesus died he placed his soul in his Father’s hands. Did God then accept the sacrifice of Jesus’ blood for our sins? Was God satisfied with the atonement Jesus had made? Can we now come with Jesus’

blood and sacrifice covering our sins and find acceptance with God? Here is the answer. From God himself in heaven above the soul of Jesus returns, reenters his body, and now declares that God has accepted his sacrifice and that the holy wounds in our Savior's body are God's articles of peace with us all. Thus, and thus alone, is there peace for the sinner. Take away the resurrection, take away or count for naught those glorified wounds, and you take our peace, our salvation, away. No resurrection — no salvation! But now is Christ risen; God has accepted the price of Christ's death for our peace; Christ himself brings us that peace by his resurrection.

And with this blessed peace of Christ's wounds made ours by faith, we may indeed gather about him as his church; that peace makes us Christ's own, God's own, his pardoned children, his holy church.

### **III. No Resurrection: No Gospel**

There is another step to take in speaking of the Christian church and Christ's resurrection from the dead. Not visibly does Jesus come to us now to show us his wounds and speak the word peace. That he did for those precious forty days only. How does he come to us now? By means of the holy Gospel. The Gospel brings us the risen Savior and all that his resurrection carries with it. This is so vital for us as the church of Christ that we must ever declare: no resurrection — no Gospel. If Christ did not rise, then, not only is the Gospel not true, it would not be Gospel any more, whatever else it might be. And without the Gospel as Gospel indeed, no church, no real church of God is possible.

What was it that Jesus impressed so deeply upon the hearts of his disciples during those forty days when Jesus appeared to them and gave them his last instructions and commands? This is the precious sum of it, as St. Luke records: "Thus it is written," said Jesus, "and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Soon the forty days would end and Jesus ascend to heaven. Those disciples indeed would have it all treasured in their hearts, how he suffered and died for our sins, how he rose from death on the third day, and how this resurrection proved that Christ's sacrifice had been accepted of God, how peace everlasting was theirs through Christ crucified and risen

from the dead. But how about us, and how about all the nations of the world? Here is Christ's own answer — the Gospel! By the Gospel all that those first disciples saw with their eyes is brought now to our hearts that by faith we may see it, and by faith have it forever. This is why Jesus commanded before his ascension to heaven that the Gospel should be preached to all the world, and why he sealed this precious command with the promise, that whosoever believeth the Gospel shall be saved.

By the Gospel then Jesus appears to us now. He is here this very moment as the Gospel rings in our ears. His Gospel reveals him to us better even than our bodily eyes could see him or our bodily hands could assure us of his presence and his gifts. Even when Jesus appeared to those first disciples he himself had to teach and tell them what he had done and what his work had won for them — he himself had to preach to them what is now preached to us, the Gospel. For ever the vital thing is to see not Jesus alone, but how he suffered, died, and rose again for our salvation. Unless this gets into our hearts all is in vain. Preach the Gospel is therefore his last command, and for almost 1900 years it has been done.

But what is done when men tamper with that Gospel? when they take the resurrection of Jesus out of it, the very thing he impressed so deeply upon those who were to be the first hearers of his Gospel? No matter how the thing is done, whether by the claims of false science that man cannot rise from the dead, or by the false theological wisdom which asserts that all these inspired records of the resurrection are only myths and fables, or by the assertions of fanatics who think they have something better to offer than the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the moment the resurrection is taken out of the Gospel it ceases to be the Gospel, the glad news that sin and death are conquered for us by Christ. Whatever is left is like a nut with the kernel eaten out by noxious worms. Yea, worse; for when men take the resurrection of Jesus out of the Gospel they substitute something else — and any substitute here is like poison for bread. It is all summed up in the one statement: no resurrection — no Gospel with real salvation through Christ for sinners. Glory be to God, the whole Bible contradicts this delusion! It rings with the resurrection of Christ. Every evangelist records it; every apostle made it the cornerstone of his preaching; Moses and every prophet proclaimed it in advance. The Gospel brings us a Savior risen from death and the grave with eternal salvation now for us all. And therefore we gather together now; all whose hearts rejoice in the precious news of this

Gospel by faith, not as an earthly society merely, like thousands of others religious, or of other kinds, but as the company of those who have been saved by Jesus death and resurrection — as his holy, blessed, eternal church.

## **IV. No Resurrection: No Revelation**

The Gospel which brings us the risen Savior is the only hope of men and the only real foundation of the church. But we must take in the full view of it. Christ's deliverance from death for our redemption is such a stupendous thing that it forms the crown of all God's revelation to man. All that God has ever said to man since that sad day when Adam fell into sin, centers in Christ and his resurrection. It is literally true, if the resurrection of Christ is set aside as unreal, the whole vast structure of God's revelation to man is overthrown. No resurrection — no revelation is-then the only conclusion left. And that again means no church of God as a real church of his.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples he did more than send them forth to all the world as the heralds of his salvation through his death and resurrection. St. Luke records that Jesus said to them: "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me." Then Jesus took up the revelation of God, opened the understanding of his disciples, that they might understand the Scriptures, namely how all God's revelation to man leads up to Jesus' death and resurrection. This is the vital thing in all of it. And this vital thing was now finally accomplished — the risen Savior stood before them, and salvation was theirs through his resurrection. No wonder that now they were to carry the glad news of it all for all the world to share.

The resurrection of Jesus is a deeper, mightier thing than many suppose, many even of those who believe in it. To achieve the resurrection for us Jesus was born man. To conquer sin and death for us by his resurrection God's Son left the throne of heaven and came to earth. Heaven itself, and God in heaven is behind Christ's glorious resurrection, even as now heaven rejoices around our Savior risen from the dead and ascended on high. And thus it was that all through the ages before Christ came, by God's own words and the messages of his holy prophets, the resurrection of his Son



from the dead was set before men's eyes as their only hope of salvation. Isaiah proclaimed it when he told of the Lamb led to the slaughter, which would be taken from death, would prolong his days, and live forever. The prophets called the coming Savior the corner stone on whom the building of God's church would rest forever — that meant his resurrection. He would be an eternal king, producing an eternal redemption — and that included the resurrection. He would be a High Priest forever, because he would rise from the dead. In him all the nations of the earth would be blessed — this the promise to Abraham already, — a promise based on the resurrection. What a wonderful story the whole Bible becomes when you read it in the light of Jesus' resurrection, when you see it as Jesus made those first disciples of his see it during those forty days! Blessed indeed is what God was preparing for men, and what he finally wrought as he had said he would, when he raised Jesus from the dead.

Take that resurrection out and what have you done? You have destroyed the one thing which makes God's revelation through all the past and all the coming ages what it really is — the glorious, golden hope of man. If the resurrection is gone, then the sun in God's heaven of revelation is gone, and we are all in eternal night. If the resurrection is a fable then the whole Bible is nothing but a fairytale, like other remarkable stories of ancient folklore. If there never was a resurrection and God never promised us a Savior returned from the grave, then what has he given us that is worth while for our souls, what revelation has he made beyond what man himself could know and find out? Yea, if the resurrection of Christ is not real, then, as St. Paul says, all God's messengers are found false witnesses — not one of them can be trusted, they are all liars, for they all said that God would raise Christ, whom now he did not raise up, if the denial of his resurrection is justified. And if Christ is not risen from the dead and this revelation of God must be cast aside, then there is no hope or help for us, and the night of death which swallowed up Jesus is only waiting now to swallow up us all likewise. Oh, I know that men set up in the place of Christ's resurrection and the divine hope and life this offers us, hopes, promises, claims, assurances of their own. This is their ungodly, blasphemous presumption. God's revelation they cast down, to put up in its stead for our souls the abortions of their own lying fancies. Christ's mighty deed of death and resurrection they annul, that they may be a Christ for us by their own revelations. Away with them all. God's revelation shall stand undarkened forever. Heaven and earth shall

pass away, but not the Word of God, not the truth of his revelation, not the Christ he has given us, not his atoning death, nor his saving resurrection. We are not left drifting in eternal night, God's risen Savior gathers us around him; we are his disciples, his believers, filled with the power of his' resurrection — his beloved church.

## **V. No Resurrection: No Church**

And now we may close the grand circle which our after Easter text has helped us to draw. These two clasp into each Other — the Christian church, and Christ's resurrection. The mighty conclusion stands: no resurrection — no church.

With no resurrection of Christ we would have no real Savior. His work would end at the grave. That far we can certainly go ourselves. We must have one to lead us far beyond that line. With no resurrection we would have no salvation. All that we could have would stop short at death. Again that far we can go ourselves. We must have the peace and pardon which admits to God in heaven. With no resurrection we would be left without the Gospel, in fact the whole world of men would be left without a revelation of God really able to fill their souls with light, hope, and help. We must have God's Gospel, God's revelation: this alone can bring us what we need. Thank God we Have them all: his revelation, his Gospel, his Savior and salvation. Christ's resurrection from the dead is God's own heavenly assurance for our souls.

Thus from the resurrection of Christ has sprung the Christian church. It is the company of all those who by faith have Christ and his salvation in their hearts, who by faith have received God's Gospel and revelation. The power of Christ's resurrection shines in them all. Their faith has sprung from it; their lives have been uplifted by it. The risen Savior rules their hearts. They gather about His invisible presence to glorify his holy name. Ever and ever more souls shall be added unto them as they too feel the blessedness of this resurrection. And all these through all the ages of Christendom are only the successors of those who in the long ages before believed in the Christ of God and in the glorious work he would crown with his blessed resurrection. False churches there have been many, and ever will be. But the true church stands — Christ is her mark, he who was delivered

for our offenses, and raised again for our justification. God grant that this heavenly mark may be upon our souls now and evermore.

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## **Outlines**

The previous sermon has endeavored to indicate the immense sweep of the text which every preacher will feel who works himself thoroughly into it. In this respect it will make little difference from what angle the sermon approaches the text, as long as it tries to cover what all the text contains. A very desirable point is the Savior's greeting: The risen Savior's greeting of peace; that peace shines forth from his wounds — is assured by his resurrection — is sent out to all the world. — This text deals in a special way with; The certainty of Christ's resurrection. This certainty is established by Christ himself — and by the entire revelation of God — and as such forms the basis of our faith today. — We may also set forth from this text: The supreme importance of Christ's resurrection: 1) It is vital in the work of Christ — without this it would have been failure: 2) It is vital in the whole revelation of God — without this it would have been empty and false; 3) It is vital for our salvation — without this it would be nothing but a sham.

### **The Heavenly Peace which the Risen Savior Brings.**

1. Written in God's Holy Word.
2. Sealed by Christ's holy wounds.
3. Made ours by faith through his Holy Spirit.

### **How God Sends us the Great Easter Gift of Christ's Resurrection.**

1. As a fact divinely assured.
2. As the center of all revelation.
3. As the heart of his Gospel.
4. As the rock of our salvation.
5. As the fountain of eternal peace.

## **The Gospel of Christ's Resurrection.**

1. Its truth. — 2. Its place in God's plan. — 3. Its importance for us all.

## **God's Revelation and Christ's Resurrection.**

1. God's revelation foretold the resurrection.
2. God's revelation culminates in the resurrection.
3. God's revelation proclaims the resurrection to all the world.
4. God's revelation makes the blessings of the resurrection our own.

## **28. The Savior's Word To St. Peter On The Christian Church, On Its Foundation, Its Function, And Its Foes. Misericordias Domini. Matt. 16:15-20.**

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ. (Matthew 16:15-20)

AN ECHO OF THE EASTER TRIUMPH we were privileged to celebrate two weeks ago sounds through the great text which you have just heard. St. Peter in the name of all the apostles confesses Jesus Christ as the Son of the living God, and that Son declares that he will found his church so that the gates of hell shall not be able to overthrow it. St. Peter's confession was true, Christ's promise was true — nineteen centuries of the history of the Christian church attest it. Just how true both are the power of Christ's resurrection from the dead reveals to us.

This is what makes all that Christ said to St. Peter in regard to the church he had come to found for the salvation of men so important for us all. Not only has the church existed for all these centuries, every hostile attack against her has failed and her work has gone on triumphantly and will go on

till the end of time. Why? Because Christ, the Son of the living God is behind the church.

Let us carefully weigh, then,

## **The Savior's Word To St. Peter On The Christian Church, On Its Foundation, Its Function, And Its Foes.**

### **I. Its Foundation**

Christ, the Son of God, had come to found the church on earth and to make it the portal of heaven. For this he made his great sacrifice on the cross, and then arose on the third day, throwing wide the portals that men might enter there and find salvation. Here in our text he is busy with the preparatory work, training his apostles who were to be his special servants in the first age of the church. How much he had already accomplished we see in the noble confession of St. Peter. When he asked the Twelve on this notable occasion: "Whom say ye that I am?" this ever ready disciple voiced the faith of them all: "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God!" At once Christ opened up to them what all was involved in this confession. To know Christ as he really is must lead us to know likewise the divine purpose of his coming among men, of his work here on earth, and of its consummation hereafter. This purpose stands before us embodied in his church. Put together then these two — Christ, the Son of the living God, and his church; and begin as Christ here did with the founding of the church.

What had St. Peter done when he declared that the twelve apostles were convinced in their inmost souls that Jesus was indeed the divine Savior sent of God? He 'had placed himself and them all into living relation with Christ. He had confessed that 'the souls of them were joined to Christ by the inward tie of faith and trust. They had escaped from the bogs and sands of human delusions, and had grounded themselves on the everlasting Rock of Ages, on the Son of the living God, their Savior, where they would stand secure to all eternity. It was a mighty confession indeed; it said even more than Peter thought when he uttered it. No wonder Jesus called him blessed, and told him that this confession was the fruit of God's work in his soul, for by the work of God's grace alone can any man ground himself thus upon Jesus Christ,

But see, the Savior now answers the confession of the apostles by drawing the curtain aside to show them what lay in the future. “On this rock,” said Jesus, “will I build my church” On what rock? On the very one St. Peter and his fellow apostles had confessed they were already built by faith — on Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. The Christian church is founded on this mighty Rock of Ages which cannot be moved. The glory of the apostles is that they were the first to be thus founded and grounded on Christ, even before all his redemptive work was done. What if they did pass through days of trial and weakness. They were often enough weak and wavering, but the Rock on which they stood held. See how they gathered at last around their risen Savior, and then realized far more fully than when Peter here first said it, that this Christ, dying for our sins and rising again, is indeed the Son of the living God, an eternal Savior, the everlasting foundation of the church. And then Christ carried out his word that on this Rock he would found his church. Beginning at Jerusalem and going on through the world Christ revealed to men, and thousands and thousands down to this very day have been drawn to Christ as Peter and the Twelve were long ago. Their souls rest on this divine Savior; he supports and holds them now and ever more. Thus is the church founded as Jesus says “upon this Rock.”

But are we not misreading the Savior’s words? Did he not say to St. Peter: “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock,” namely upon Peter, “will I build my church”? Is not the apostle Peter the foundation of the church? Does not the very name “Peter” signify rock? This is the terrible delusion of Rome. To bolster it up, since Peter, of course, would die in a few years, they have invented the idea of successors of Peter; not that Christ ever appointed a successor of this or any other apostle as an apostle, but the church of Rome chooses such successors herself and calls them popes. Thus the Catholic church claims to be founded on Peter. The Greek word “Peter” means stone. That was the name Jesus gave to this apostle to indicate what his grace would finally make of him, a solid living stone in the structure of his church. As such he was to be an example unto others that like him. they too might grow firm in the faith and be living stones in the temple of God. But when Jesus said: “upon this Rock I will build my church,” he used a different Greek word, not “stone,” but rock indeed, like a mass of rock in the earth upon which one can build stone upon stone in a mighty structure to stand unshaken for ages. Peter himself had just confessed that his faith rested on Christ, the Son of the living God — that was the Rock Christ said

he would build his church on. Peter was one stone already in that building, so were the other apostles and believers stones resting on Christ. Christ's words are plain enough, if only men will take those words as they stand.

If the church had been built upon a mere man, no matter how great and strong, it would not stand to eternity. Though Peter was a strong apostle of Christ, he himself needed a Savior as much as any man. Remember how he denied Christ the night Judas betrayed him. Almost did Peter then fall from the great foundation Rock of the church — Jesus' mercy saved him. If Peter is the foundation of the church, and not Christ, then does Peter stand alone? No greater dishonor could be done Peter, for his whole soul rested on Christ. But if Peter is the foundation of the church because he rests on Christ, then he would be a foundation upon a foundation, he would not differ from the other apostles and early believers. The real foundation would then after all be Christ. Look on through the' Scriptures, and see whether Peter is made the foundation. Paul preached only one grand theme, not Peter, but Christ and him crucified. John preached not Peter, but the blood of Christ which cleanseth us from all sin. The Apostolic Creed confesses not: "I believe in St. Peter," but: "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord" — the same confession with which Peter rested his soul upon Christ.

Thank God that Christ is our foundation. He needs no other upon whom to rest, for he is God's eternal Son. His power, grace, majesty, his atoning work, his promise will stand forever. He that believeth in him shall be saved indeed. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 3:11.

## **II. Its Function**

When Peter and the apostles confessed Christ as the Son of the living God the Savior beheld in them the beginning of his holy church. He then revealed to them that he himself was the foundation upon which this church would rest to all eternity. But this very image of it, a mighty building, a strong fortress on solid rock, a glorious temple on a sure foundation, the Savior used to reveal to the apostles what the function of the church would be.

This church which Christ said he would build, and did indeed build by his sacrifice and resurrection, he pictures as having a grand entrance that



men may be received into it. And this entrance is nothing less than the door into God's own blessed heavenly kingdom. Christ's great object in building the Christian church was to bring the kingdom of heaven down here among sinners that thus through the Christian church the doors might be thrown open and men received, into his kingdom. With this in mind we will understand what Jesus said to Peter and thus to all the apostles: "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." The great work of keeping the doors of the kingdom of heaven in the Christian church Jesus thus placed in the hands of Peter and his fellow believers. We who believe in Christ and confess his name, we who are in the church and thus in the kingdom of heaven, we are to have this grand and blessed duty — to keep the door, to have charge of the keys, to open and to shut the door, to admit those who may enter, and to bar out those who may not. This is the great function of the church. Mark it. of the church, not of one or more in the church, but of all those who constitute the church, namely of all true believers in Jesus Christ. The first of these Jesus saw before him when Peter made his confession, and to them he made this blessed revelation which is now in full operation — the keys of the kingdom open and shut that kingdom here on earth for men.

What are those keys? The answer is plain when Jesus says: "And whatsoever thou shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." A little later Jesus himself states this very thing of all the apostles: "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." After his resurrection Jesus said still more explicitly: "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose soever sins retain, they are retained." There are two keys, then; that means two great powers committed to the church, to bind and to loose, to retain and to forgive sins, to bar men out of the kingdom of heaven and to let them in. Once Christ himself exercised this power. Hear him say to the paralytic man, to the sinful woman in Simon's house: Thy sins are forgiven — go in peace, thy faith hath saved thee. And again, turning to the wicked Jews, he said: Ye shall die in your sins — he who blasphemes the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven either in this world or the next. Thus did Christ in person handle the keys while among men; this we now are to do at his command.

He has told us how, when he gave us the Gospel to preach to all the world. What is the sum of that Gospel? You know it well: he that repents and believes shall be forgiven and saved: he that refuses to repent and believe shall not be forgiven and shall be damned. Preach it, said Christ, just as I have given it unto you. And just as we preach it to all to hear, so we are to apply it to each and every individual, forgiving his sins in Christ's name and by his command if the man repents; retaining his sins and refusing him membership in the church if he will not repent. And this Gospel thus preached and applied as Jesus has ordered will be effective every time; no matter what scoffers may think or say, these two great Gospel, powers or keys will work unfailingly, shutting out every impenitent sinner, freely letting in every penitent one.

But again, are we not mistaken here? Did not Christ say: "I will give unto thee," namely Peter, "the keys of the kingdom of heaven"? Was not Peter thus made the head or pope of the church to bind and to loose, to let in and bar out of the kingdom of heaven? This is the great error of Rome. Peter is dead and gone, but since about two hundred years after Peter they began to make successors of his, and then gradually built up the papal hierarchy, the pope of Rome at the top, and all his bishops and priests binding and loosing at his command, while all the members of the Catholic Church must humbly submit. But the whole system is false. Christ established no vicegerent of the church, he made no pope out of Peter. The keys and their power he laid not in the hands of Peter alone, or even of all the apostles alone, but into the hands of the whole church on earth, of all his believers. "Tell it unto the church" Jesus said, when a man has sinned and will not repent; and he adds: "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth," ye as the church, "shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth," ye as the church, "shall be loosed in heaven." Not to Peter, not to the Twelve, but to the whole church he gave the Gospel, and this key power of the Gospel to admit men to Christ's kingdom, or to shut them out. And so the first church used this Gospel and its powers, and the true church has continued to do so down to this day. This is what Christ has done, and we will not submit to any man who stands up to usurp this power to himself.

The church is the great keeper of the keys. The Gospel and its wonderful power belong to us all who are built by faith on Christ. Yet it is Christ's will and command that the church call and appoint men to preach this Gospel and to administer its power. In this the church is like our great nation which

elects its president and congress to administer the constitution and laws of the land. There would be a tremendous rebellion if any man would attempt to usurp these powers and claim that they belonged to him alone. They belong to the whole nation, and the nation as such administers them through its chosen representatives. So the church with the powers of the Gospel. Christ selected the first twelve representatives, for he had special tasks for them to do as apostles, but he gave the Gospel and its keys to all the church, for the church as such to handle these keys by calling pastors to preach the Gospel and to apply this Gospel, in the name of Christ and his church, to the souls of men, to admit the penitent to heaven, to bar the impenitent out. And behind his Gospel and these its keys there stands the Christ that Peter confessed with his fellow disciples, the Son of the living God, making that Gospel good in every case, letting into his great heavenly kingdom every penitent sinner, barring out every impenitent one.

The pope would snatch those keys and hold them himself. But equally arrogant is his claim that he can change these keys or powers to suit his own ideas of who shall enter and who shall not enter the kingdom. And in this second piece of arrogance he has had many followers outside of the Catholic Church. Many are not satisfied to bind what Christ binds, they want it loosed. They want to broaden the entrance to the kingdom to let in all kinds of people as they may decide. And others want to narrow the entrance by setting up new requirements, such as Christ did not set up. They all act as if they were the kings of this great kingdom of heaven, at least they do not bow to the Son of the living God to follow his will and Word alone. But all such arrogation is in vain. No man can alter the keys or change their working. You can crowd an earthly church with all kinds of people — that does not admit them to the kingdom unless they truly repent and believe. You can set up rules to bar out of the earthly church many a truly penitent believer, Christ himself whose the keys are still admits him into the kingdom. But woe to the men who sin thus against the keys and the kingdom! They must give an account to the Son of the living God. In the state many an elected officer may get around the laws, but the Gospel and its powers no man can evade, not even the pope, not even a church body composed of millions. The keys placed into Peter's hands and the hands of the Twelve will judge even them, and so they will judge us all; for these mighty Gospel keys are nothing but the will and Word of the living Son of God.

Humbly let us bow then to Christ our King. What an honor to, enter his kingdom of grace! And the still greater honor to be made the keepers of the door of his kingdom! Let us take this holy Gospel he has put into our hands, preach and administer it in every point exactly as he has said, heeding him only and no thoughts of our own or of other men. So will our earthly churches be indeed the gateway to the kingdom of heaven, and we will enter that gateway and through our ministrations others will enter, all to the glory of our Lord.

### **III. Its Foes**

In his word to Peter on the Christian church concerning its foundation on the Rock, and its function in regard to the keys, the Savior inserts a glorious promise and assurance. He declares of the church: “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” This is Christ’s word concerning the foes of the church.

Yes, there are, and there always will be, foes both of Christ and of his church. Nor are these merely human foes. Against them human power might prevail. Here and in many another place in Scripture the curtain is drawn aside and we are shown who stands back of all the human foes of the Christian church — the gates of hell, Satan and the powers of darkness. Whoever sets himself against Christ is a tool and ally of Satan. Whoever opposes the Gospel and its blessed truths of salvation is aiding the gates of hell. Whoever hinders and hurts the true church of Christ which administers his blessed Gospel is doing the work of the kingdom of darkness. There are only two great spiritual kingdoms among men. that of which Christ is King, and that over which Satan holds sway. And these two are bound to clash. The gates of hell swing open wide. Satan and his hosts go forth to war against Christ, his Gospel, and his church.

“Deep guile and great might  
Are his dread arms in fight.  
On earth is not his equal.”

Into the open jaws of those gates he would drag all the souls of men to eternal destruction. The church will ever be assailed In the world we will never

have peace, for always new oppositions will be stirred up. Sometimes these oppositions have risen to bloody persecutions. Read the history of the church and see the fires through which she has passed. Always here on earth she will be a church militant, her members “soldiers of the cross.” The truer we are to Christ the more will we have to fight the battle of Christ.

But at the very start Christ, the Son of the Living God, has declared that the gates of hell shall not prevail. It is the great victor of sin, death, and hell who gives us this assurance of the victory and triumph of the church. What a handful of men heard that first promise — what a mighty host of believers glories in it today! Why will the church triumph, why will her foes go down in defeat? With our unaided strength we would soon lie low in final defeat. But the Son of the living God is our King; he is with us always even unto the end of the world; even where only two or three are gathered together in his name, he is in the midst of them. The church founded on this Rock cannot fall or fail; never shall the mighty keys of the Gospel be snatched from her hands and the doors of the kingdom of heaven be blocked by the enemy. We may suffer, but we shall prevail, or rather Christ shall prevail in and through us. And this blessed promise to the church includes every member of hers. Christ knows his sheep, and not one of them shall be snatched out of his hand. Only we ourselves, by willfully, wickedly turning from him and loving the world again, can separate ourselves from his promise. If we grasp the hand of Christ in his Gospel and resist the devil he shall flee from us. Forever and ever Christ, his Gospel, his church, and every true member of that church are stronger than the arch-foe of the church. See the hosts that have triumphed already. In the Book of Revelation they are described as they that have overcome and sing now the song of heavenly victory. Ever new hosts are joining them above — and you shall join them and I, if only we remain true to Christ.

Glory be to Christ who gives us this blessed assurance! Let it fill your hearts with gratitude and joy. Let it make you loyal to Christ and his church and fill you with courage to fight the good fight of faith. “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed with white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.” Rev. 3:5. “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.” Rev. 21:7. The great advance hosts of the church militant have already received these promises

and are become the church triumphant in the kingdom above. We too are hastening toward that triumph.

Let the words which Christ spoke to Peter concerning the Christian church sink deeply into your hearts. Her foundation is everlasting, her function is divine, her foes are helpless. All this because with all her members she is the church of Christ, the Son of the living God.

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## Outlines

Harless in Langsdorff's work on the newer gospel pericopes shows what a wealth of thought lies embedded in our text. We may lift out that central word: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church." Here is the foundation of the church — here is her work called together by the Gospel, every member like Peter built by faith on this rock — here is her assurance of success and triumph. — We may put forward: The marks of the true church — built on Christ, and on no human authority — built in true faith, and trusting in no works and ceremonies — built by the Gospel, and following no other doctrine. — Combining Peter's confession and the mighty answer of Jesus we could make our theme: The answer of the Son of the living God to Peter's great confession: that answer shows the rock on which Peter stood, and the church with Peter — that answer shows the fight which Peter must fight, and the church with him — that answer shows the work which Peter was to do, and the church with him. — If a more controversial sermon is desired, take a theme like this: Is the pope at Rome the successor of Peter? We answer by pointing to the falseness of the papal claims — and by pointing to the truth which Christ himself declared to Peter.

### **The Glory of the Christian Church.**

1. Her glorious Founder.
2. Her glorious power.
3. Her glorious permanence.

## **The Son of the Living God and his Church.**

1. He laid the rock on which she stands.
2. From his hands are (he keys which she holds.

## **Was St. Peter the First Pope?**

There is an answer to this question in

1. The rock, on which the church is founded, which is not Peter, but the truth which Peter confessed, and we confess with him.
2. The gates of hell, which shall not prevail against the church, not because Peter is so strong, but because the foundation of the church is divine.
3. The keys, which the church holds, which are the power and authority of the Gospel given, not to Peter, but to the entire church and her ministry.

## **The Church the Keeper of the Keys.**

1. The keys which have been committed to the church.
  - a. The gates of heaven are on earth; no one enters except through them.
  - b. These gates are in the Word, by which the door of heaven is opened and closed.
  - c. The Word is committed to the church, whose duty it is to open and to close.
  - d. The church exercises this power of the Word ordinarily through the ministry.
2. The keeping of the keys on the part of the church.
  - a. Having preached repentance the church is bound to forgive the sins of all who do repent.
  - b. Having warned against impenitence the church is bound to retain the sins of all who do not repent.

- c. Christ's authority behind both acts makes them valid on earth and in heaven, and thus fills the church with divine assurance.

## **The Glories of the Christian Church.**

1. Her foundation — the Son of the living God.
2. Her authority — the keys of the kingdom of heaven.
3. Her promises — the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.



## 29. Christ's Mighty "Either — Or." Jubilate. Mark 8:34-38.

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. (Mark 8:34-38)

CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS have all made a mighty choice and abide by it. We may also say that they constantly repeat that choice, and having made it once and again find it easier to repeat it whenever an issue involving that choice presents itself. It is Christ's grace which wrought in them to make that choice, and his grace alone by which they are able to abide by it. Left to themselves they never could and would have made it, for their wills were bound by the chains of sin. But he came by the Gospel and set them free; he graciously wrought in them to will and to do according to the saving pleasure of his will. Thus did they make the choice, and thus they rejoice in making it anew. But it is vital for us all that we ever keep before our eyes just what our great choice is, and how blessed it is that Christ's grace has moved us to make it and now works in us to abide by it.

For one of the great errors of Christians is the idea that in some way they can evade this choice, or can compromise the issues involved. Many of them try to serve two masters, and persuade themselves that they are able to do so successfully. They think that they can save their souls, and yet hold to the world; that they can follow Christ, and yet not let loose wholly of sin; that they can gain eternal life in the end, and yet walk on paths that lead in other directions. The thing has been tried over and over again; nobody has ever succeeded in the effort. But people are loath to learn from the terrible

mistakes of others. You can falsify your life's ledger, but always the falsifications appear when in the end the books are audited. Every false entry will stand out against you, and you will be unable to explain it away. The devil is behind this false book-keeping; he laughs when you make the false entries, for they are always in his favor. He wants you to cheat yourself, for he knows that thereby you are cheating Christ also of the reward of his suffering and resurrection. Christ wants to save your soul for himself, and therefore he tells you so plainly what the issue really is. There dare be no compromise, only a decisive, clean-cut either — or. Let us look at it clearly, our text is full of it —

### **Christ's Mighty Either — Or:**

Either self — or Christ; either a life without the cross — or one with it; either the world, really only a piece of it — or the soul; either the approval of men — or that of Christ. May the grace of God keep us from ever wavering in our choice!

## **I. Either Self — Or Christ**

Christ's great either — or is first of all a choice of masters. Who is to be your lord and master? Is it to be your own self — or is it to be Christ. That is the issue, if you want to face the truth. Here Christ: comes to you anew, shows you who he is and what he has for you, and then bids you: Deny yourself, and follow me!

It seems very attractive to be your own master, to do as you please, to obey nobody else. Does a thing seem good to you? well, you take it, proud of your own independence. Does a course of action seem profitable to you? you simply go ahead with it, satisfied with your own insight and wisdom. The church does not seem to pay — you yourself decide the matter and discard the church. Christ is opposed to so many things you like, — you sit in judgment on him, and place yourself where his Word about these things does not trouble you. Some Christless organization offers you all kinds of business and social advantages — you do not ask Christ's judgment in regard to such a connection, you decide the matter yourself. The study of God's Word for you and your children, this constant attendance at worship,

this praying and reacting God's Word at home is rather tiresome for the flesh and takes considerable of your valuable time — at least you think so, and so you drop these things and fill your time 'and thoughts with something else. Christian people, too, are not always attractive, even if they are God's people — and so you decide upon a different class of associates. Church work, benevolence and charity seems to require a lot of money — you settle the matter by putting your money where you think you can get a better return for it. Sunday is a day you find you can spend much more to your liking in pleasure, sleep and loafing around, reading the big Sunday issues of the papers, or doing a little business perhaps — you decide accordingly and ask nobody else. That is a brief story of self as your master. What a fine thing to be independent like that, to have no Lord Jesus Christ to interfere with you and the way you direct and manage your life.

But stop a moment! When Christ says: Deny yourself, disown your own thought and will in directing your life, follow me, trust me and my leading in all things — do you really see why he says that? Let me assure you, it is not to your disadvantage, but to your everlasting advantage. Who is this that asks you to follow him in faith and trustful obedience. Why, it is God's own Son, your rightful lord and master. Even if we could say nothing more, this ought to settle the matter for you. It would be dangerous to be a rebel against God and his Son. You know, traitors to any country are usually shot or hung. To try to be a kind of an anarchistic lord of your own will surely cost you dear when at last you face the Lord who has made you and to whom you belong. — But his call to you to follow him is based on ground far higher. This Son of God came on earth to suffer and die for you that you might escape the slavery and curse of your sins; he went into death and returned again from the grave that he might bring you eternal freedom from death and a life full of comfort, joy, and peace here on earth and full of eternal blessedness in heaven. It is your Savior who calls to you: Follow me! Look at the marks in his hands and feet and at the open wound in his side — these he suffered for you, miserable sinner that you are, that you might escape the penalty of your sins. In those holy wounds see what this Lord offers you: forgiveness of sin, life, salvation, adoption as a child of God, help, deliverance, consolation, and finally eternal joy. That is the kind of a lord he is. And to follow him means to possess all these priceless treasures in communion with him. Make no mistake, about; see clearly what is involved in this mighty either — or of his.

This is the issue: either self as your master, with the little passing satisfaction, sham independence, and deceptive advantages you are able to secure for this poor life — or Christ as your Lord and Savior, giving you earthly care and help too, but in addition thereto all that the soul needs in the true priceless treasures bought by his own blood, treasures for this life and for that to come. As for me and my house, our choice is made forever, and every day of our lives makes us more thankful to Christ that by his grace he has led us to follow him alone.

## **II. Either A Life Without The Cross — Or One With It**

In Christ's great either — or a vital element is the cross. He never makes the least effort to hide it; in fact, he sets the cross plainly before our eyes and calls on us, as here in our text: Take up your cross, and follow me! That puts the issue in a new form: either a life without the cross — or one with it. But again, here is Christ to show us clearly just what is involved in declining to bear the cross after him, or in courageously taking it up and following him.

The word "cross" is very significant, and Christ purposely chose it on that account. You remember how when he was condemned men laid the great wooden cross upon his lacerated back and made him carry it out toward Calvary, and how he broke down beneath it, and they had to get Simon of Cyrene to carry that cross for him. So the cross has come to be a symbol of all that is painful in connection with the Christian profession and life. And nobody denies, least of all Christ himself, that there is a load of painful things which goes with following him. The great question is, will we fly from this load — or will we take it up and bear it after him as he bids us.

Now a life without the cross seems very attractive. All you need do to avoid the cross is turn away from Christ, his Gospel, and his church, and you will have no cross to bear. Nobody then will make fun of you for being a Christian, for listening to things the Bible says, for being so devoted to the church and the work of Christ. Nobody will turn against you for confessing Christ and for contradicting and rebuking their wicked, godless ways. There are jobs you can hold, there is money that you can make, positions and ad-

vantages you can get, if you discard Christ and free your conscience from his control. Moreover, Christ himself will let you go, if you refuse to follow him. He will not ask you to do any hard and painful service for him; nor will he lay any trials and afflictions upon you, as he always does with every one of his followers. You can be like the boy who runs away from school — no teacher, no lessons for him, nothing but the sweet pleasure of his own will. You can be like the rich man in the parable, faring sumptuously every day; not like that poor Lazarus, covered with painful boils, with only crumbs to eat and dogs for his friends. What a fine thing it seems to be to get rid thus of the cross. — Only remember, that those who have no crosses to bear, do not always have a life merely of pleasure and advantages. The Bible says: “Many sorrows shall be for the wicked” — sorrows mark you, not crosses. Men’s sins have a way of finding them out after all. A man for instance lets his children grow up without Christ — afterwards perhaps they break his heart. A man piles up money without Christ — in the end that money is like a load on his soul which drags him down. You get many friends by turning away from Christ — only they too help to hold your soul in the power of the devil. But, of course, you will have no cross to bear, if you do not follow the Savior.

But let no man misjudge the cross, when here again Christ asks us to take it up willingly and to rejoice in bearing it after him. While there is something painful about the cross, and ever will be, there is also something infinitely blessed. — Every man who bears the cross is marked by it as a follower of Christ. Whatever you truly bear and suffer for Christ’s sake is like a badge of honor given to you by Christ himself, it is like the service medal given to a soldier or general for some special deed of valor. It costs something, but it is worth far more than it costs.

Whoever suffers mockery, loss or persecution for Christ’s sake, as Christ himself says, loses his life. Martyrs have lost it altogether by being actually killed; but countless others have lost it in part, by losing some of the earthly things of life, some position, honor, money, friends, pleasures, and the like, and receiving instead slander, harm, enmity, and other painful inflictions. Alas, many Christians, like Peter at the trial of Christ, try to avoid the shame, danger, and loss, by denying Christ, hiding their faith, refusing to stand up for Christ. They escape the cross, but oh, how their consciences look when they are through! Peter went out and wept bitterly, and thus took up again the cross he had thrown away. But mark the other side of every

loss you suffer for Christ's sake. The Savior. says he who thus loses his life shall save it. When Stephen, the first martyr, died for Christ, Christ himself received his soul in glory. Stephen lost nothing but his earthly life, he gained a thousandfold more in the life to come. When Paul, the great apostle of Christ, suffered all kinds of hardships and persecutions in his work, he indeed lost many a thing people count dear; but he gained thousands of souls for Christ, his own name shines today with imperishable splendor in the kingdom of heaven. We bless him to this very day for what he has done. He gained infinitely more than he ever lost. And now to be true to Christ at whatever cost always gains us a clear conscience, always insures us the blessing of our Savior, always helps our brethren. We lose the things that count the least, and gain those that count the most; we lose what is for a day, and gain what is for eternity; we lose what is only for this life, and gain what is for the life of the soul forever. And the same is true of every affliction the Lord sends us. It is his training school. The boy who runs away may have a pleasant time, but he loses the education which is a thousand times more valuable. Let him keep that up, and he will become a loafer, utterly worthless. Let a man bear the cross of affliction; it will train and discipline his soul for Christ and his kingdom. Blessed are the cross-bearers, for they grow more and more Christlike in patience, courage, purity, nobleness of soul. What they lose is nothing compared with what they gain. Woe to those who have nothing but sorrows, but glory to those who have the cross and what it brings.

Mark well, then, what is really at stake in this mighty either — or of the cross. To avoid the cross is to avoid Christ, avoid aiding his Gospel and cause to avoid what is highest and best for your own soul. By his grace let us choose these highest things, taking up our cross as he gives it to us to bear, and bearing it with his blessed help. Only the cross leads us to the crown.

### **III. Either The World, Really Only A Piece Of It — Or The Soul**

Christ's mighty either — or involves a third issue. We may call it the issue of treasure or gain. The lives of all men constantly turn on it. Only so many never know what the issue really is until it is too late. For this very reason

Christ comes to us, as he does here in our text, to open our eyes and show us what is really at stake. It is either *the world*, and what you may gain there for this life — or it is *your own immortal soul*.

Men constantly think they must devote themselves to the things of this world. Thousands completely use up their time and efforts in this direction. Some see that there is a higher treasure to strive for, a truer gain to secure. But alas, they merely divide their efforts. They put a little exertion on their souls; they make the spiritual things of Christ a kind of side-issue. Sometimes they have the idea that when they come to die they will devote themselves whole-heartedly to their souls. But very few people are able to direct their dying. At best it is very hard to make a complete change when that last important hour comes. Too late — is the sad story of many a man who attended to much business in all the active years of his life, but neglected the most important business of all, that of his immortal soul.

Christ puts the case clearly before us now while there is still time. Suppose a man gained the whole world by the work of his life. What a glorious achievement that would be! He would be master of all its millions and billions of money. He would be president, king, and emperor of all its peoples and realms. He would have so many servants and subjects he could not count them all. All the pleasures, beauties, and glories of the world would be his — such a wealth of delight he could not take it all in. Yet let us suppose that he could. Add on top of it all, the wisdom, knowledge, learning, and science of the world. He would know all the secrets of nature, all the mysteries of earth, and sea, and air. What a wonder of mental riches added to all the material, imperial, and aesthetic! Of course, no man ever could achieve so much. It is a mighty thing when a man owns a few billions now, or becomes the president of one great nation, or rises to the top of one department of art or learning. The great mass of men is satisfied to get a small piece of, this world, some little corner of it to call their own. Purposely Christ puts before us, not what we actually are able to get of the treasures of this world, but all the vast unattainable wealth of what the world has to offer, in order that taking the right measure of it all we may become undeceived as to its apparent value and see where the true treasure and gain is found. If a man gained the whole world and had it all his life long he would after all be just like you and I are today — in the hour of death he would leave it all behind, not one particle of it could he take along. And if he had only this, his soul would go out of this world as an absolute beggar. For as

Christ puts it: “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world — and lose his own soul?”

The one thing for you and me to learn is that now, in the hour of death, and so in all eternity the true wealth is that of the soul alone. Is the gold of faith yours? Then you are rich indeed. Is the pardon of Christ’s blood yours? Then you have what neither diamonds nor rubies can equal. Is the righteousness of Christ yours? Then you own the true wealth of heaven. Is the favor of God yours in Christ Jesus? Then an eternity of glory awaits you. These are the real values, for they never fade, the light of heaven only reveals their glory and greatness more completely.

Balance these two against each other, and then tell me which are you determined to have by the grace of God? Let the fools in this world chase the treasures that last for a day if they will, forgetting their souls and the real treasures, you must look ever at the soul alone and at the glory of the wealth which Christ is offering you. Never fear that you will not get enough of this world’s wealth — God always takes care of his children. If he gives you an abundance of earthly goods and blessings, look doubly to your soul lest that through fault of yours come short. But never for a moment hesitate between the two. Trade not a single soul-treasure for the fading treasures of earth. In this mighty either — or understand once for all that the soul alone counts. Though you had all the world as your own, yea, a hundred worlds, they could not buy your soul back from death and hell in the hour of death and judgment. Too late many a man has recognized his mistake. That is why Christ warns us again today.

## **IV. Either The Approval Of Men — Or That Of Christ**

And so the mighty either — or which he puts before us reaches its final goal. It is not a question of today only, or of the few men we come in contact with now, but a question of the last great day, of the presence in which we shall then stand, of the verdict which shall then be pronounced. Once for all we must see the issue as it stands: either the approval of men here in time — or that of Christ on the day of judgment and to all eternity.

An adulterous and sinful generation Jesus called the Jews of his time. This is what he meant. God had given them his revelation, his Law, his



covenant, his promises. What did they do? They falsified his Law, they were faithless to his covenant, they perverted his promises. They were like a woman untrue to her husband, a wretch covered with shame and sin. Then when Christ came what did thousands do who heard him and saw his miracles of grace? They listened to their priests, the Pharisees, the rabbis; they refused to be identified with Christ, they were ashamed of him and his words.

This thing is repeating itself today. Only here now is Christ himself, here are his words in Holy writ, here is all his mercy and grace and the blessings he has in store for us. But what do we see? The old unfaithfulness over again. It is not necessary here to think of the world and men who openly reject Christianity. It ought not to be necessary for Christ to warn us against them. But look at many of those who profess to follow him, and yet openly dishonor him and his words. He said he was the Son of God — they stand in their pulpits and preach that he was not. He said that he paid his blood as a ransom for our sins — they preach that we need no ransom at all for our sins. He said he would rise from the dead, and he did rise — they tell us that this is all a mistake. He said we must observe all things whatsoever he said unto us — they tell us we ought to be liberal and free, we need not trouble about pure doctrine, faithful church practice, loyal confession of Christ, careful Christian conduct in all things. That is the adulterous and sinful generation of our day. It takes in every falsification of Christ's words, every unfaithfulness in teaching his Gospel of truth to men. Many are altogether nasty with this adultery, others still love some of it and will not be pure as they ought to be.

Here is the warning of Christ to you and me and all who mean to follow him truly: Be not ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation! We are facing another either — or. Either we heed what these men of adulterous minds say and court their approval — or we heed solely what Christ says and glory in his approval alone. Do you know what that means? Never look to men, but only to Christ. Never tell me that other preachers say this and that, and then ask why we cannot say and do the same. Never point to other churches who are not so strict in doctrine, not so careful in practice, who take in all kinds of people as members, and let their preachers and members do all kinds of things which we forbid. Never raise the question: If the members of other churches can do this or that, why cannot we do the same? The young are especially in danger of being affected

by the teaching and actions of disloyal, unfaithful churches, their preachers, and members. They see that their doctrines and ways are popular among men; they find that their own instruction and what it has taught them is highly unpopular. They hear themselves called narrow, bigoted, unprogressive, behind the times. They are laughed at and mocked. It is the way of this adulterous generation — it is always proud and arrogant. But the miserable means it uses to make us ashamed of Jesus and his words ought not to hide from our eyes its shameful disloyalty to Christ and his words. From disloyalty let us flee as from the noxious defilement of adultery. For if unfaithfulness among men is bad, a thousand times worse would be your soul's and my soul's unfaithfulness to Christ.

See the issue as it really is. This is not a question of men at all, it is solely a question of Christ. If all men in the world should approve some false doctrine, that would not make it any more pure and true than if only one man approved it. Why look to men at all and ask whether they approve or not? Look to Christ, If he says: Believe this! then believe it; for then it is true and blessed indeed. If Christ says: Do this! or: Avoid and oppose this! follow his words, for they alone are safe and blessed. What if thousands of men cleanse you for thus sticking to Christ's words, what if they do heap reproach and shame upon you, what if you feel the burden of being unpopular, the sadness of standing alone? Better alone with Christ, than without among millions of men. Better pure in faith, true in conduct with Christ to approve than adulterous and sinful with only men to praise and support you. — For the day of reckoning is coming fast. This thing of being popular and unpopular is going to take a mighty turn. The hour is coming when the great Lord of the church, our Master risen from the dead and enthroned on high, will appear in the glory of his Father, and all the holy angels of God about him. Then where will the praise be, and where the shame? Then how will all those look who falsified the words of Christ and taught men to set those words aside? And where will the loyal band be which looked to Christ alone and kept true in all things to what he has said? Hear what he says, and what he will make good on that great day: "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." Keep that day before you. It will help you mightily to disregard the false and lying approval of men, and to seek alone the eternal approval of Christ. So keep before you this vital either — or of

Christ. Blessed are they who willingly bear the shame of men by holding faithfully to Christ alone and to his words.

Either — or, you cannot avoid it, for Christ himself has placed you at the crossing of the ways. Let us thank him for making the issue so clear, and for giving us his grace in such abundance to draw us to him alone. He shall be our Master, we want no other; his cross shall be our mark and distinction, we want no ease from its burden; his blessed treasures shall enrich our souls, we will trade none of them for the glories of the world; his approval shall be our consolation now and our crown on that great day, we will never exchange it for that of men. This is our choice; our souls rejoice in making it anew. And the grace of Christ will keep us true until the day of glory comes.

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## Outlines

Almost every verse of this text offers a grand thought on which to build a sermon. The text as a whole treats of our faithfulness to Christ. We may sum it up in the theme: What does it mean to follow Christ? The answer is made from a synthesis of the text: Cling to his words — give your soul to Christ — bear the cross. — A negative form may be found serviceable: The hindrances which Christ's followers must overcome: There are four that stand out in the text: The disinclination to deny self: reluctance to bear the cross; desire to gain as much as possible of the world: delight in the approval of men. — The last verse contains the significant word "ashamed," around which the familiar hymn has been built. Its first lines offer a theme: "Jesus — and shall it ever be, a mortal man ashamed of thee?" Of thy words? — of thy gifts? — of thy cross?

### **Christ's Followers are Christlike.**

1. They keep his passion and resurrection before their eyes.
2. They take up their cross and follow him.
3. They lose their life for his sake and thus save it.
4. They are not ashamed of him thinking of the glory to come.

## **Christ's Cross-Bearers.**

1. Do you pity them? — their load is heavy.
2. You should envy them — see who is at their head!
3. You must join them — behold, whither they go.

## **A Study in Eternal Profit and Loss.**

1. The whole world against the soul.
2. The life temporal against the life eternal.
3. The cross in time against the glory in eternity.

## **Why must Every Member of the Church Follow Christ?**

He must do it:

1. For the sake of Christ — who is his blessed Savior.
2. For the sake of his own soul — which he surely means to save.
3. For the sake of the Gospel — by which he is saved.
4. For the sake of his own generation — if possible to save them.
5. For the sake of God and the holy angels — that they may not be ashamed of him.

# 30. The Real Unity of the Church. Cantate. John 17:17-24.

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:17-24)

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH ought to be one. On this point there is general agreement among those who bear the sacred name. But there is no agreement whatever when it comes to saying what this oneness is and how it is built up and secured. The old error of Rome, which makes the church an outward organization and therefore strives to secure an outward oneness, has hosts of advocates far beyond the pale of the papacy. Outward greatness, immense numbers, power of organization, domination by such power in the world, these are the things which impress too many who call themselves Christians and try in their way to follow Christ. Instead of helping to unify the church, instead of giving themselves into the hands of Christ that he may work in them the fulfillment of his great high priestly prayer for the oneness of his church, they oppose him, they try to unite the church, but, as has been well said, they unite it to pieces. Many of them actually separate themselves from the church of Christ by their misguided efforts at uniting it.

How shall we be kept from these terrible mistakes? How shall the great prayer of Christ find a genuine fulfillment in us? The answer is simple indeed. Let us listen to Christ alone. He alone, the great founder and Head of the church, is able to direct us aright. The blessed words in which he prayed for the oneness of his church are before us; from them let us learn his own heavenly thoughts concerning

## **The Real Unity of the Church,**

### **I. It Is A Unity Created By The Word**

When the Lord founded the church and called on men to follow him he gave them his Word. At the end of his earthly life, when he prayed for his apostles, this was the great statement he made to God: "I have given them thy Word." When he prayed to God for their keeping in the future, this was his petition: "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy Word is truth." As he looked beyond the apostles to you and me and the coming members of his church, he said of us: "which shall believe on me through their Word," the precious Word of the Gospel which he commanded his apostles and church to preach.

Here he shows us plainly what his church really is and in what its unity or oneness really consists. Not those are his church who merely call themselves Christians, or who belong to some outward organization called a church. Christ's church consists of all those who truly believe in him and in his Word. All others are outside of his church. "I never knew you," is his final verdict concerning them. They may now be popes, bishops, priests, preachers, or other officials in organizations called churches — not one of them is a member in Christ's church except he believe in Christ as his Savior and in his blessed Word of salvation. This applies to us as well. A man may be born and reared in the Lutheran Church, he may be a pastor and preach from this pulpit, he may be the synodical president of our entire church body, faith in Christ and his Word alone makes him a member of the church of Jesus.

What, then, is the oneness of the church? It is nothing outward at all. The inner tie that binds us together is the one that joins us to Christ, the living faith in our hearts, planted there, maintained and strengthened by his

Word. The real unity of the Christian church is spiritual, a wonderful invisible bond that reaches up into heaven and unites each soul to Christ, the Head of the church, and by doing this unites us to all others bound by the same tie. But remember this tie is wrought by the Word of Christ. "Faith cometh by hearing," writes St. Paul, "and hearing by the Word of God." There is only one way to have Christ, and that is by his Word. Whoever sets that Word aside cuts himself loose from Christ, and whoever sets any part of that Word aside, endangers his connection with Christ and thus with his church. — In order that we may make no mistake here Jesus uses another term for his Word, namely "truth" — "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy Word is truth." Men may say they believe the Bible, in fact thousands boast of that. In reality he alone believes the Bible who receives into his heart the blessed truth which it teaches, its holy, saving doctrines, just as Jesus himself, his prophets and apostles taught them. Nor can any man deceive Christ in this respect. He may be great and learned, rich and powerful, unless he lets the simple teaching of Christ fill his soul and bind him to Christ, he is an outcast and reprobate. Only Christ's truth sanctifies the soul, that means. separates it from the world and lifts into true oneness with Christ and his church.

But here see how much depends on the Word of God when it comes to the church, to its wonderful oneness with Christ, and to your own real connection with Christ and his church. The more we cling to the Word of God in all things, the more fully we are joined to Christ and his church. This Word is like a mighty cable binding us to Christ and his salvation. Do we want to sever any of its strands? do we want to let any of its blessed truth go? In the same way, the more we all abide by the Word of God in this our congregation and in our synod, the more we ward off all false teaching contrary to the Word, and all practices in the church and her work and in our own lives contrary to the Word, the more will we strengthen our own bond with Christ and his church, and the more will we aid others in their union with Christ. It is like the loyalty of a nation to its government when at war with some powerful enemy. Half-hearted loyalty may still leave us one with our nation, but only complete devotion in heart and deed will really make that national unity what it ought to be and develop all its strength. — On the other hand, who is it that disturbs and injures the unity of the church? Every man who in any way repudiates any part of God's Word of truth. It is bad enough for himself and his own relation to Christ and the church, and it is

equally bad for all others in the church affected thereby. Let no man make a mistake here. You may unite crowds of people outwardly into a grand outward church organization by setting aside this or that teaching of the Word — never does this build up the unity of the church. We might gain a thousand outward members for our congregation by admitting people not ready to believe what we know God's Word wants us to believe, and not ready to obey what we know God's Word requires of us all. By thus setting aside the teachings and requirements of the Word we would only help to weaken and tear down the unity of the church of Christ, endangering ourselves and others alike. It is the same with larger church bodies. The Word and the Word alone, Christ's saving truth and that truth alone, makes us one with him and in him with each other in that true inner oneness for which the Savior prayed. The less loyal we are to that Word, the weaker is our union, sometimes losing contact with Christ altogether. The fuller and stronger our hold on the Word, and its hold on us, the greater is our unity, blessed alike for us and for others. God give us the fullest possible measure of this unity dependent on his Word.

## **II. It Is A Unity That Centers In Christ**

But we must know the full mystery of the real unity of the church. It is far deeper and more wonderful than all those suppose who look only at its outward side. It is a unity that centers in Christ.

Behold, what the Word of God does when its blessed truth unites us to Christ. Here are the words of Jesus' prayer: "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one." And again he says of his believers: "That they may all be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." Here is what the unity of the church and its members really means — not an outward bond or tie at all, but Jesus Christ himself dwelling in our hearts by faith and thus by his own presence in our souls making us all one — truly, spiritually, really one in him.

The Word of God and faith in that Word unite us by planting Christ himself into our hearts. When he fills my heart, and equally fills your heart, we are one indeed. And this oneness is extended to include thousands and millions of others. You see at once if any man comes with Christ only on his lips and not in his heart, he cannot be one with us in this heavenly union.



And on the other hand, the more we all give our hearts to Christ, the more he lives in us, fills us with his gifts and blessing, governs and controls our thoughts, words, deeds, and all our lives, the more perfect will our oneness be in him. That is why Jesus speaks of our being “made perfect in one.” Not lightly are our hearts to hold him, but with all their might, not one corner of our souls is he to possess, but our whole mind, heart, and spirit, with every power and faculty. And there is nothing more blessed, wonderful, and heavenly here on earth, than for poor sinners thus to be made the abode of Jesus, living in constant communion with him, and thus through him in the real oneness and unity of his church.

This is indeed a different thing than outwardly joining people together in congregations and churches, while their hearts are far from Christ, though thousands be thus outwardly brought together. It is a much harder thing, too, to accomplish than building up outward aggregations and collecting mere crowds. To put Christ into a man’s heart is a divine work, we can do it only with the Word of Christ. And many will not submit to him. But oh, how valueless the mere drawing of crowds; how infinitely valuable to put Christ into the sinner’s soul! With Christ comes his pardon and peace, his help and support, his comfort and joy, his purifying and ennobling power, his love and light. It is like heaven itself coming down here to earth, down where we can taste and feel it day by day. Oh, open your hearts wide, and take your Savior in that he may be your all in all! And then see that this Savior joins you together with all others in whose souls he dwells likewise. This is the real oneness of his church.

And now you will see what furthers and what hinders this oneness. Here are people who contradict Christ. Do you suppose that is letting him into their hearts? Here are some who pervert his words. Do you think they are thereby opening their hearts to him? Here are some who disobey Christ, drawn by their own sinful desires or the allurements of the world. Do you suppose they are thereby decking their hearts to receive him? And now shall we say nothing to all this, just that we may have as many of these people in our congregations, and thus ourselves help to grieve Christ, be guilty of other men’s sins, and thus on our part too hinder Christ’s coming into our hearts and the hearts of others? No; while we never can look into a man’s heart, to know whether Christ is really there or not, while this forever remains his exalted prerogative, yet this we know that when men deny him with word and deed, refuse to submit to his Word and will, we who mean to

have him dwell in us and rule us cannot agree with them, cannot declare ourselves one with them. And if we become like those others, disloyal to his Word and will, let us know that we are turning Christ from us, that we are not one with him and with his church. For the real oneness of the church is in Christ alone, and the more he dwells in us all the more perfect is that oneness.

He in us and we in him; let this be our constant prayer. He in all who profess his name, and every contradiction and deviation from his Word and will taken from us all, this is what makes the real unity of the church and builds it up to what it ought to be.

### **III. It Is A Unity That Reaches Out To The World**

And now see the blessed purpose of this genuine unity of Christ's church in him through his Word. It is far from being only an ideal thing for us to enjoy by ourselves. It is a unity that reaches out to the world.

In his priestly prayer Jesus asks that we may thus be one with him "that the world may believe" that the Father sent him. And again he says: "that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." The unity of the church here on earth is to be a saving power and influence for the world. By this our oneness with Christ through his Word men are to be brought to believe in Christ and thus to be drawn themselves into this oneness with him. The great missionary power of the church lies in this its real spiritual oneness.

It is easy to see how these things belong together. Think how the apostles were one in Christ. Their hearts were wholly his, and moved by him they preached and taught Christ and they lived and practiced Christ. What was the result? Thousands were thereby drawn to Christ. Like a snowball, small at first, but rolling on and on, the church grew and increased mightily. This is what the oneness of Christ's apostles in him did.

It is the same today. When men are one in Christ theirs is a power strong to save others. When Christ fills us our faith shows itself in a thousand ways. We confess his name by word and deed. Men feel the Christ that is in us and makes us one. And so many of them are won for him. Oh, for a church wholly one in him! If all who profess his name were really filled

with him, how they would all unite in preaching Christ and his salvation, how they would all second that preaching by their lives! And men would hear and see and feel it. The heavenly power of it would attract them — surely, many would believe! — But see the sad picture as it is in so many. They are not one in Christ. Here some deny and falsify this teaching of his, some that teaching. Here some disobey these commands of his, some those commands. They will not let Christ bind them into one. Even in our own midst much of the inner oneness is lacking because we do not take into our souls the blessed Christ as we should. The effect is plain. We are not the power we ought to be in saving men and drawing them to Christ. In unity there is strength. This is true of the spiritual Christ-unity of the church. An army that does not march and strike together under a unified command, under the one command of its real general-in-chief, cannot win the great victories it might easily win if only it would combine as it should. One is our Master, even Christ. In oneness with him and thus with his church, let us glorify his name by winning men for his kingdom!

## **IV. It Is A Unity That Culminates In Glory**

But look now, as Christ did, up to his heavenly Father and the world to come. See there the full glory of the oneness for which he so earnestly prayed. As this real unity of the church is far deeper and more blessed than thousands have thought, so also it is far more glorious in its ultimate goal. It is a unity that culminates in glory.

Our Savior's high priestly prayer rises to this heavenly height: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me, where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." The spiritual, earthly unity of the church in Christ is to culminate in the eternal glory of Christ and his church when now our work is done on earth. This is the crown of our real oneness with Christ.

The Savior who dwells in our hearts now, made ours by his Word and held fast by our faith, dwells at the same time in the infinite glories of heaven. But he dwells there, not merely as the Son of God, but as God's Son made man for our sakes. There in heavenly glory is his human body and soul, now shining with divine glory. It is he who hung upon the cross

for our sins, he who burst the bonds of death and the grave for our deliverance. When I he went to that sacrifice and from that sacrifice to his heavenly glory, this was his prayer, that we who are one with him by faith and through him with each other be finally gathered around him in that eternal glory of his beyond the skies. What does it mean? This that he in whom we are one now as the great Head of the church shall be lifted away from all these imperfections of earth at last, to see that glorious Head with our own eyes, ourselves made glorious like unto him, and blessed forever in that heavenly vision and all it implies. O wonderful unity of the church! As Christ reaches down to us now from on high making us one with him in this world, so we are to reach up at last unto him into heaven and blessedness forever.

Does it make any difference, then, whether we are really one with him, and whether we are really bound together into one now through him? Will we ever be careless now about his Word and will, about our faith and love, and about our task of winning men unto him? Away with all that endangers this precious unity, or tends to weaken, corrupt, rend, and destroy it! Let others be blind and indifferent if they will, we will hold to him and hold together in and through him. Hear what he prays here to his Father: “The glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one.” With him ours now by this faith of ours and this indwelling of his, his glory is ours now already. Even now as his church in true oneness with him we are heirs of heaven. And though it doth not yet appear what we shall be, we know, because we have him as our Head, that in due time it shall appear: we shall be like him — we shall see him as he is! Ours is a unity that culminates in glory.

Grant, O Lord, that in us all thy blessed prayer may be fulfilled!

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## Outlines

The text has a depth and wealth of thought that will tax any preacher. In all probability he will have to treat some parts with considerable brevity. Central in the text is the oneness of the church, — surely, a timely subject. We may take the theme: Christ’s great thoughts on the oneness of the church: on the bond which produces it — on the power which lies in it. Or, more

detailed: The unity of the church as Christ prayed for it: spiritual — in the truth — in Christ — in possessing his glory — in separation from the world — in working for the world — in heavenly glory. — We may also begin with the truth and its power: The sanctifying power of the truth: It separates us from the world unto God — it makes us one in Christ Jesus — it fits us for our mission in the world — it' lifts us up to behold him who is the Truth in all his glory. — Another way is to start with the world: How shall the church accomplish its mission in the world? By drawing into itself all the power of Christ through his Word — by giving out from itself all the power of Christ in the Word. — A fine spiritual sermon may be drawn from this text on: Christ's indwelling in the church: he enters by his Word of truth — dwells in us by faith — makes us one by his indwelling — enables us to do our mission in the world — at last draws us to himself in heaven.

### **Christ's Final Prayer for the Church.**

1. A prayer for sanctification in the truth.
2. A prayer for oneness in him.
3. A prayer for our work in the world.
4. A prayer for our eternal union with him.

### **“Sanctify them in the Truth!”**

1. The truth which is to sanctify us.
2. The sanctification which the truth is to work.

### **The Great Work of the Church in the World.**

1. Filled with the Word,
2. Made one with Christ.
3. We are to bring this Word to the world,
4. Draw men to Christ,
5. That together we may be forever with Christ:

### **“That they may All be One.”**

1. The wonder of it — Christ's indwelling.

2. The realization of it — sanctifying truth of the Word.
3. The power of it — that the world may believe.
4. The promise of it — that they may behold my glory.

# The Pentecost Cycle

## 31. The Sacred Seven in the Lord's Prayer. Rogate. Matt. 6:9-13.

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Matthew 6:9-13)

MANY A TIME we have prayed this wonderful prayer which Jesus himself has given us. Alas, we must all confess — many a time without that concentration which its mighty petitions demand! This prayer is far more than a beautiful formula of words to use in praying. Jesus himself tells us that we are to pray “after this manner,” namely with all that this prayer of his requires on our part. Let us follow this intimation of his and open our hearts to receive all that lies in this divine prayer.

Here are seven petitions — a chain with the sacred number, bringing God to us, and us to God. These seven petitions reveal our sevenfold need. In doing that they come to us with a sevenfold admonition in regard to these needs. Looking again we will see here a sevenfold vow which ought to follow the admonition as our response to it. And then this wonderful prayer brings us a sevenfold promise from Jesus that if we pray it thus as we ought our petitions shall indeed be heard. That, beloved, is

**The Sacred Seven in the Lord's Prayer.**

# I. A Seven-fold Need

Yes, these seven petitions reflect most clearly on our part a sevenfold need.

Many men are conscious of more or less need in their lives. If not always then at least when their needs become painful, terrifying perhaps in the vicissitudes of life, in sickness, calamity, distress of conscience, and in the hour of death. Then, perhaps, too they cry unto God, and yet, oh, how much they lack to make their prayers what they ought to be in order to be heard! Learn here from the sacred seven in the Lord's Prayer what our need really is.

We need first of all the heavenly blessings, which are locked up in God's name, God's kingdom, God's good and gracious will. Too many of us are still like the children of this world, blind to their greatest need. When they pray they think of asking only temporal and bodily blessings. They look down, instead of looking up. Let us cease being children who cry only for playthings to make us happy for an hour; let us cry for the eternal things which will make us happy now and forever. That is why Jesus lays his Father's name upon our lips and bids us look up to him in heaven. Behold thus the heavenly blessings intended for us, and see how much we need these.

His name we need that we may know him as he is in all his love and mercy towards us. Look at Christ, your Savior, his cross and blood, his exaltation and glory. "He that hath seen me," says Christ, seen me in faith, "hath seen the Father." In Christ God is revealed to us — Christ is his wondrous "name." And Christ comes to us in the Gospel, in this Holy, precious Bible. This is God's name so full and clear that you may know him indeed. And mark-it well, this is your first great need. You and every man that lives in this world needs to know God as he is revealed in Christ and in the Gospel of Christ. You need this blessed name. And how do you need it? So that its blessedness may fill your heart, that you may hallow and sanctify it by faith and a godly life. Unless you have this need satisfied, you will never have what you really need.

But the knowledge and faith which takes in his name opens his kingdom to us. "Thy kingdom come!"—here is our need. First of all that through Christ and his Word this kingdom come to us and take us in, and then that in ever fuller measure the blessings of this kingdom be ours. O the poor souls still in the kingdom of darkness! And here is the kingdom they need



— its grace to cleanse and free them and to make them ready for the glory beyond. Let us never forget this vital need.

This need at once touches another, namely that for us in all things God's good and gracious will may be done, that will which would crush our foes, sin, world, devil, and hell, and lead us safely through this poor earthly life to our Father which is in heaven. Say it yourself, whether this is not our greatest need!

God's name, kingdom, will, and what they bring to us now in time and hereafter in eternity, this is our need.

Yes, we need bread too, earthly food, clothing, property. But stop! This need is not nearly as great as you think. You need, really need, far less than you think. Does the millionaire need his millions, and you your hundreds and thousands? Look at this word "bread" and you have the answer. God is good and gives you a rich abundance perhaps. He more than satisfies your need, but let not that deceive you in regard to your real bodily need.

This is the least need, and therefore in the four petitions that draw us up to God after he comes down to us in the first three this little prayer for bread is put first. With this need settled look at your soul. It is sinful, guilty, a curse impending over it. What do you need? Forgiveness from God. Nothing but the forgiveness of God through Jesus' blood can cleanse your sin away. But here you are in a wicked world, a thousand temptations and dangers on every side. What do you need? That God guide and keep you that you may not be lost in temptation and fall a prey to the roaring lion seeking to devour you. And now with so much evil about you, sum all the rest up, what do you need? Deliverance. Daily deliverance from evil that you may be kept safe and pure as a child of God, and then in the hour of death may be delivered from all evil and translated into the eternal kingdom of God.

Oh, that we all might realize the vastness of our need! Here Jesus opens up its sevenfold greatness for us to see. See it aright, and then lift up your hearts and hands and pray to your Father in heaven to answer this mighty need of yours.

## **II. A Seven-fold Admonition**

In pointing to the need the voice of admonition has already called to us, but let us give special attention to it — in pointing to our sevenfold need these

seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer come with a sevenfold admonition.

You who have long known the name of God — have you hallowed it as you should? Have you made it your rock of faith, your refuge of prayer, your anchor of hope? You who have had the kingdom come to you — have you been glad to be in it, or have you tried to run back into the kingdom of the devil? You who have known God's good and blessed will, and how it would keep you in his grace — have you loved that will, desired with all your heart what it purposes? or have you too run counter to that will and followed the will of the devil, the world, and your own flesh? Do you hear these questions coming out of these holy petitions, reminding you of your lack of faith and faithfulness? Stop praying the Lord's Prayer until these admonitions bow your heart in true repentance; then pray, and your prayer will be better.

And again, you whom God has fed daily for so many a year of your earthly lives — have you thanked him as you should? have you used his gifts as he desires? Or have you worried like worldlings when your abundance was less, and have you held in greed and avarice what he has given you? When he gave you so much that you should help build his kingdom with your money and goods, have you done it? or have you wasted all this kindness of his in pride and selfish desire? Stop praying for daily bread, until these admonitions go home in your hearts. It is one thing to get the bread — even the wicked get it, — and another thing to get it so that God's blessing rests upon it. May not the bread God gives you now rise up against you in the judgment day for the way you prayed for it and for the way in which you ate and used it.

You have asked for forgiveness — but do you hear this petition: “as we forgive our debtors”? Did you forgive? or did you expect God to forgive you your thousands of sins, while you refused to forgive one or the other sin of your brother or fellow man? You pray to be kept from temptation — have you kept away from it yourself when you knew it was there and were warned against its danger? Remember the folly of Peter and his fall; remember the falseness of Judas and the death he died. And so with evil and all the corruption of sin. Can you pray to be delivered from it while you still love it and cling to it in some form? And how about the end? You do not know when the fatal hour may come. What if then some chain of evil still held you? Too late in that hour many a soul has cried to be delivered.

A sevenfold admonition from the sacred seven in the Lord's Prayer. Seven cords to draw you down on your knees in repentance. Seven hands to free you from your unbelief, carelessness, sin. Seven voices to call you back to God. Pray, yes, pray these petitions, but only after you heed their admonitions.

### **III. A Seven-fold Vow**

Admonition is meant to awaken a response. And surely this sevenfold admonition ought to receive a benefiting response from you. What shall it be? There is only one proper answer — a sevenfold vow.

This holy name in Christ and his Gospel, for which you pray that it may be hallowed — as you lift your hands in prayer to your Father, vow to him that with his help you will indeed hallow it better than before — cling to it more, love and use it more, and make it the signature of your whole life. And this kingdom of God and his Son, here in his church on earth, and in the glory of heaven above, for the coming of which you pray — as you pray add the vow that you will belong wholly to this kingdom alone, and live as a child of it, rejoicing in its blessings and manifesting forth its power in your life. Let that vow include that God may use you too in bringing this kingdom to others. God's gracious will, for which you pray that it may be done — do more than pray. Yield your own will to this will which is your salvation, and vow anew to God that your will shall not again support the will of the evil one or of those who are ruled by him. This is the right answer when from your past faults and sins you turn anew to God and pray for his name, kingdom, and will.

Part of your vow must include your earthly possessions, that you will hold them as God's gifts alone, and use them according to his will, it is a hard vow unless your heart is wholly your Father's, but make it with his help. Only as you let loose from these earthly things will you really be lifted up to God. Then add the vows on sin, temptation, and evil. It took the blood of God's own Son to win forgiveness for you. Say to God as you plead anew for this forgiveness which he so gladly and richly bestows: Father, I know its price, and I vow to hold it as my dearest treasure — and having this great forgiveness from thee no unforgiving spirit shall ever remain in me! Will you dally again with temptation? or talk with lightness and laughter perhaps

of any evil? or forget what evil means when it still holds you in the hour of death? No, no — here vow to your Father, as you ask for his protection and deliverance, that you will walk his paths alone, the blessed paths of righteousness for his name's sake, and that you will flee every evil and give your soul only to him.

Holy and sacred ought to be these vows arising out of the sacred seven in this prayer, as holy as these petitions themselves. Christian vows are really Christian prayers, for none of us can make them except in complete dependence upon our Father's help. But made thus they will be acceptable to him and effective in our hearts and lives.

## **IV. A Seven-fold Promise**

What will God's response be when thus the sacred seven in his Son's prayer makes us feel our sevenfold need, humbles us with its sevenfold admonition, and stirs us to make this sevenfold vow? Dear children of the Father in heaven, his answer will be, must be, a sevenfold promise.

The surest thing about the Lord's Prayer is the promise which every one of its petitions contains. Why did Jesus ask us to pray thus? Because God is anxious to do these very things for us.. Not that any man dare be presumptuous mid think he can do as he pleases and then merely by repeating these petitions secure the fulfillment of the sevenfold promise. This promise is not for presumptuous fools, but for God's beloved children. He wants them to see their need, but he sees it far better than they, and it moves him to extend his hand and open his heart to relieve it. But only they who know their need and cry to him from out their need can receive the answer he is so ready to give. And that is the purpose of the sevenfold admonition in these petitions and of the sevenfold vow they would produce — to drop our carelessness and indifference, to come as we ought to come to this mighty and exalted Father of ours, that he may bless us as these petitions assure us that he will.

His holy name, full of light, peace, and joy for you, he will indeed help you that in and through it you may be sanctified for your own salvation. His wondrous kingdom, established for your sakes and filled with heavenly treasures, he will indeed make it yours and bring it to others through you, even as you pray, if only you do pray in spirit and in truth. And his loving,

saving will — there is no doubt about its being done, and; done upon you and in you in the highest measure, if you pray as he bids you through his Son that it may be done.

All the treasures of earth are his. He made its gold and silver, he created the grain that feeds you, the cattle on a thousand hills are his. Will he ever let his own children suffer lack if they cry to him in this prayer for bread? if they come, not as greedy worldlings seeking filthy lucre, 'but as beloved children knowing and prizing their Father's love? He who gave his own Son to die for us, will he not now apply that Son's blood in pardon to our souls, if we come to him contrite and believing as we should? He who knows our weakness and the Tempter's strength, will he hesitate to help us when we are tried while we serve and obey him? and will he not deliver us from wickedness and all its hurts, while we live here and in the final hour, if we indeed turn from evil and reach out our hands to him? Oh, the promise is sure. Its mighty sevenfold strands will never break. Heaven and earth will pass away, but not the words here written, the promises here given with Christ in them and the Father in heaven behind them.

Let this assurance make us eager and strong in prayer. And that the full joy of it may be ours let us pray "after this manner," namely as these seven petitions train and guide, instruct and move us to pray — with needy, repentant, faithful hearts. Then shall the promise with its sevenfold stream of blessing flood us with heavenly gifts, and our hearts shall break forth in praise and worship: "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen."

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## Outlines.

The Lord's Prayer is an excellent text for a homily, only in using this less usual type of sermon great care must be exercised lest the result be only a general sort of Sunday-school comment. A homily has perfect unity, like any other good sermon, and while there is freedom in the development the whole of it is governed by the unity and helps to unfold it — The natural divisions of the prayer may be used, either dividing between the third and four petition, or dividing into four sections: the introduction, the first three petitions, the last four, and the conclusion. — Theme; Christ's wonderful

prayer for us all: its three petitions to bring God down to us — its four petitions to carry us up to God. — Let the Lord's Prayer teach us how to pray: with its address to God — with its petitions on the things of God — with its petitions on the things of men — with its conclude of praise and faith.

## **Our Most Beloved Prayer,**

1. Its contents . — 2. Its blessing.

— JEREMIAS.

## **The Lord's Prayer the Greatest Lesson on Christian Prayer.**

1. On the way we should pray.
2. On the things for which we should pray.
3. On the faith with which we should pray.

## **The Lord's Prayer in Jesus' Name.**

1. In Jesus' name we come as dear children to our heavenly Father.
2. In Jesus' name we ask aright for heavenly and for earthly gifts.
3. In Jesus name we close with a joyful and believing Amen.

— ANACKER.

## **The Depth of the Lord's Prayer.**

1. Here is the true spirit of prayer.
2. Here is the true ground of prayer.
3. Here if the true blessing of prayer.

We add an outline on this text for mission festivals. Instead of using only the second petition let us use:

## **The Entire Lord's Prayer as a Mission Prayer.**

In praying it we will find:

1. it requires that we have the right missionary spirit (the introduction, and the first three petitions).
2. It impels us to make the right missionary offerings (the fourth petition, “our” including the bread of our missionaries).
3. It directs us to desire the right missionary success (the last three petitions: that men may find pardon, deliverance from temptation, and at last from all evil).
4. It inspires us with the right missionary faith (the conclusion: it is all God’s work, and the glory is his alone).

# **32. Our Joy in Christ's Ascension to Heaven. Ascension.**

## **Acts 1:6-11.**

When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1:6-11)

OUT ON THE BEAUTIFUL CREST of Mount Olivet, within sight of the city of Jerusalem and its white marble Temple gleaming in the distance, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ascended to heaven. So near the spot where he passed through the great agony, when drops of blood like sweat trickled from his pores, in the night in which he was betrayed, he now stood, risen from the dead, his body wondrously glorified, ready to assume his heavenly throne above. The same disciples were about him as in that night in Gethsemane — with one significant exception. For the last time they heard their Savior speak to them with his own lips, then they saw him ascend in majesty to heaven, and angels of God spoke the words that dismissed them from the sacred spot with undying joy and exultation in their hearts. That joy is ours today. It marks every return of the great day which commemorates this miracle of our salvation. May God sanctify and increase

### **Our Joy in Christ's Ascension to Heaven.**

It is joy in his own exaltation, and in what that exaltation means to us.



# I. Joy In His Own Exaltation

We rejoice in our Savior's ascension to heaven because of his own exaltation in thus ascending on high.

When Christ arose from the dead on Easter morning he entered a new and glorious mode of existence. He now used all the heavenly powers that belonged to his human nature since it came into existence in the body of his mother. No longer was his body subject to the ordinary laws of time, and space, and earthly conditions. Suddenly he would appear to his disciples, and when he was done speaking with them as suddenly would he be gone. A heavenly glory was poured out over him, and all his disciples saw that he was indeed the Son of God. For forty days this wonderful intercourse with his beloved disciples continued. They were to know indeed that he was risen and glorified, and from his own lips they were to hear the things they needed to know from the Scriptures and in explanation of all that had occurred and was yet to occur in the blessed plans of God.

Then at last the crowning act of all was to take place — the ascension of our Savior to heaven itself and to the throne of his eternal glory at God's right hand. It is the final and most transcendent act of his exaltation.

As the glorified body of Jesus stood there on Mount Olivet — when the last mighty words had been spoken, bidding the disciples preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth — a silence fell over the sacred group. And the great act of exaltation began. Slowly, majestically, wondrously the body of Jesus rose from the earth. Wide-eyed with astonishment the disciples beheld it. The hands once nailed to the cross and still bearing those holy wounds, were spread out in blessing over them, as the glorious form of Jesus rose higher and higher. Not an eye was turned from him as he ascended heavenward. Far in the upper regions now they saw his body, then a filmy vapor of cloud closed around him. and they saw their Savior's human form no more. He had ascended to heaven.

Only the first part of that wonderful ascent could human eyes behold. Heaven itself the disciples could not see, nor the Savior's entrance into the pearly gates beyond. When that vapor cloud hid him from their sight, when that which they could see and were therefore given to see. was finished, then all in an instant. with power and majesty transcending all earthly tilings, our Savior's body was transferred into heaven itself. We can speak

of it only in an imperfect, human way. The great golden portals stood ajar to take the mighty conqueror in. All the hosts of heaven shouted with joyful acclaim. Angels swept down to receive him. We may think of the Psalmist's words when he sings of these angel hosts shouting to each other: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah." And there on his mighty throne, shining with the divine light and glory of God, our Savior sat down. This was his eternal exaltation in heaven.

Think for a moment what it means. Jesus, our Savior, sat down at God's right hand of power in heaven. It is he whom they nailed to the cross and laid in the grave — the same body that suffered so much, the same soul that was sorrowful unto death that night on Mount Olivet. For this was the human body and soul of God's own Son made partaker through the Incarnation of all the power and glory that belonged to him as the Son. Now he used it all most completely, and will use it all. — His great redemptive work on earth was done. Sin was atoned for by his death, Satan and hell were defeated forever, salvation was bought for us all, the glorious Gospel of life and peace for sinners ready to be sent to all the world. Thus did our Savior ascend and take his throne on high. — And not for himself was he exalted thus, though all heaven rang with the praises of what he had done. For us he ascended, for us he assumed that exalted throne, far above principalities, powers, might, dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. He ascended on high to sit at God's right hand of power, that means to exercise and rule forever with this power, alike in heaven and on earth. And not as the Son of God only, but also as man, in the oneness of his divine person. He himself said it, and meant it of his human nature: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." And his apostle writes: God "hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." That infinite power lies now in his pierced hands in heaven, and its one purpose is the salvation of men and our own eternal glorification.

Oh, that our hearts might realize in some proper measure at least what took place when Jesus ascended thus to heaven, that we may rejoice in his

exaltation! Mighty is the death of Christ — it rent sin and death in twain: blessed is the resurrection of Christ — it displays all his saving victory. But we must add one more stupendous deed, completing in its sublime way all the rest: infinitely glorious is the ascension and heavenly exaltation of Christ — it crowns all his work as our Savior, enthroning him as our King and Savior forever. To realize what this means must fill our hearts with boundless joy.

"For this he taught, and toiled, and bled  
For this his life was given;  
For this he fought, and vanquished death;  
For this he reigns in heaven.

Join, all ye saints beneath the sky.  
Your grateful praise to give;  
Sing loud hosannas to his name,  
With whom ye too shall live."

## **II. What That Exaltation Means To Us**

Our joy in the ascension of Christ to heaven must be deepened and increased when we see what his exaltation means to us.

It means a blessed kingdom of grace here on earth. The last thing Jesus said to his disciples before he ascended in glory to heaven was this assurance concerning his kingdom of grace and salvation on earth. He promised them the gift of his Holy Spirit from heaven; he promised to fill them with the power of his Holy Spirit, and to make them witnesses to preach the Gospel with success-among men — in the first place right there in Jerusalem where Jesus had been condemned, then in the whole Jewish land, in the adjoining land of Samaria, yea in all the lands of the earth. It was a kingly promise indeed. It was a promise resting on his exaltation in heaven. For only one who rules in heaven can send down from there God's own Holy Spirit to fill and bless the souls of men. Only one who governs the whole earth, controls with his power and might every nation and land, can send his witnesses as he deems best to the very ends of the earth. You know how his exalted word has been kept. Only ten days after Christ's ascension the Holy Spirit was given with wonderful signs. That little band of apostles, so timid at first, became fearless and strong — Jerusalem resounded with

the Gospel, and thousands believed. To be sure, persecution broke out, but Jesus ruled in heaven, ruled in the very midst of his foes. The blasts of persecution in Jerusalem scattered the Gospel into many lands. Soon there were churches in the most distant parts of the civilized world as it then was. St. Paul went as far as Spain and the Atlantic ocean. St. Thomas penetrated even to far off India. The holy Gospels were written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the letters of the holy apostles by the same Spirit, and the great book of St. John's Revelations. Thus when the apostles died at last, nearly all of them martyrs to the faith, their mighty witness went on and on through the world. It still resounds among the nations of the earth, and nothing shall ever conquer it or bid it be silent. Why? Because Jesus Christ sits and rules in the heavens. His hand is over his witnesses, guiding them one and all; his power protects his church so that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. This is what the ascension of Christ to heaven and the glory of his exaltation mean to us.

They mean still more. For we must connect with his exaltation not only his own words and promises before he arose, but also that word and promise which he gave through his holy angels the moment after he was risen on high. There they stood on Mount Olivet while the disciples were gazing toward heaven watching their Savior's ascent, and then they added to the first promise this second one of his, that their ascended Lord and Savior would return in glory even as the disciples had seen him leaving them. What does it mean? This that the earth shall stand only as long as our Savior needs it for his kingdom and church here among men. Then, when his work here is done, when his Gospel has drawn to him all who are his. Jesus Christ will return. That shall be the last day of earth. He shall come in glory as he went, only all the angels of God shall return with him. He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. By his almighty power all the living and the dead, from all the ends of the earth, shall be gathered before his heavenly presence. You shall see him, and I shall see him, when then he sits before us on his great white judgment throne. His holy angels will gather us and all the children of his kingdom at his right side. From his own lips we shall hear the mighty word which shall usher us forever into the glory that is his: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Then shall the righteous, who washed their garments by faith in the blood of the Lamb, enter into life eternal; but all his foes, who would not have this exalted Savior to rule over them, will be cast

into outer darkness forever. Thus our great ascended, exalted King will translate his kingdom of grace into the kingdom of glory.

And all this is our joy now. We rejoice when by his holy Word his Spirit works among us today; we know it is the work of our exalted King making us ready to meet him at last. We rejoice when we see his church, kept safe through hundreds of years, still going on its course of victory; we know the hand of our exalted Savior is guiding it. We rejoice in hope of the great day to come when our exalted Savior shall return, and when we and all his saints shall share his glory forever. Our joy is so great in Christ's ascension because it means so much to him and through him to us.

“Glory unto thee be given,  
By men and by the host of heaven,  
With harps and with the cymbal's tone.  
Twelve pearls are thy city's portals, Wherein we dwell with the immortals,  
With angels high around thy throne.  
No eye hath seen such sight.  
No ear heard such delight,  
Hallelujah!  
Thine hour is this,  
O Heavenly Bliss,  
Thine now, and shall be evermore!”

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## Outlines

The text is simple in the substance which it presents: first, and most important, the ascension itself — secondly, the promise concerning the kingdom — thirdly the promise concerning the return. We may divide into three parts; or we may throw the two promises together, making only two main parts. Another way is to allow the ascension itself to dominate the entire sermon, utilizing what is said by Jesus and by the angels without assigning to these sections separate main divisions of the sermon. A two part division is shown in the sermon given above. One with three parts may follow lines like the following: Christ's ascension to heaven a mighty article of faith: 1) Our faith rests on the great fact of Christ's ascension: 2) Our faith lives and labors in the power of Christ's exaltation; 3) Our faith rejoices in the hope of our ascended and exalted Savior's return. — Making the ascension itself

supreme we may say this: Our Lord's ascension to heaven: He finished his own work on earth in this glorious manner—he added this miracle of grace to all his previous work — he rules over the angels in heaven and over men on earth — he will carry his glorious work of salvation to a blessed conclusion.

### **The Miracle of Christ's Ascension to Heaven.**

1. A miracle of divine power.
2. A miracle of divine blessing.
3. A miracle the power and blessing of which fill us with joy and hope.

### **The Infinite Blessings of Christ's Ascension to Heaven.**

1. Our exalted Lord rules over us.
2. An imperishable kingdom is about us.
3. A heavenly home awaits us.

### **The Mighty Change Wrought by Christ's Ascension.**

1. Heaven is changed — our Savior is there.
2. Earth is changed — the church and its work are here.
3. We are changed — faith and hope fill our hearts.

### **Our Faith in the Savior's Ascension.**

1. It lifts us to heaven with its strong assurance.
2. It puts us to work on earth with its joyful seal.

# **33. The Wonderful Doctrine of Divine Inspiration. Exaudi. Matt. 10:19-22.**

But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. (Matthew 10:19-22)

NEXT TO THE VITAL QUESTION: "What think ye of Christ?" comes the question: What think ye of the Bible? A chorus of conflicting, wrong, inadequate, misleading answers is heard today. The Bible? — why, it's a book of fables and legends! That is the unbeliever's answer. The Bible? — oh, it is a good book, but some parts of it cannot be received as they stand. That is a reply of the liberalist in the church. The Bible? — beyond question it is the Word of God! That is the true believer's most emphatic answer; and it is ours.

Now why do we make this answer? For this great and decisive reason: The Bible is inspired of God — that makes it God's own Word, that makes it the rock of our faith, the anchor of our salvation. The great question concerning the Bible is really the question concerning its Inspiration of God. If the Bible is truly inspired of God, then it is his Word and the everlasting foundation of our faith, even as Jesus says: Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Word shall not pass away. If it is not inspired, namely in the true sense of that word, then we have no sure guide and support for our souls in life or in death.

Thank God, we need not remain in doubt or uncertainty! Right here in our text our Lord himself tells us clearly and fully just what the divine Inspiration is. Here is one of the simple keys which unlocks for us and every true believer in Christ all that we need to know concerning

## The Wonderful Doctrine of Divine Inspiration.

### I. The Lord Describes It

Our Lord Jesus Christ made a wonderful promise to his disciples in connection with the terrible days of persecution which he saw coming upon them. Ten terrible persecutions devastated the early Christian church under the Roman emperors. Thousands of believers were imprisoned and tried by heathen tribunals, and great numbers of them were put to death, some with the most hideous torture. Since those fearful days there have been lesser outbreaks of this kind. But Jesus assures us that when we approach the end of the world, the fires of persecutions will flame forth again more terribly than ever before. Brother will deliver brother unto death, fathers their children, and children their own parents. The passions of hell shall destroy even the natural affection of blood relatives. How shall Christ's followers ever be able to stand in these ordeals? Hear the Savior's promise and assurance — his Holy Spirit will support and aid them. And in this wonderful way: when men deliver you up, says Christ, "give no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak — for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." The Spirit of God will renew in those who are put to trial for Jesus' sake the blessed miracle of Inspiration — he will use their lips and tongue, he will speak through them.

The doctrine of divine Inspiration — *the Lord Jesus Christ describes it for us*; he tells us here what he understands by this wonderful act of his Holy Spirit for which we have the name divine Inspiration.

Mark well what he says: "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father." When believers are brought to trial for their faith, they are not to worry and think out in advance what they shall say in court before their hostile judges; when the moment comes God's Spirit will give them just what to say and the right words to say it in. So completely will this be the gift of the Spirit that though he uses their lips and mouth he, the Spirit himself, will be the speaker. He will use their faculties, their memory, intellect, mind, and will, and gladly, thankfully they will let him do it; and so, in the true sense of the words, even as Jesus says, not they are the ones who speak, but God's own mighty Spirit in them. That is what Inspiration



means. It is the act of God's Holy Spirit when he gives to a man just what he wants that man to say and when he enables that man to say it exactly as he, the Spirit, wants it said.

No, there is no compulsion and violence about it. Think of a poor martyr locked in a dark prison cell. If he had only himself to depend on, how he would sink in despair. When brought to trial, weak and broken down in body and mind, how easily he might become confused, upset completely, how he might blunder in his defense, and even bring dishonor, on his faith and his Savior. Will he not gladly accept the help of his Lord and the Spirit of his Lord? Why, every defendant in our courts seeks an advocate to conduct his case and speak for him. Vast sums are paid out for legal help. It is the very opposite of compulsion. Only too often such legal defenders use lies, evasions, and legal technicalities to help their clients. But the principle of having legal spokesmen at court is universally acknowledged. Now Christ's followers are to have the best and highest helper and spokesman of all, God's own Spirit. He who fills their hearts, who has been their aid and support in all their life, he will help them. It will all be a glorious, wonderful gift. He will make them his instruments; with deep gratitude they will yield to him soul, heart, mind, lips, and tongue. And so he will speak through them. The Spirit's Inspiration will be their defense.

Need I add that when Christ's followers receive this help the things they say and the words they speak will be better, higher, truer than any they ever could have invented or put forth themselves? When the Spirit speaks he makes no mistakes, for the Spirit is God himself. That is the very purpose of the Spirit's speaking to say just the thing he wants in just the way he wants it. And no true believer could desire anything better, or would for one moment thrust the Spirit from his heart in order to speak himself. This is the glory of divine Inspiration, and surely they recognize it most fully who are granted this heavenly gift both for their own help and benefit and for that of others.

## **II. The Bible Teaches It**

And now let us apply this to the Bible. The wonderful doctrine of divine Inspiration as our text illustrates it — the whole Bible reveals it. What Christ promised his believers in their hour of trial is the very thing God used on a

grander and more extensive scale in giving to his whole church for all the ages his own heavenly Word.

What did he answer to Moses when Moses was afraid to go to Pharaoh, saying: "I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue!" The Lord said unto him: "Who hath made man's mouth? ...Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say." God promised to inspire Moses, even as Christ here promised to inspire his own believers. No less than about 2,000 times in all we read the solemn declaration and testimony of the Old Testament prophets that the Word of the Lord came to them. "Thus saith the Lord!" "Thus saith the Lord!" is their constant refrain. It is just as our text says of these persecuted Christians: "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you." Hear God speaking thus through Isaiah:" "My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth." Is. 59:21. Hear David declare: "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me." 2 Sam. 23:2-3. This is the testimony of all the prophets.

That is why our Lord Jesus himself treated the Old Testament and every part of it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth the Word of God. Constantly he declares: "It is written!" — that is the final proof and assurance, because the Old Testament is God's own Word. What the prophets spoke by Inspiration that they wrote by the same Inspiration. In fact their writing was far more important than their speaking: only a few men heard them speak, millions were to read what they wrote. And upon their written Word Jesus, God's own Son, put his eternal stamp of approval, saying: "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all lie fulfilled." Man's word perishes, but the inspired Word of God cannot perish.

As God inspired the Old Testament prophets, so also he inspired the evangelists and apostles of the New Testament. They are placed side by side, these inspired writers of the two grand halves of the Bible. St. Paul Writes: We "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." Eph. 2:20. Most solemnly Jesus promised his Holy Spirit to the apostles: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." It was thus and thus alone that the apostles could become the

foundation of the church, teaching and writing the Word of Jesus by divine Inspiration, so that we to this day, and all men to the end of days have without any question just what Jesus said and taught. These holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, is St. Peter's assurance. Here again, what they taught by speaking was heard by far fewer than what they wrote. If they were inspired in what they spoke, God could not withhold his Inspiration when they wrote. It is as St. Paul assures us: "All scripture is given by Inspiration," and because it is so it is "profitable," as he adds, "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Only a Bible really inspired could be what St. Paul here says, a perfect equipment for every Christian man. A Bible uninspired would be nothing more than what men can produce themselves, and all men left thus to themselves are — liars. A Bible partly inspired would throw us into endless doubt as to what is and what is not inspired. It would be a compass without a needle, failing to show where north really is.

But we must add what our text makes so plain. Christians at trial who are to receive the Spirit and his Inspiration are not even to worry about how they shall speak. Not only the thoughts will be given them, but the very words. And that in a case where they alone are directly involved. Now think of the Bible, of the direct interest of millions and millions of souls involved in all ages of the world. Do you think for one moment that God inspired the Bible writers in a lesser degree than he promised these Christian martyrs in our text? Can it be that he gave these Bible writers only the thoughts in a general way, but did not watch over their words? When so much is at stake would God lower his Inspiration than when far less is at stake? When God gives, especially to his church, does he not always give in great abundance, with a truly royal, divine hand, more than we ask or think? The Bible is inspired both in thought and in word. The two are so closely welded together, that no prophet, apostle, or the Savior himself ever tried to split them asunder. Jesus said not even one letter, namely the very smallest of the old Hebrew alphabet, the little "jot" should be lost; yea, not even the "tittle" the little hook on some of the Hebrew letters. He spoke of these because the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. If the absence of a letter or piece of a letter shall not be allowed to spoil the Word of God, do you think God cared nothing about the words? No; we believe in Inspiration and in verbal Inspiration. No man can tamper with the words here written; he would surely

tamper also with the sense. When Christ and his apostles point as they do to single words and impress these upon us, they all declare that the Bible has verbal Inspiration, namely the only real, true, and complete Inspiration.

### **III. All True Christian Faith Corroborates It**

But there is more to this wonderful doctrine of Inspiration than merely to show that the Scriptures really teach it and that they show in a thousand different ways that they are indeed inspired. It is a doctrine intended not for human reason to speculate on or to find fault with or deny, but a blessed doctrine intended for faith and involving faith. And so we say concerning the doctrine of Inspiration: all true Christian faith corroborates it.

We may talk all day long to a blind man about colors — he will after all know nothing about them — he cannot see. Tell a man who has always been deaf about the wonders of music — he will not know what you mean, for he never heard a sound. Tell an unbeliever about divine Inspiration and the Word of God — it is love's labor lost. For this doctrine, like all the real treasures of the Scriptures, is for faith alone and can be received only by faith. The men who heard Jesus promise them divine Inspiration when put to trial for their faith, had God's Spirit in their hearts and believed in Jesus: to them that promise was a mighty blessing, others would have doubted, denied, perhaps even mocked at it.

To know and believe that the Bible is inspired we must not only read the statements in it that say so, we must take this holy inspired Word and let its saving power work upon our hearts. Taste and see how good the Lord is in this his Word, and you will know that this is not the speaking or writing of mere men, but the speaking of God himself through the instrumentality of men. It is exactly as Jesus said to the Jews: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself," namely without God. The man who has found pardon and peace for his distressed conscience in the eternal Gospel of Jesus Christ and his blood, will know in a living way that this Gospel is of God and not of men. The man who has felt the Spirit of God in this Word, delivering him from the power of sin and helping him to a life triumphing over sin, will know in his inmost soul that in this Word God's Spirit speaks to him. The soul weighed down with grief and lifted up with heavenly comfort through this

Word, will realize what this Word is which calls itself inspired. The more completely, then, we make trial of the Bible in our hearts and lives, the more completely will we know the divinity of the Bible and thus its Inspiration. For there is nothing under heaven able to do what this Word constantly does, save, regenerate, renew and bless poor, sinful, lost men.

When a man who has thus gotten from the Bible what God intended it to bring to him reads this Bible and sees what it says about itself, this that it declares its own Inspiration will not seem strange and incredible to him. No, it would be strange and absolutely incredible for a mere human book to do what this Book has done and does in him who receives it by faith. Never is the effect greater than the cause. Only fools believe that what is of sin and earth can carry us to heaven; God's children know that God's Savior and God's Spirit alone can carry us there, and when in this Holy Word of God he feels God's heavenly power, hears his voice, finds his blessing, his soul is satisfied. And this is what it means to believe in the Inspiration of the Bible. This is the faith which joyfully, thankfully corroborates the great Bible testimony and doctrine concerning its divine Inspiration. God grant this faith unto us all.

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## Outlines

The text contains prophecy and promise; the latter is twofold. Apart from the special use to which the text may be put because of its clear statement on Inspiration, we may simply set forth in the sermon its great contents in general. This, however, would make the text less suitable for the day. We offer the following in illustration of a more general treatment: Christ's promise for the evil days to come: the help of his Holy Spirit in the midst of persecution — eternal deliverance for those who persevere. — Turning to the special purpose of the text we may speak of: The miracle of divine Inspiration: wonderful and incomprehensible indeed — perfectly assured by Christ and his Spirit — completely accomplishing its object — our constant reliance in the Holy Scriptures — our special hope in case of greatest need. — An argument is furnished by this text and its parallels from the minor to the major: if the Christian's individual need is to be met by an act of Inspiration, can the need of the whole church be left to less? if even individual

Christians are to be given how to speak in the great hour of need, can the prophets and apostles of God have been left to their own words when God provided for the greatest needs of his church?

### **The Heart of the Doctrine of Inspiration.**

1. It is the Holy Ghost who speaks, not man.
2. Yet men are the instruments through whom the Holy Ghost speaks.
3. When thus the Holy Ghost speaks through men we feel the divine power of his Word.

### **The Divine Inspiration Promised in Persecution an Aid in Believing the Doctrine of the Divine Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.**

1. Here we see in what Inspiration really consists.
2. Here we learn how far Inspiration really goes.
3. And so we realize what the Holy Scriptures really are.

### **The Spirit's Blessed Work of Inspiration.**

1. What it did for the martyrs in the days of persecution.
2. What it did in the Holy Bible for us for all time.

### **The Promise of Jesus to his Martyrs an Answer to the Questions on Inspiration.**

Here we may learn indeed:

1. What Inspiration is.
2. How far Inspiration extends.
3. What inspiration gives.

# **34. The Spiritual Beauty Of The Church That Was Born At Pentecost. Pentecost. Acts 2:41-47.**

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (Acts 2:41-47)

PENTECOST IS RIGHTLY CALLED the birthday of the Christian church. Fifty days after the resurrection of Christ from the dead and ten days after his ascension to heaven the Lord Jesus Christ sent down his Holy Spirit from heaven to begin the world-wide spread of his Gospel among men. That very day it began in a most wonderful way. By the power of the Spirit the disciples of Christ proclaimed to the great multitude that gathered about them in Jerusalem "the mighty works of God." They did it in many different languages which the Holy Spirit enabled them to speak that day to show how the church of Christ would spread by the Spirit's power into all the lands of the earth. Then St. Peter arose and preached his great Pentecostal sermon on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which had just taken place. He told that great multitude of the prophecy of Joel, who hundreds of years before had foretold the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit; he pointed all these hearers of his to Jesus Christ whom they had rejected and nailed to the cross, whom God had raised from the dead and exalted at his right hand in heaven, and who now had manifested his heavenly power and grace by sending down

his Holy Spirit. The effect of all this was tremendous — 3,000 people turned in repentance to Jesus Christ. The first great spreading of the Christian church began. It began at Pentecost through the mighty coming and work of God's Holy Spirit, and it has continued ever since.

The first Christian congregation was formed on that day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem. It was the mother congregation of all Christendom. All her true daughters, even as we today, love to look back to her and study her features, in order that by the Holy Spirit's help we too may become more and more like unto her. Our festival text gives us a complete picture of

### **The Spiritual Beauty of the Church that was Born at Pentecost.**

The first church at Jerusalem, the mother of us all, was born, molded, and formed by the Spirit of God. God's Spirit wants to make us in all essentials like unto her.

## **I. The First Church Was A True Church**

God's Spirit made the first church a true church. The greatest beauty of the first church is this that in the fullest sense of the word we can call her a true church.

She was a true church because she had the pure Word of God and held to it. St. Luke tells us that all her members gladly received the Word; and again he says that they all continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine or teaching. He means that nothing but the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ, as the apostles had received it from Christ, and as the Holy Ghost himself enabled them to restate, preach and teach it, ruled in this newly born congregation at Jerusalem. And he means in addition that from the apostles on down all the members of the congregation with all the strength of their hearts held to this pure Gospel, earnestly and truly believed it and shaped their lives accordingly. They were not only one in the faith, but one in the true faith. Not one of the twelve apostles altered in the least the precious Word of God when he preached and taught it; and not one of all those 3,000 and more members in the church either openly or secretly objected to any part of this Word. They all rejoiced in its precious truth; they were happy to know the full way of



salvation in Jesus Christ; they all submitted to the truth and found no fault with any part of it, gladly putting away their former wrong ideas and practices. This is the wonderful spiritual beauty of the church born at Pentecost — it was a true church because it had and held the pure Word of God.

There are thousands of churches today, but you see at once that any number of them are not true daughters of the first church, because they no longer hold as she did to the pure Word of God. They preach and teach what they think best, no matter how much it contradicts the Word of Christ and his Spirit. And the churches are filled with members who think they can hold what they please of the Word of God, and can set the rest aside. Men mock at us when we point to Pentecost and this mother church of Christendom and insist on the pure truth of God's Word. Not a single doctrine has escaped defilement, and some have defaced the Word altogether. At best some are satisfied today to come near to the truth as the Holy Spirit has given it to us in the Scriptures, but to be completely true to the Word and to put everything contrary to it away is too much even for them. Alas, how the spiritual beauty of the mother church has faded and vanished in these who would be her true daughters and are not! Let none of them mislead or deceive us by their false reasoning and hurtful ideas.

No church today is true unless it has the pure Word of God and holds it steadfastly in its faith and life. God's Spirit is not in error and false doctrine; in these and by these the evil spirit works, tries to get into the church, into her members, into her pulpits and seminaries if possible, in order to damage and deface the church, to undermine and destroy faith, to corrupt and drag down the life. Error and false teaching are not marks of beauty and health; they are like sores and boils in the face of the church, like cancers and tumors in her vitals, like infections and contagious diseases in her system. Truth alone makes for life and beauty, all error is disease and makes for death.

Oh, then let the beauty of the mother church and her loveliness of truth impress us this day of Pentecost. Here is the Word of God, true and pure as it was that day in Jerusalem, and the Spirit of God in it. This is what we must have and hold, from the pastor down to the youngest member in our church. Its preaching and teaching must be our delight. The knowledge of this truth and the faith that rests in it must be our joy, for it is beautiful in every part, for it is life and salvation. Holding this we shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth fruit in season, and our leaves

ever green and not withering. Never let us think that God can delight in us when we are like a withering tree, its leaves yellow with disease, with no fruit at all or wilted, diseased fruit alone. By the grace of God's 'Holy Spirit' the beauty of the true church, our Pentecostal mother, shall ever remain fresh and strong in us as her true daughter.

## **II. The First Church Was A Strong Church**

As God's Spirit made the mother church a true church, so he also made; the first church a strong church.

When we say a strong church too many people think at once only of a large church. Now the first church did have no less than 3,000 members to start with. But remember that these 3,000 Christians were the only Christians in the whole world at that time. That was not a very great numerical strength when you look at the millions on the other side. But in the kingdom of Christ mere numbers are not strength. We might have a church consisting of millions today, and yet it might be a pitifully, miserably weak church. Large bodies may be weak as well as small ones. Strength is not mere size, strength is inward power. And this true, strong, unconquerable power the first church in Jerusalem had. It was the power of faith which clung to the Word of God and the holy Sacraments. St. Luke tells us how the entire membership at Jerusalem was baptized, how they were all together listening to the preaching of the apostles, and how they all gathered likewise for the breaking of bread, that is for the celebration, of the Lord's Supper. This is what made the mother church strong. She clung to the means of grace, the true fountain of strength; by the means of grace God's Holy Spirit kept flowing into every heart, and he is our true strength; clinging thus to the means of grace every heart grew in faith, and this is true spiritual strength. Ah, what a lovely picture, what true spiritual beauty — life, health, strength, vitality, power from on high in the hearts of the members of the first church! That is the strength we must have.

The world is full of churches, but are they strong? Here are cathedrals, bishops and priests, preachers and world-famous leaders, thousands of members, millions even, money enough, workers enough, and everything else. But where are the means of grace? where is the constant clinging to these means? where is the Spirit who works only in and through these

means? where the faith which draws its life only from these means? Ah, here we see the weakness of many a church outwardly large enough. There is not strength enough to hold the banner of the truth on high. There is not strength enough to resist the old errors that still come to attack, nor the new ones that grow out of the old. Preachers and members surrender again and again, now to this lie of the devil, now to that. There sits the world right in the midst of the church and rules the members — the Spirit of God and his Word are thrown from the throne. Many a chain is worn by these members, and yet they call themselves free and strong. And their preachers are muzzled and fettered likewise, unable to preach the Word in the strength of the Spirit. No, they are not like the mother church at all. She was a free woman like Sarah, Abraham's wife; these are bondwomen, slaves, like Hagar, who with her son was thrust out and could not share in the inheritance.

Let no mere show of strength deceive us, our true spiritual strength is in God's Word and Sacrament, in the Spirit of God who comes through these to fill our hearts, and in the strong, living faith which he thus implants and increases in us. The less you are rooted and grounded in the Word the weaker you are, and the less you hear, read, and take into your heart this Word, the weaker you are. It is the same with the Sacrament, Oh, then let us make use of these heavenly means, that we may grow in strength, free and joyous in all things to do our Savior's will. The Spirit of God is our strength. You are weak if you do not constantly open your heart to this Spirit as he comes to you in his holy means of grace. When he rules your heart, mind, and will, then you are strong. You will cast off many a chain and fetter that now still holds you; you will run with joy the race that is set before you and never tire. And so with faith. Its strength is drawn from the means of grace and the Spirit of God. The less you go to this source and the less you take of it, the weaker will you be. But if you take as you should, your faith will stand strong and upright, confess on every occasion with joy, trample delusion and sin under foot, and triumph in all things in Christ. Even a little band of believers, all filled thus with faith, God's Spirit, and the strength of Word and Sacrament — how strong they will be. A congregation made up of such members will have the true spiritual beauty, will be indeed a fair and lovely daughter of the glorious old mother church in Jerusalem.

### III. The First Church Was a Devout Church

True and strong, and then devout. The Holy Spirit made the first church a devout church.

The 3,000 at Jerusalem were steadfast in the breaking of bread and in prayers; they continued with one accord in the Temple for the worship there, and gathered in different places in the city for their celebrations of the Holy Supper. They were devout because they delighted in the worship of their Savior Jesus Christ and in all the exercises which go together with that worship. What a lovely spiritual picture — all these people gathered together again and again for preaching and teaching, for prayer and singing, for confession and absolution, for Baptism and the Holy Supper, for giving and offering, for benediction and doxology!

But here again let us make no mistake. Not all devotion is pleasing to God and the fruit of his Spirit. Look at the heathen at his worship — devout enough, but all his devotion an abomination to God. So men preach and hear, sing and pray in the churches, but all their devotion may be in vain. Only one kind of devotion has the true beauty which delights God, and is like a sweet smelling savor in his nostrils. It is the devotion which honors Christ alone, grows out of the truth in Christ alone, and is the expression of true faith in Christ and his truth alone.

Yes, we are to preach with fervor and zeal, and you are to hear likewise, but only the pure, true Word of God. Come indeed and sing and pray, only let your prayers and singing be filled with the same Word; Bring your little ones to Baptism, and let older ones come too to receive this Baptism, but let it be the Baptism as Jesus and his apostles gave it to us, the washing of regeneration and renewing in the Holy Ghost: make it a mere sign, as so many do, and your devotion is in vain. Eat and drink with a devout heart in the Lord's Supper, but eat Christ's true body there and drink his true blood, given and shed for the remission of sins, then alone will your devout participation in the Sacrament be acceptable to God; they who fail to discern the body of the Lord, St. Paul himself tells us, eat and drink damnation unto themselves. Many indeed cry: Lord, Lord! devoutly enough, but the Lord himself says, that he will tell them: "Depart from me; I never knew you!" God help us all that in every service we hold here in our church, and in all

devotional reading, singing and praying in our homes, there may be the truth of God's Word and faith resting on that.

And the stronger this faith, the more fervent, earnest, zealous, and glowing in all its worship of God, the more will it delight God and resemble the worship of the devout mother church. Alas, how cold many of us are! How little it takes to draw us away from our worship! How readily we respond to worldly pleasure, calls of business, or other claims upon our attention! Make the comparison yourself with the beautiful picture in our text. Here is the fire of faith, the glow of true devotion — too often with us there is no fire and no glow. Let us repent of our indifference and unspiritual ways, and open our hearts to God's Holy Spirit that he may make us alive to his Word and truth and all our blessings in Christ. Then will we worship in spirit and in truth, and we too as a church of God will be true, strong, and devout like our lovely spiritual mother of old.

## **IV. The First Church Was A Loving Church**

God's Spirit wrought in her also that fairest of all the fruits of true faith, Christian charity and love. He made the first church a loving church.

Not only were the members drawn together in fellowship and friendly association as brethren, they made the fullest provision for each other, and since some were quite needy a constant fund was provided that their need should be met. Think of it, people who but a little while ago did not even know each other, are now so filled with love toward each other that one after another who had wealth brought money, or sold a house or land or goods and so brought money, that none of their number might lack. It was altogether voluntary, and the more beautiful for that. The apostles did not need to scold or drive; they did not need to have fairs, sales, bazaars, or any other money making scheme. These early Christians gave — they just gave. It was the pure fruit of faith, wrought by the Word and Spirit alone. It stands as a model for all time, beautiful with the beauty of him who gave himself for us.

Are the daughters and would-be daughters like their mother? Thank God, some are! They put away from themselves once for all every plan which would deprive them of the blessed joy and privilege of giving. They will not be robbed of this honor and blessing. And in the same way, when

they give, they give as St. Paul bids us: “He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity,” with singleness of heart. They lay every offering at their Savior’s feet; they give as though they placed the gift into his own hand. They see him in their needy brethren; they hear his call in the work of the church which needs their money and support. O the loveliness of this heavenly grace! God gave, Christ gave, the Holy Spirit gives — can we as a true church of God refuse to give? Can the rose dispense with its beauty and odor, and still be a rose? Can music turn to discord, and still be music? Can the Spirit of love fill a heart, and yet leave it without love?) Oh, let this loveliness of the first church shine in your eyes and win your hearts to a similar love. Light the candle of your love at this bright and shining taper. Away with mercenary motives — salvation cannot be bought even with millions. Lay the pure incense of true love to Christ and his brethren upon his altar in generous gifts. These he will take from your hands. They shine with the beauty we see in our lovely spiritual mother. A congregation of such givers is a true child of the Spirit, a daughter indeed of the first great church of love.

## **V. The First Church Was A Missionary Church**

God’s Spirit who made so much of the first church could not but add true missionary zeal and fervor. He made the first church a missionary church.

“The Lord added to the church,” writes St. Luke, “daily such as should be saved.” Born herself out of Christ’s missionary command to the apostles, the first church obeyed that command, threw her doors wide open through the Gospel and drew men in. And hers was real missionary work, for those that were added were drawn by the Gospel alone. The Lord added them, writes St. Luke, not the apostles or church alone.

Here is our example as a church with the Pentecostal Spirit and a true daughter of the first church. Not for ourselves alone do we exist as a church, but for the work of the Lord and for the salvation also of others. We are not to be like the Dead Sea only taking in the fresh waters of the Jordan and then to make them salty and alkaline; we are to be like the living spring, pouring forth a sparkling stream to make the desert bloom wherever that stream flows. We are to be like a city set on a hill, a safe refuge in a

dangerous land, whither men may flee and find protection indeed. Every church must be a missionary church; it cannot be less if it has the Gospel and the Holy Spirit. For these will constantly impel us to preach salvation to others.

But mission work is more than propaganda. The Turks, as history tells us, went out to conquer the world for Mohammed; they took the sword to do it with. Even now in far off Africa the Mohammedans are zealous workers for their religion. Mormons are of the same type. All sorts of religious errors like to propagate themselves and gain as many adherents as possible. Weeds like to grow; but a garden consists of useful plants alone. Missionary work is planting the true Word and Gospel in men's hearts. It is winning men's souls for Christ so that Christ himself will count them won. It is one thing to fill up a church with people, another to fill it with people of God. Sometimes true missionary work is slow work, hard work — few can be won. Let us never grow discouraged on that account, or do the work in any other way than that prescribed by Christ. There are men enough building hay, wood, and stubble in the church, and making a great boast about it, but the fire of judgment will soon show what their work is; let us build with the gold, silver, and jewels of the Gospel alone. So shall we be saved, and those who join in faith with us. The most glorious work that is done on earth today is the missionary work which helps the Lord add souls to his church as he did in the old mother church. God grant us a full share in that work.

## **VI. The First Church Was A Blessing To All**

And now to complete the picture we must add that the Spirit of Pentecost made the first church a blessing to all.

Even the Jews generally in Jerusalem recognized the hand of God at work in this first congregation. St. Luke writes of the members of the church that they had favor with all the people. God's true children, moved by his Spirit alone, following his Word alone, are surely good neighbors and friends. It is a blessing for others to associate with them. But the real benefit and blessing of having the true church in the midst of a city or community is far greater than mere friendly association. God's church is an open door of salvation to all still outside of it. So it was here in Jerusalem. God was guiding and blessing his flock that it might grow strong in spirit and in

numbers. Those who viewed the church with favor were open to the Holy Spirit's influence; in many a case it was but a short step for them to enter and join themselves.

This too is part of the spiritual beauty of the church that in all its life and influence it is a blessing to all men who come in touch with it. The Spirit of God makes every true believer a purer, nobler, better man in every way. If this result is not apparent in you, it is because you resist God's Spirit and yield to the old spirit of selfishness, meanness, hate, and wickedness. Alas, that many a member of the church thus helps to disfigure the holy body to which he belongs! The open sins, vices, and faults of church members have turned many a man away who otherwise might have been won for the church. Let every member in our church keep that constantly in mind.

In Jerusalem the true church found favor at first, but in due time, because the church was so true to Christ, persecution and hatred were turned against her. This was the lot of the mother church, and it is bound to be the lot also of her daughters, if they are daughters indeed. Only see to it that it may be our faithfulness to Christ that brings us the opposition of men, and not some sin of our own. Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. By trial the Lord purges his church to make her spiritual beauty shine the more.

Pray God then this day of Pentecost that his Holy Spirit who wrought so gloriously in the first church at Jerusalem may work equally in this church of ours and all her members, making us too in all things a church true, strong, devout, loving, full of the missionary spirit, and thus in every way a blessing also for others. So will the favor of God rest upon us now, his blessing aid our work, and the door of eternal glory be opened to us at last.

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## Outlines

The natural connection of our text with the Pentecost miracle is easily utilized when we describe the first glorious work of the Spirit in the congregation in Jerusalem. This work centers in the means of grace and flows out from this center in a life of Christian love and godliness. So we may divide the substance of the text into two sections: The gracious work of God's Holy Spirit in the first church: how it centered in the Word — how it flowed



out from that center in blessings abundant. — A simple and natural treatment will take up piece by piece of the Holy Spirit's work in Jerusalem: The mother church at Jerusalem a beautiful model for all her daughters: in doctrine and fellowship — in breaking of bread and prayers — in love and goodness. — The whole work of the church depends upon the Holy Spirit: we must use his means — we must submit to his power — we must take his blessings. — How shall we celebrate the birthday of the Christian church? There is only one real way in which we may do it: her Spirit — her faith — her love — her faithfulness must this day be repeated in us all.

### **Praise God for the Holy Spirit and his Blessed Work.**

1. He has built the church.
2. He works in the church through the means of grace.
3. He adds to the means of grace a wealth of other blessings.

### **Our Pentecostal Blessings.**

1. The Holy Spirit is ours.
2. The means of grace are in our church.
3. The evidences of faith and a Christian life are in our midst.

### **Have We the Holy Spirit Today?**

1. Have we the means of grace?
2. Have we the gift of faith?
3. Have we the marks of Christian life?

### **The Pentecostal Church at Jerusalem.**

1. One in the true faith.
2. Clinging to the means of grace.
3. Rich in love.
4. A blessing to all.

# **35. What is at Stake in the Revelation and Doctrine of the Holy Trinity? Trinity Sunday. Acts 2:37-40.**

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. (Acts 2:37-40)

IN THE SIXTH CHAPTER of his great book of prophecies Isaiah describes the vision of God which was granted him: he saw Jehovah sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the heavenly temple. Above it stood the seraphim; each one had six wings — with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory!” And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. It was the Triune God whom the prophet saw, the great God of our salvation.

The great prophet John the Baptist who stands at the head of the New Testament was granted a similar revelation of God. When Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan God the Father spoke from the open heavens: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!” and the Holy Spirit descended from the open heavens upon Jesus and abode upon him. It was again the Triune God, even more fully revealed — one God, yet three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This is his name as Jesus Christ himself declared when his work of redemption was done and he was soon to ascend

to heaven: Go, said he, preach the Gospel, and baptize in the name, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost!

Our text describes how on the basis of all these revelations and at the command of Jesus the great work of bringing the Gospel to all the world was begun at Jerusalem. St. Peter, surrounded by all the apostles, preached to a great multitude at Pentecost; his sermon pricked their hearts and they cried: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" You know the blessed answer they received, one that pointed them to faith, baptism, and salvation, but all three of these bound up with the revelation of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. So the Christian church began with this faith in the Holy Trinity. On that faith she stands today, and will stand to the end of time. And it is for every one of us who stands with her to realize ever anew

### **What is at Stake in the Revelation and Doctrine of the Holy Trinity.**

Three words bring it out: God — Christ — You!

## **I. God**

When St. Peter, and with him all the apostles of Jesus, began here in Jerusalem the great work of building the Christian church, when they preached, baptized, and brought men to believe in the Holy Trinity; when they went on thus, as the entire New Testament shows, till the Lord took them one by one to himself in heaven; when the church thus founded continued in the faith delivered unto her, and with one united voice confessed, and to this day confesses: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ his only Son, and in the holy Ghost" — what is at stake for us all and for the whole world in this faith and confession? It is nothing less than God himself. In this faith and confession we have God, without it we have no God, only idols, phantoms, dreams, devilish delusions concerning God.

It is absolutely true, as the Scriptures declare: "No man hath seen God at any time." And again they say of God, the only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, that he "dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see," except by gracious revelation of God himself. 1 Tim. 6:16. Nor do the

Scriptures leave us in doubt as to the reason why sinful man cannot of himself see God: “For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire” Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29). Since sin has come into the world we are all shut out from God, and to approach him in our sins, if this were possible at all, would be only to be consumed like filthy rags in the fire of his holiness and righteousness.

There is absolutely only one way in which we can know God, draw nigh to him, receive anything from him, and be permitted to have communion with him, and that is for God himself in his infinite love and grace to draw nigh to us, to reveal himself to our hearts and minds, to open the door to us that we may come into his presence. And this is the thing that God has done. For God is love. He did not want to condemn and judge the world when it fell into sin, but he wanted to save it: For this and for this alone he drew the curtain aside; he came to men in a multitude of revelations — Isaiah was permitted to see him in a vision, the Baptist heard and saw the true God revealed, and most wonderful of all — God’s own Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity came into our flesh and dwelt among us, so that St. John could write: “We beheld his glory, the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” St. Peter and all the apostles thus saw the Son of God. Hear their confession: “We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” Through the Son of God they knew the Father, and through the Son they received the Holy Spirit. And in the power of this revelation they brought God, the only true God. and his salvation to the world.

But behold the wickedness and perversion of men — this wonderful, blessed revelation which God made of himself they reject. All the visions which God vouchsafed to his prophets in love for us sinners, all the revelation of the Son of God as our Savior with which God crowned his love, men make bold to deny. A great host of men declare, there is no Son of God — Jesus was only a man like us today. There is no Spirit of God, all that the Holy Scriptures say of him is nothing. And this bold and monstrous denial of God’s revelation of himself is made by those who make it because they claim if God is one God he cannot possibly be three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. They decide what God can and cannot be; they determine what and who God must be. They have not seen him, and yet they say they know. “The Only Begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him,” and this declaration of God’s own Son they declare to be a lie. In place of God’s own revelation they set up their own ideas of God,

and say that this is God, this what they think and say. Some of them try to carry their idea of God into the Bible and try to make it say what they think; others are bolder and set aside what the Bible says of God, and say openly it is not true. The whole Unitarian Church denies the Holy Trinity, and other churches like the Congregationalists and the Campbellites or so-called Christian Church have many Unitarian preachers and members. All who deny that Christ is the Son of God, all who refuse to worship him as God, are of this type. Their false creed and doctrine is summed up in the two points: the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. And that Fatherhood is not the one of which the Bible speaks, when it calls Jesus Christ the Son of the living God, but a fatherhood which consists only of his creatorship — he is father of the beast, and the tree, and the stone as he is father of man — that and no more.

What does it mean to think thus concerning God? It means one thing and one only — the rejection of the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and the substitution in his place of a self-made, self-invented god, which is an idol. God is at stake, and these men, even with the Bible in their hands, have lost God. For an idol is not only a graven image made of wood or stone with human hands; or a mountain or river, fire or the sun in the heavens, which men have worshipped as god. Men's brains can make idols as well as their hands, and the worst idolaters are not the poor, benighted heathen who deserve our pity, but these deniers of the Triune and only true God in Christian lands, who worship, or think they worship, the fetish and freak of their own brains which they call god. Every prayer they make to such a god is idolatrous. "I am the Lord thy God," says the very first commandment, "thou shalt have no other gods before me." And again: "I am the Lord; that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another." And the Son of God declares: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God. and him only shalt thou serve."

Let no man among us deceive himself for one moment. You may hear men say "God," and use the name "Father," and other names such as the secret orders have invented, "the great architect of the universe," and the like. This is not God, not your God, not the God of the Bible. See who they are that reject the Holy Trinity. In their company is the Jew, who today rejects Christ as his nation did in Jerusalem; the Mohammedan, named after his false prophet: the Unitarian, whose very name proclaims his unbelief; and all sorts of other unbelievers, who all reject the Bible God, One in Three,

and Three in One. A mighty gulf separates us from them all. It is wider even than that between heaven and earth — as wide as that between heaven and hell. For there is only one God, he whom Jesus Christ revealed. They who reject this God have no god, except their own idols. And it is Satan's work, who first tried to separate man from God, that all these men are now still without God. Not for one moment can we join in their prayers to their imaginary god. The oaths with which many of them bind themselves, using the name of this dream god of theirs, are so many sins against the true God; not one of them binds because there is nothing behind them but man's own delusion. Away with all these idols and dream gods of Satan. Ours is the true God, the Father who made, us, the Son who redeemed us, the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us.

“Jehovah! Father, Spirit, Son,  
Mysterious Godhead, Three in One!  
Before thy throne we sinners bend:  
Grace, pardon, life, to us extend!”

## II. Christ

In the revelation and doctrine of the Holy Trinity God is at stake — and Christ is at stake.

Why do you suppose God ever revealed himself and this great mystery of his being unto sinful men? Since he is so infinite and great, so incomprehensible to finite minds, so mysterious in his being, why did he tell us that he is one God and yet three persons — a thing no human mind can grasp or fathom? There is a mighty reason for it, and a blessed, glorious reason for us. We can sum it all up in one word — *Christ!* Or in Christ's own words: “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” Not on God's account, but on our account was the Holy Trinity revealed to us: and on our account only because God himself, namely the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, had to do a mighty work to enable us to escape from our sins and attain unto heaven. And this work centers in Christ, God's Son. No man can know it, can get the infinite blessing of it, except through Christ. And so God for our sakes revealed himself as three persons in one infinite being.

You see it all along in the Scriptures, and wherever the way of salvation is preached. Here is St. Peter in our text. What does he tell the anxious sinners before him: “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” He means Jesus Christ whom he has again and again confessed to be the Son of the living God. If he is not God, then it is folly to believe in him, folly to be baptized in his name, folly to think that he can save us. No mere man can bear the sins of the world; no mere man can conquer death, hell, and the devil; no mere man can carry us into heaven. No man can save himself from damnation, to say nothing of saving others, millions of others. God’s eternal Son — he alone can do this. And he could do it only by becoming man for our sakes and atoning for our sin and guilt. This is what Christ, the Son of God, has done. And even so the work was not finished. The third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, had to be sent by Christ to bring each one of us to repentance, to make Christ’s salvation ours personally. Thus and thus alone can sinners be saved. It all centers in Christ, God’s Son, but so that the Father sent the Son to redeem us, and that the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to sanctify us.

It is as clear as day what the denial of the revelation and doctrine of the Holy Trinity involves. Christ is at stake, and the whole work of God’s salvation as it centers in Christ. If God is not three persons as he has revealed himself, then Jesus Christ, whoever and whatever he was and whatever he did, was not and is not God’s only begotten Son, as the ancient Nicene Creed declares, “God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, ...of one Substance with the Father.” If Jesus was not and is not God, then there is no divine Savior for sinners, no eternal salvation for us who believe. Blot out the Holy Trinity and you blot out God’s Son and our salvation. Then the heavens are black, then eternity is nothing but terror. Let them talk wisely, or mock scornfully, there is only one hope for fallen man and that is the blood of God’s own Son shed for our redemption — take that, and nothing is left. Let them go on in their blindness and pride if they will, there is salvation in no other, “for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” And if there is no salvation, then, as Jesus said of Judas, it would have been better if we had never been born.

Let no man among us deceive himself. Christ and our salvation is at stake. Every Christless profession of religion, every denial of his divinity and redemption, every Christless prayer, every Christless code of morals,

every Christless hope of heaven and blessedness to come, consigns us all to hell and damnation. There is no use to soften the words — the plain truth is best. Here is the heart of our faith in the Triune God — his revelation is the revelation of our salvation. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is like the sun in the heavens — all is light. In him heaven is open for us. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has prepared a place for us; he himself will come to receive us, that where he is we may be also. This glorious hope of eternal blessedness is ours through the true God alone, the Triune God, namely through Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

### **III. You!**

In the revelation and doctrine of the Holy Trinity God himself is at stake, Christ and his salvation is at stake, and therefore also — you are at stake.

The revelation and doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not for one moment something for learned men only to dispute about. It is something of supreme and absolutely vital importance for your soul and for mine. If you lose God, you have lost everything: if you lose Christ and his salvation, there is nothing in the whole universe to make good the loss. Thus all that we have said about God and about the Son of God centers at last in you. Your soul is at stake in this revelation of God, whether by accepting this revelation of God your soul shall be saved, or by rejecting it your soul shall be forever lost.

That is why St. Peter in our text pointed all his hearers to God, his promise and redemption in Christ, and the saving gift of the Holy Ghost. The thing at stake was the soul of each one of his hearers, whether it should be brought into union with the true God and thus he saved, or whether the devil should succeed in keeping it from that union and in union with himself, and that soul should thus be lost. And that is why St. Peter wound up all his preaching and admonition to that multitude in the solemn call: “Save yourselves from this untoward generation!” You are at stake whether you shall be saved, or lost.

Would to God we might all realize it fully! When one sees the indifference of men regarding God, how they, are satisfied when anyone says “god” unto them, even when they know he does not mean the Triune God, one is shocked. Do these men know their own souls are at stake? We all know that



counterfeit money is no money: and a counterfeit God is also no God. Only the devil, and men deluded by him, try to pass such a god off upon us. We all know that a rotten plank will not bear our weight in crossing a gulf; when we step upon it, we will fall to our death. A Jesus who is not true God is less even than such a plank; he cannot carry us across the gulf of eternity. Only the devil could offer us a Savior who is no Savior, so that trusting him when our soul steps out into eternity we shall be plunged to eternal perdition. And because the true God is so concerned about you, therefore he revealed himself, sent you his Son and Spirit, that trusting in them you may be safe now and safely reach the heavenly place prepared for you. Can we ever thank him enough?

This day then once more, with the whole Christian church let us confess our most holy faith: I believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost! In this faith let us live and die. Then the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost shall be with us now and evermore; and with the seraphim six-winged about the glorious throne of God we too may sing their mighty song of praise: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory!”

“Father, Son, and Spirit  
Endless One in Three,  
Now, henceforth, forever.  
Glory be to thee.”

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## Outlines

For Trinity Sunday the holy names used by Peter in our text constitute the basis of the sermon. On these names as here used our salvation rests, and this must form the heart of the sermon. We may thus preach on: The glory of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity: Here is the glory of God himself in all its infinite reality — here is the glory of God’s salvation in all its infinite blessedness — here is the glory of your soul and mine in all its heavenly possibilities. The Triune God is our God: Ours through the Father and his promise — ours through the Son and his redemption — ours through the Spirit and his sanctification. — Naumann has this outline: How is the grace

of the Triune God made ours? By repentance — by baptism — by the gift of the Holy Spirit — by the certainty of God’s promise and call. Or, adding another thought to each part: The entrance of this grace is by repentance — the importation of this grace is by baptism — the power of this grace is in the gift of the Spirit — the certainty of this grace is in God’s promise and call. Anacker has the following: The blessed communion with the Triune God, how shall we attain it? 1) Acknowledge in true contrition that we have been disobedient children of our heavenly Father. 2) Grasp in true faith the mercy of God brought to us in his Only Begotten Son. 3) Let the Holy Spirit work this repentance and faith in you daily by his sanctifying power.

## **The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity the Deepest Foundation of Christianity**

1. There is no God except the Triune God.
2. There is no salvation except that of the Triune God.
3. There is no Christian church except that of the Triune God.

## **Our Entire Salvation Rests on the Triune God**

1. On the Father’s promise and call.
2. On the Son’s redemption and remission.
3. On the Spirit’s regeneration and sanctification.

## **Why do I Believe in the Holy Three?**

1. God so revealed himself.
2. My salvation is bound up in this revelation.
3. All adoration of God must rest on this salvation and revelation.

## **The Blessed Mystery of the Holy Trinity**

1. It is clearly revealed. As in our text, so in the whole Bible.
2. This revelation is bound up with our salvation. As in our text, so in everything the Bible says of our salvation.

3. We are constantly depending on this revelation and its blessedness. This dependence in our text, and in all that the Bible says of our relation to God now and hereafter.

# The Trinity Cycle

## 36. The Eternal Issues in Christ's Final Word to the World. The First Sunday After Trinity. John 12:44-50.

Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak. (John 12:44-50)

ON THIS FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY we leave the golden heights of the festival half of the church year where the great deeds of God for our salvation were revealed to us in the birth, the manifestation, the passion, the resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and his mission of the Holy Ghost. In the coming half of the church year we will follow the beautiful river of life as it flows in the Word of God and reveals to us how salvation and life everlasting, with all the heavenly treasures involved, are to be made ours now and forever. All these coming Sundays deal with one great theme — Christ's salvation made yours and mine.

And this very first text in the second half of the church year begins the great work by setting clearly before our souls the eternal issues involved for

us in all that we shall hear. The holy words which you have just heard are from the lips of Jesus and summarize all that he preached to men during the three years of his ministry on earth. His work was done; no more would he speak to the multitudes in the cities, on the hills and mountains of Galilee, or in the great Temple courts in Jerusalem. And now that all is done, this is the sum, these are the mighty issues. They have run through every sermon he spoke, they stood forth in every word he uttered. And it is proper that at the end of his work they should be focused together as we find them here in St. John's holy Gospel. They mark all that we shall be told during the rest of the church year. Let us impress them upon our hearts —

### **The Eternal Issues in Christ's Final Word to the World.**

They are the issues between light and darkness; between faith and unbelief; between life everlasting and judgment eternal. God grant that his grace alone may decide these issues for us!

## **I. Between Light And Darkness**

“I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” That is the eternal issue Christ sets before us, the issue between Light and darkness.

The whole world outside of Christ and apart from him is “darkness.” It is denser and more terrible than any natural darkness in which we have ever seen. For this is the darkness which lies like an impenetrable pall upon the souls of men. It is the dungeon darkness of sin, locking the poor prisoner in. It is the deadly darkness of the grave, holding him like a corpse in an iron vault. It is worse than that, for the prince of darkness, Satan, and the powers of darkness, the spirits of hell rule in it, and their devilish clutches hold the souls that lie bound and fettered beneath their power. Do not think that these are extravagant figures of speech, they are cold, stern realities in the fullest sense of the word.

What is the world without Christ? What is your soul without him? Oh, I know this earthly life is fair enough in many ways. The sun shines in the heavens, the birds sing, the flowers bloom: there is interesting work and pleasant play, there is love and music and fair aspiration. Men are satisfied

with it all and go on day by day asking and seeking nothing more. They see only what is outward to the eye of sense, and that deceives them, because their very souls are blind and dead within them. The realities as they are they do not even know, to say nothing of escaping from them. — But look beyond this life without Christ — tell me what is there? Night, absolute night with eternal terrors. Let no man lie to you by hanging up a painted sun in self-made hopes of his beyond the grave. No colors which he can paint into that; sun with his hand of flesh shed even the faintest glimmer into that void beyond the grave. Why is eternity one black abyss without Christ? — Look into your own soul — without Christ, what is there there? Night, darkness, just as black. For there is sin and unforgiven guilt, cutting off all connection with God and the true light above. Every sin is like another dark dungeon door clanged shut against hope. Let no man lie to you by inventing a forgiveness of his own. What will it help a poor prisoner in some underground vault; if he succeed in getting a match and lights it — it burns for a stride and then the night is blacker than ever. And that perhaps is the reason why most men without Christ do not even think of their souls, and live on as though they had none. — But look again. The soul without Christ is not only in itself dark, blind, and dead to the true life, it is in the power of darkness. For this spiritual darkness of which Christ speaks is filled with devilish forces, the great monsters of the pit. Where do all the crimes come from in the world, all this black mass of vice and shame, and all these deeds that we call lesser sins, but all of which belong to the same class? There any man can see the power of darkness; there are the Satanic forces in hideous openness. But that is all some men can be brought to see, and yet the open works of darkness are by far the least. What of these others — hearts without fear and love of God and Christ, souls centered in self and not in God, fighting God and Christ with their prideful self-made righteousness, striking down the very cross of Christ trampling on his holy blood, and to justify themselves putting forth all kinds of doctrines and teachings — all born of the devil and black as he is himself? Immorality is black enough, but blacker still and more deadly even in their blackness are the wicked, perverted, destructive delusions with which men's souls are bound. — This is the darkness which Christ means when he holds up before us the great issue of Light and darkness.

Against it all he puts himself: "I am come a Light into the world!" And so the issue is joined. Christ is the Light, the only Light there is in the world

for the souls of men. Down into this black world he came from, the very throne and home of eternal light above. Like a mighty sun he burst into our darkness and sheds his radiance abroad. There is God — in Christ we see him, and all his heavenly world of unspeakable blessedness. And there in Christ is the way to God, straight, bright, clear, and wonderful, right up to the throne of light above. There in Christ's cross is the end of our sin and guilt, in his blood and cross the shining, radiant righteousness which God accepts and which, Christ would give to us. And there in Christ is the power of heavenly light to enter men's souls and drive out the power of darkness and the devil that rules them. The dungeon is burst open and the soul released: the grave of the soul rent in two and the light of life enters in — like Christ's own open grave when the shining angels sat within it. And all this heavenly light of Christ, illumining the great eternity beyond and our own souls with radiance and power from on high, is gathered for us as in a sun that never sets, in his Holy Word. Here it shines in these heavenly pages, all of them showing us Christ, Christ, Christ, and eternal salvation for us poor sinners in him. And this Word which he himself made shine through all the land of the Jews when he wrought out our salvation among them, he has ordered to be proclaimed unceasingly to all the world. Wonderful, heavenly, blessed Light! Oh, that all men who sit in darkness and the shadow of death might have their souls filled with it now and evermore!

## **II. Between Faith And Unbelief**

Light and darkness — this is the eternal issue placed before us in Christ's final word to the world. But locked lip in this issue there lies another — the issue of faith and unbelief. "I am come a Light into the world that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness." And again Jesus says: "He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me." On the other, hand he had to add: "If any man hear my words and believe not," and "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words." That is the issue, one right in our own souls, whether faith shall rule there or its opposite unbelief.

Can it be possible that such an issue should ever arise? With an eternity blacker than midnight on the one hand, and on the other an eternity lit up by God and his grace in Jesus Christ to be made ours by God's free gift in

Christ — can it be that a single soul should not at once be drawn from that desperate night to this heavenly light? With the black night of sin, guilt, penalty, and dread on the one hand, and on the other the heavenly light of God's own pardon and grace in his Son and the peace and joy of heaven itself as the result — can it be that a single soul should not at once be won from this accursed night to this blissful light? And yet once more, with the powers of darkness on the one hand, hellish powers to enslave in sin, error, lies, and damnable delusions, and on the other hand the love-light of freedom, a heavenly power to make us love what is godly and good, sweet and heavenly, and not only love it but rise up and do it — can it be that a single soul should not be conquered at once and carried from the power of night to this heavenly power of light? With the issue so clear, and turning on our own souls, must not everything, literally everything throw us into the arms of Christ and the heaven that opens for us there? Yes, a thousand times yes! And yet in the face of it all, men say no. This darkness which hell has brought they prefer to the light which heaven has brought. They hurl aside their own salvation, they will not let go their own damnation.

Why is this issue drawn for us anew today? Because it is so absolutely decisive for everyone of us now and every day.

Every doctrine and word of Christ rings with it. Every critical hour in our own lives, and many that do not seem critical to us, involve this issue, in an endless variety of forms. This is the issue in our own souls which means everything for us. Faith and unbelief — with faith heaven; with unbelief hell. Those are the ultimate issues; faith and unbelief determine them now. — Oh then, all you who believe, let the infinite preciousness of your faith stand out clearly to your souls. You believe — Christ is yours, all his love and all that his love has purchased and won for you. And with Christ the Father is yours, he who sent Christ for you that he might be yours, and all his blessings are yours, for you are his child and heir in Christ. You believe — Christ the Light is yours; in him you know God, salvation, newness of life, comfort, peace, and joy. Not one of these could be yours without Christ, and faith. In Christ his Word is yours, that which the Father gave him to give you, that which shall stand when all the words of men are fallen and forgotten. It is the Word of your salvation and deliverance, every syllabic of it help, light, and hope for you. Who can measure the value of these gifts for your soul? Faith is the hand by which you hold them as your own.



Can it be, then, that you should ever forget your faith and what it holds for you? If your faith should go out — what an unspeakable loss! He who loses faith, like him who spurns faith, loses no less than Christ, God, and his own soul. How is it possible then that you should ever be indifferent about your faith, careless about nourishing and strengthening it by means of Word and Sacrament, hurting it by foolish sins and grasping at tainted worldly gain and pleasure? Will you let the devil hide the issue involved in faith from your eyes? And these doctrines of Christ and his Holy Word, all of them so many fortifications for your faith, why are you so indifferent about them, with not time enough even to make them your own like strong defenses against the devil's delusions? Can it be that you see the issue only in part? And this thing of unbelief — how it fails to shock you when you meet it in men, when you see them acting on it, insulting Christ perhaps to your very face. And worse still, you are not always proof when men expect you to do as they do in their Christless ways of unbelief; you are afraid of them, of losing their goodwill, their help, the money, positions, honors involved. Is the issue clouded to your soul? Remember, then, it always involves your soul. And that is why Christ draws it here so plainly for you once more — light or darkness, faith or unbelief.

### **III. Between Life Everlasting And Judgment Eternal**

And therefore also this final issue — the issue at last of life eternal and judgment to come. "If any man hear my words," says Christ, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day." And over against this judgment Jesus places the same Word held by faith. God commanded him to give it to us, and Jesus says: "I know that his commandment is life everlasting," namely for you and me. That is the final issue: life everlasting — judgment at the last day.

How near are you to this final issue now? How many days have you yet on earth? There are some here who may have only a few months, weeks, or days left. And at best how quickly will our years go if yet they are many! It is absolutely certain for us this last eternal issue — life or judgment. It is

folly supreme to disregard or forget it. If your earthly life is in the balance, will you take time for other things, trivial things, foolish things, and no time for your life? If your money is the issue, will you take time to make it secure, or let the time pass playing with other things, till the loss is upon you? But your soul in all eternity is infinitely above money, or earthly life, or any other earthly thing you can name. Surely, you must see this issue as it is, and secure eternal life and escape eternal judgment.

There is not a shadow of doubt about how the issue will be on the last day. All those who think that they cannot know, who are satisfied thus to go on with a faint sort of hope, who are content, to take their chance with the great crowd of other uncertain and foolish people around them, are merely letting the devil cloud and darken the issue for them. Christ is the Light, he has made it clear and sets it clearly before you today. The Word decides — either with the Word by faith in our hearts, filling us with light and life and leading us to light and life — or with the Word we have rejected and neglected in open or secret unbelief facing us as our judge on that great day. That Word is here before you this day, the Word with Christ and God in it. to be put into your heart by faith and to stay there until Christ and God receive you in heaven. And that Word, as every unbeliever has met it here and locked his heart against it, that Word will face him in that fatal, final hour. Christ's own lips have said it, and all the -devils in hell cannot change it, and all the unbelievers in the world cannot erase it: "He that believeth not shall be damned!" That is the verdict of the Word now, that is its unalterable verdict then. And the unbelieving and godless shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. This is the issue for every soul on earth.

Christ left the Jews when his work was done, but the issues drawn by him and in him remained. They stand unchangeable to this day. Thank God, they are made so clear in his Holy Word. Thank God, that in the very statement of them all that Christ says of himself as the Light, of faith and trust in him, of eternal life sure for those who believe, is a power reaching down out of heaven itself into our poor sinful hearts to cut us loose from darkness, unbelief, and judgment, and thus to give us salvation now and evermore. Bless that heavenly power of grace; let it fill your hearts and hold them firm and true. Then the eternal issues as Christ drew them at last will not have been drawn in vain for you.

# Outlines

The chief features of the text stand out with such prominence that in making an outline the work will consist mainly in arranging these features and grouping them under a proper theme. We have Christ and his Sender — faith and unbelief — light and darkness — salvation and virtual judgment now already — life everlasting and the final judge. Taking these just as they are derived from the text we may use them as the main parts of the sermon, adding them all together in the theme: Christ's own Summary of his Teaching.—We may also lift one of these cardinal features into special prominence, for instance what Christ here says of his Word: The tremendous power of Christ's Word: Its illuminating power — its life-giving power — its judicial power. — The vital importance of faith: Faith accepts the Word — Christ — light — life everlasting. — Or we may center everything on Christ, which would make a very fine sermon at the head of the whole after-Trinity line of Sundays: In the name of Jesus Christ let us enter the Trinity season: In his name — that means with his Word; in his name — that means with faith in his Word; in his name — that means with him and his Word to give us light and life.

## **The Way to Life Everlasting.**

1. Christ. — 2. The Word. — 3. Faith. — 4. Life.

## **The Commandment that is Life Everlasting.**

1. The Word which Jesus brought.
2. The Word which brought Jesus.
3. The Word which brings us to Jesus.

## **Christ's Final Word to the World.**

1. A call to faith and life.
2. A warning against unbelief and judgment.

## **Why is Faith so Essential?**

1. Because it delivers from darkness and judgment.
2. Because it gives us God and life.

## **Have You Heard God's Word from Christ?**

Then one of two things is absolutely certain for you: 1) Either by that Word you have eternal life; 2) Or that Word will be your final judge.

# 37. The Shining Example of the Men of Berea. The Second Sunday After Trinity. Acts 17:10-14.

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. (Acts 17:10-14)

“[Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet] {smallcaps, and a light unto my path,” sang the Psalmist of old.

“To the law and to the testimony,” cried the great prophet Isaiah to his people, “if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them.”

“We have also a more sure Word of prophecy,” adds the holy apostle Peter, “whereunto ye do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”

And on all these Jesus Christ himself sets his seal when he bids us: “Search the Scriptures: for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”

One thing more we need in addition to these testimonies and admonitions from great men of God and from God’s Son himself, namely an example of what their words mean. We have it in our text today —

## **The Shining Example of the Men of Berea.**

### **I. What They Did**

See the example in what they did.

St. Paul came to Berea on one of his great missionary journeys; he had his helper Silas with him, and presently his other helper, Timothy, also came. Berea was a beautiful city of 20,000 people in Macedonia. Most of these people were heathen and worshipped the old idols of Greece and Rome, but some of them were Jews who had the Old Testament revelation of God and came together in their synagogue for worship. St. Paul began with these Jews. He preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them, the Savior to whom the whole Old Testament pointed, in whom all the promises of God for our salvation have been fulfilled. What did these Jewish men of Berea do? Hear the glorious answer we are able to make: They “searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so.” They did exactly what they ought to have done, what St. Paul wanted them to do, and no doubt helped them in doing, what Jesus Christ himself would have bidden them to do — they took the Bible to see what it said in order to believe what there they saw. And here is their shining example for us.

Thank God, the Bible is in men’s hands today! Whoever will can have it in our whole land, and can read and study it as much as he desires. But what do we find in this free land of ours? The most deplorable ignorance of the Bible. And alongside of it the most dangerous misuse of the Bible. Thousands have time and attention for everything else, but none literally none for the eternal Word of God concerning their own soul’s salvation. And other thousands do indeed take the Bible, but they use it as it never was meant to be used, to find support in it for their own preconceived religious follies; not to find Christ in it, Christ alone, and the salvation he has won for us. Here is God’s own Word, the great treasure house of heaven, and here is the key to unlock all its treasures for us. Some do not even go near; and others fail to use the key and do not really enter where the treasures lie. O the sadness of this lack of use, and of this misuse of the Holy Scriptures!

Look at these Bereans. They had *only* the Old Testament, while we have both the Old and the New. When St. Paul came among them preaching Christ’s salvation, they did not argue with him and set their own opinions against what he said; they started to search the Bible to see what God said, and to build their whole faith and trust on that alone. Whatever opinions they may have had before, they put away completely in order to learn and rely on what God said, and on that alone. And when St. Paul preached Christ to them, Christ the Son and Savior of God, they made these things

the key of their search in the Scriptures. And at once their search was rewarded. One golden promise of God after another shone out before their eyes. They found Christ indeed, and they were overwhelmed with happiness and joy. Oh for a repetition of their search among men today! Oh for a finding like theirs, a finding of Christ unto faith and joy!

It is so easy to repeat the experience of the Bereans today, easier than ever since the New Testament has been added to the Old. A little knowledge is enough to find the very words of Christ himself and take them into your heart: to discover all that Christ did for us, all that he would do now, and to fill our hearts with that. Why not take this Word, then, as the Bereans did? Why not put away all our own blind and foolish thoughts, and let Christ come to us as he really is, and God come to us and give us what he has for us in Christ? If you have thought wrong on any of these things, do you want to keep on in that wrong way? Do you want to be like a man who has taken the wrong road, and when one comes to set him right refuses to listen, and goes on farther and farther on the wrong track until it is too late? Or do you want to base your soul's faith and hope of salvation in eternity upon what some man says to you? What if he does mean well enough by you? It would be bad enough if you had no one else to guide and help you. But here is God himself, God's own Son, your divine Helper, God's own Spirit of truth and light, and these come to you personally here in their Word, to tell you all that you need to know, yea must know to be safe now and in all eternity. Away with every objection and plea! Do as the Bereans did — search the Scriptures daily, find Christ for yourselves, and all the treasures of salvation for your souls. This is what the Bereans did.

## **II. How They Did It**

And not only this. They are a shining example to us in how they did it.

They went to the Bible with absolute sincerity. One thing and only one thing they wanted to know: “whether those things were so.” What God said, that and that alone they wanted to find. — This honesty of purpose and sincerity of heart is what we must have when we search the Bible. God himself and God's Bible must give it to us and increase it constantly. Away with every other purpose. Let this control you alone. What does God say? In that is your salvation, and in that alone. And be assured that God always rewards

such sincerity. “Seek and ye shall find!” is the promise that holds here too. “He is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.” Prov. 2:7.

The Bereans went to the Bible to accept what the Bible said. This is the test of sincerity. Many people see what God says — it is so plain. But for some reason or other they do not like it. Some things sound impossible to them; other things seem unprogressive and not up-to-date; still other things go against men’s natural inclinations and desires. They must lay aside their own opinions and conclusions on these things. They hate to do so, and secretly resolve not to do so. And so they set aside certain things in God’s Word, and other things they change by their way of interpreting them. They are like a man who has the bright light of day to walk by, walk safely by and without stumbling. But he is afraid he might actually walk thus, and so he blinds his own eyes, at least damages them so that he cannot see as he should. There is only one way to read the Holy Scriptures aright, with the full determination and purpose to accept for our own souls what the Scriptures say. To read them, otherwise is to read our own condemnation there, if our thoughts are at variance with what the Scriptures say, so much the worse for us. If our desires run in the opposite direction, the sooner those desires are crushed and the new desires that come from Christ are planted in their stead, the better for us. Take what God says and gives in his Word, it is life eternal in every part.

The Bereans went to the Bible in order to believe the Bible. That much they had learned in their Jewish church, and now when St. Paul came to them with the message of Jesus Christ, the one thing impressed upon them was the necessity of faith — complete trust and confidence in God and his saving grace in Christ. How could they get this? Never by any effort of their own. But the Bible is full of the very grace and power of God which works this faith in us. It is like light that shines and drives out darkness; it is like a flame that leaps up and touches us and starts the fire in us; it is like the voice of Jesus calling Lazarus out of his tomb alive from the dead. The Spirit of God is in his Word, and when you read the Bible, read it so that this Spirit may come in living contact with your spirit. This Word is more than an earthly Word, though written in earthly words so that you may be able to receive it. Too many of us degrade the Word of God. They do it who think slightingly of it, and they do it who take it only into their minds and not into their hearts. When this Word grips your soul, do not draw away. When you feel the power in it, let that power hold and bless you. That is



how to read the Bible and how to hear the true preaching of it. So faith is wrought by this living Word, and when wrought made stronger and more perfect by deeper reading. You are next to God himself and all his heavenly grace in this Word of his, and when you realize that, as the men of Berea did, you will read the Bible as they did, of whom we are told: “many of them believed.” Not all, alas, for some closed their hearts in Jewish pride and folly, as many do today.

And the Bereans searched the Scriptures in order to obey what God said to them there. And they did obey. They had been Jews who hitherto had despised all Gentiles. But what do we hear now? Many of the Greek women came to believe in Jesus also, and of the men not a few. And these former Jews, now become believers in Christ Jesus, joined with these Gentiles, now also become believers, just as God’s Word directed that they should. How shall we read our Bibles? With the same spirit of willing obedience. Not to evade, set aside, explain away, but to bow completely to God in everything. Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and do it! But woe to those who hear God’s voice, and will not heed it! Obedience to God’s Word is life, peace of conscience, and blessed reward of grace.

### **III. What They Gained By Doing It**

We need the shining example of the men of Berea in what they did, in how they did it, and then also in what they gained by doing it.

This especially we need for our encouragement. Does it pay to read and follow the Bible? Look at Berea. Here were a lot of Jews and a town full of heathen people. When St. Paul was through with his work, what do we see? All those who had read and followed the Scriptures a congregation of God’s people — true children of God with faith and joy in their hearts. What a reward for searching the Scriptures aright! — There came other Jews from Thessalonica, who had done the opposite, refused to read and obey the Word. They came to Berea to oppose St. Paul and stop his work of preaching Christ. To which of these two classes would you rather belong — to the devout Bible readers, the Berean Christians, or to these hateful unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica? But suppose these latter had remained quietly in Thessalonica, then what is your choice? Would you rather be a happy child of God as the Bereans, or without faith, without the obedience that God

wants, as those Thessalonian Jews? There is only one answer. Faith in Christ Jesus, pardon in his blood, peace and joy in his forgiveness, faithfulness to him and the hope he gives us of heaven — these are such a tremendous reward that nothing can possibly come into comparison with them. And this reward we want to gain as the Bereans did.

But are there not losses, when one loyally follows God's Word? Here was St. Paul — he had to flee from Berea, and how often he was persecuted and even severely hurt. Here are the Berean Christians — they had the hatred of all those who remained Jews, and some of these were very fanatical. Yes, there are losses when you make God's Word your only guide. Though when a man loses his sin, his meanness, his former evil and dangerous companions, can you count that a loss? If I lose a disease, I certainly gain health; if I lose danger, I surely gain safety. Would that all men might suffer losses like this that are nothing but gains. — But Stephen lost his life in martyrdom for Christ; you know the story of St. Paul's persecutions, and they too ended with a martyr's death. And others were despoiled of their goods, driven from their homes, and in varying degrees suffered losses for faithfully adhering to the Word. To be sure, these are losses, some of them painful and terrible enough. But those who suffered them were the last to call them losses and lament over them. "We glory in tribulation," writes St. Paul. After being imprisoned St. Peter and St. John rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name's sake." Losses indeed, and yet as such for Christ and his Word's sake nothing but gain.

To suffer any loss for faithfulness to God's Word is a true mark of such faithfulness. Do you want such a mark upon you, or do you want to be without it? Losses — why the children of this world also suffer losses. God punishes them — do you want losses of that kind? There is hatred, malice, fighting, snarling, and viciousness of all kinds among the children of this world. You know how they often knife each other? Do you want such losses? It is not a question of escaping losses altogether — that cannot be done in this world of sin. It is a question of what kind of losses you are to bear: either such as mark you a child of God, a lover and servant of his blessed Word — or such as mark you a child of the world, far from God, disobedient to his Word. God grant that you may ever suffer the former losses only, no matter what they may be, and never, never the latter. Happy the man on whom God lays a burden for the sake of his Word and name — that is glory, honor, blessing indeed., But cursed the man on whom the devil

lays burdens; these are all the forerunners of the eternal loss that awaits those who do not escape from the devil unto God through Christ. Yes, the Bereans lost some things, but their gain for this life and for the life to come was unspeakably great. God help us to follow their shining example!

It is bright and shining indeed, in what they did, in how they did it, and in what they gained by doing it. Shall we follow them? Let your whole life from this day forth be the answer.

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## Outlines

The text is brief and simple, its main features prominent at first glance: the nobleness of the Bereans in faithfully searching the Scriptures. Two ways of treating the text are readily noted, one which keeps close to the story, as Luke records it and makes the application direct, another which takes the general thought of the text (the right use of the Holy Scriptures) and develops that in line with the trend of the text. Both are good and when well done effective. A sample of the former kind of treatment would be the following: The nobleness of the Bereans is what we need today: their searching the Scriptures — their readiness of mind — their whole-hearted faith — their unshaken loyalty. — For the other way of using the text the following may serve: Personal experience with the Bible: Do you go to the Bible? — Do you rely on the Bible? — Do you abide by the Bible? — Or we may take the thought of certainty from the text: The joyful certainty of a true Christian: It rests wholly on the Word of God — It consists of real faith in the Word of God — It is intensified and strengthened by constantly going to the Word of God. — Use the Bible aright! Search it — with readiness of mind; believe it — with an honest heart; cling to it — against all opposition.

### **The Bereans and the Scriptures.**

1. What they thought of the Scriptures.
2. What they did with the Scriptures.
3. What they gained from the Scriptures.

## **Search the Scriptures as the Bereans Did!**

1. Know what they say!
2. Believe what they say!
3. Adhere to what they say!

## **Learn in Berea what the Bible is for!**

1. To preach. — 2. To believe. — 3. To apply. 4. To spread.

## **Go to the Bible as the Bereans Did!**

1. To get what you need.
2. To test what you have gotten.
3. To spread what you have tested.

## 38. The Story of the Two Prisoners in Caesarea. The Third Sunday After Trinity. Acts 24:24-27.

And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound. (Acts 24:24-27)

WHEN WE READ this story of Felix and St. Paul we are liable to do it only in the ordinary way. Then we see only one prisoner in this narrative of St. Luke, namely the apostle Paul. He was blamed for a wrong he had never committed, and his own wicked Jewish countrymen tried to kill him in the very courts of the Temple at Jerusalem. Then the great Roman authority stepped in and took St. Paul in charge. He was brought to Caesarea as a prisoner of the Roman governor who wanted to determine whether he was guilty of any crime. No evidence could be brought against the apostle, but instead of setting St. Paul at liberty as the Roman law required the governor kept him confined in order to secure a bribe from the apostle for his release. So St. Paul was indeed a prisoner, a real prisoner, behind barred doors and a heavy guard of police.

And this is the only prisoner we usually see. For the other man in this biblical account, Felix, the governor, surely does not appear as a prisoner. He was at the head of the government in Judea, appointed to this powerful position by the Roman emperor himself. He had a great military force at his command; he lived in a grand palace in Caesarea and many humble servants came and went at his command. Everybody treated him with deference and honor, for he held the welfare of this whole section of country in

his hands. Mighty, honored, free — he does not in the least look as if he could be put into the prisoner class together with St. Paul.

And yet Felix was even more a prisoner than the holy apostle. The chains he wore were invisible, but only the stronger for that very reason. Felix was one of the thousands of prisoners in the terrible and deadly bondage of sin. Secret and open shameful sins lay like galling fetters upon his soul. Only a slight acquaintance with the man will show how true this is. He was a heathen who knew nothing but idols. He had lived in all kinds of sins and never even cared. He had abused his position as governor by wicked deeds of injustice, even as he was now treating St. Paul unjustly, trying to get him to offer a bribe for his release. The woman whom at this time he called his wife he had seduced from her lawful husband, so that he lived shamefully in open adultery. Beyond question Felix was a wretched prisoner.

Now the remarkable thing in this case is that these two prisoners were so thrown together by the hand of God that each could have released the other, and this is what makes their story of such vital interest to us all. Let us read it in this light —

### **The Story of the Two Prisoners in Caesarea.**

We will find that their story is intertwined, and that we must take up first the one who wanted to set the other free, and then the one who refused to set the other free.

## **I. The One Who Wanted To Set The Other Free**

St. Paul wanted to set Felix free from his spiritual bondage.

When Felix found that St. Paul was a follower of Jesus Christ, of whom he had 'heard a great deal in this Jewish country, he took a notion to have St. Paul tell him fully concerning the faith in Christ, and this the more since the woman with whom he lived was a Jewess and also interested in Christ, whom so many of her people called the Messiah. So Felix ordered St. Paul to appear before him and tell him about this faith in Jesus Christ.

It was a golden opportunity for the apostle. For this very purpose he had been sent to preach Christ and his salvation. For Christ is the great liberator and emancipator of souls — souls just like those of Felix and his sinful wife. He himself had proclaimed that God sent him into the world “to preach the Gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty them that are bruised.” Luke 4:18. To effect this liberation Jesus had died on the cross, by his own blood and death purchasing for all the slaves of sin redemption, pardon, and release. And St. Paul was one of Christ’s chosen servants to bring this deliverance to as many poor fettered sinners as possible. It was Christ’s own providence that St. Paul received this opportunity to carry Christ’s great salvation to the Roman governor himself. He rejoiced at the call that came to him to preach faith in Christ also to this man. St. Paul was a prisoner indeed, unjustly held by Felix, but never for a moment did this affect him. His one overpowering desire was to set Felix free, Felix outwardly free enough indeed, but held by the cruel bonds of sin, in a bondage a thousand times worse than that of St. Paul.

And so the day came when St. Paul was ushered into the presence of Felix, the governor, and of his wife Drusilla. There they were, the one prisoner before the other, the prisoner of Christ before the prisoner of sin, and this one prisoner burning with eagerness by the grace of Jesus Christ to set the other prisoner free.

There was only one way in which this could be done. If Christ himself had stood before Felix he would have had to use this one way alone. St. Paul showed Christ to Felix, him who was delivered for our offenses and raised for our justification; he showed him the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s own Son, which cleanses us from all sin and sets us free now and forever. He opened wide the door of heavenly liberty for this prisoner of sin Felix, that he might see the blessed liberty now open to him. And then with hands of love he touched the hidden chains of sin which held Felix bound. He spoke of righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come. Here were the awful chains. God demands that we do right — and Felix had done wrong in thousands of instances, and, sometimes fearfully, openly wrong when he abused his power as governor. God demands temperance or self-control. And Felix had followed his base passions in thousands of instances, and was even then living in open adultery. And to show that God is in deadly earnest in his demands St. Paul pointed to the great judgment to

come, when God will bring every man, even the highest and mightiest of earth, to a final account. This was the bondage in which Felix lay, and St. Paul showed -him that faith in Christ was nothing less than eternal deliverance from this bondage. All the sins of Felix were expiated by the blood of Christ, not one of them would stand against Felix in the judgment to come if he would humbly fall at the feet of Christ and accept his pardon and release. Thus did St. Paul, the prisoner of Christ, try to free Felix the prisoner of sin.

As you hear the story once more, mark well what it means for every one of us today. Once St. Paul himself lay in this bondage in which he now found Felix, and Christ had set him free. No sin is so great but what Christ has atoned for it. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Is. 2:18. But in this deliverance of Christ we dare not hide any sin or hold it back from the touch of Christ's pardon and deliverance. Felix must bring his unrighteousness and his unchastity and vileness to Christ, and not cover it up, if it is all to be cleansed away. St. Paul was a true preacher of Christ — he offered no sham freedom in Christ to Felix. Woe to the preachers who are afraid to touch the real sins of their hearers, and yet talk of Christ to them. St. Paul did not cringe before Felix because he was wholly in the governor's power. He never thought of himself, but like every true physician, of his poor patient, and of that patient's real hurt, and the one great remedy that would heal him. That is the point for us. Do not ask or expect that some one sin or other in which you lie shall be treated as an exception. You may be rich and great like Felix, but sin is sin in you as in the most wretched beggar and outcast. And any sin that you withhold, or want the preacher of Christ to say nothing about, is only an unloosed bond or chain, which if it remains so, will surely drag you down to the eternal prison house of the devil. Away with this secret love of some sin or sinful connection! Even if of a hundred chains that hold me ninety-nine should be sundered, I am not free until the last is cut also. But with the chains of sin none are gone if all are not gone. You cannot pick or choose, and no preacher can do it for you. If he tries it, he only adds guilt and bondage to his own soul. And do you lead no preacher into temptation in this respect; it would be as dangerous and deadly for him as it would be for you. Say it and pray it with all sincerity:



“Secure I hide in thy cleft side  
My failures every one!”

Felix listened to St. Paul. He had never heard anything like it before. He had not dreamed that “the faith in Christ” was such a personal thing. He had not thought that it would reach so deeply into a man’s soul. He felt the power of Jesus Christ in every word that St. Paul said. He saw the open door of liberty from sin in Christ Jesus. And he saw the chains now that held him a prisoner where this other man, this apostle and preacher before, him, was free. The great hour of grace had come for him when St. Paul laid his hand upon the bonds of Felix to free him, when Felix began to see his sins great and terrible in the sight of God and his judgment to come, when his conscience, dead and asleep so long, began to smite him, when he was inwardly shaken and frightened — he did what so many a prisoner of sin has done, he thrust the liberating hand of Christ’s servant away. Felix interrupted St. Paul and said: “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.” This was the fatal turning point. Instead of crying like other sinners when their conscience is stirred: “What shall I do to be saved?” he put the preacher of Christ and deliverance in Christ off. Because contrition and sorrow are painful, he thrust the Word of Christ away. Because the wound and disease was deep and caused pain when the physician touched it to heal it truly, he drew it hastily away. He kept the wound, deceiving himself. So St. Paul was dismissed. He had done his noble work, and done it well — Christ commended him. It was not his fault that this prisoner of sin remained in his bonds. It was the guilt of Felix alone.

Note well what the story contains for us. The pardon and liberty of Christ Jesus is given us only through contrition and faith; and contrition, true sorrow of the heart for sin is the first real step toward saving faith. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” Ps. 51:17. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” Prov. 28:13. Remember the publican’s cry: “God be merciful to me a sinner!” Say it and pray it, then, with your whole heart:

“A broken heart, my God and King!  
Is all the sacrifice I bring:  
The God of grace will ne’er despise  
A broken heart for sacrifice.”

Let the folly of Felix warn you. When his own conscience smote him he hushed it. Some indeed get angry at Christ’s servants as if these by stirring up their consciences did wrong. It is only another excuse which the devil offers them to keep them bound in their sins. But others say with Felix: Not now, not now — wait — later! That too is a deception. There is never a better time than now. Christ and his grace are no lackeys to come when you think you are ready. And all they who will not repent when Christ calls find that the “convenient season” which they dream will come later, does not arrive until it is too late. When the judgment comes at last, when the devil pulls the chain to take his captive to the last prison, then it would be mighty convenient indeed to have Christ cut the chain, but then contrition and repentance can not be wrought. “Too late” is the last chapter in the story of many a captive of sin. “Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” Heb. 3:7 and 15.

Felix, the prisoner, was not released, though St. Paul, the prisoner, did all in his power to release him.

## **II. The One Who Refused To Set The Other Free**

Our story of the two prisoners in Caesarea has another chapter. And now the roles of the prisoners are reversed: Felix refused to set St. Paul free.

This chapter too is highly significant. Not indeed so much on St. Paul’s account. He was innocent of any crime, and Felix did him a miserable and shameful wrong in holding him a prisoner. It is for us to note how St. Paul bore this wrong with Christ’s help, without the least resentment and in Christian patience. It was part of the cross Christ laid upon him. He took his long imprisonment as a dispensation from God. His will is best for us, even when we cannot see it. Let us learn this patience of St. Paul, the prisoner, and forgive in Christ’s name all those who do us wrong.

A different significance attaches to the action of Felix in holding St. Paul in prison, when he knew that every requirement of the Roman law, of which he was the custodian, demanded this innocent prisoner's release. The conscience of Felix had thrown off completely the hand which stirred it for a moment. It was a conscience more seared and dead than ever. This new flagrant act of injustice on the part of Felix was his real and final answer to the love of Christ and St. Paul which had tried to set him free from his soul bondage. The man who would have liberated him Felix would not liberate. And this base act of his he aggravated by his money lust. He had heard St. Paul speak of bringing alms to his destitute fellow Christians in Judea from the churches in more favored lands. The hands of Felix itched for some of this money. He knew besides how dearly all the followers of Christ loved St. Paul; that love Felix tried to turn into money for himself. He insulted the high character of St. Paul by offering to release him from prison for a bribe. And when St. Paul declined to stain his soul by consenting to any such unrighteousness Felix left him suffering in prison, left him even when Felix was recalled from his office as governor, again for a base motive, namely to placate the Jews whom he had grievously outraged. Once the conscience of Felix had trembled — now it trembled no more. Satan had fastened the old chains upon him more securely than ever. Declining to repent when Christ was brought to him he was hardened in sin and went on to his doom. This is what his refusing to release St. Paul means in regard to Felix himself. He hurt St. Paul in a way, he hurt himself a thousand times more.

And thus the warning of the example of this man is deepened for us. He kept all his old sins and guilt, and he added new. And adding them as he did, after facing Christ and hearing God's Word on righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come, his condemnation now was the greater. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked." Mighty are the wonders of grace, but stern and terrible are the wonders of justice. Sinners like Felix and Drusilla have eternal salvation brought unto them — so great is Christ's love and redemption. But when sinners scorn this grace they only help to rivet the chains more securely, they only add to the certainty of their doom. — Even the memory of his one time trembling seems to have vanished from Felix's mind. Boldly, brazenly this man lets his wickedness show forth even to St. Paul. A peculiar devilish power seems to come over men when they have been touched by Christ and yet harden themselves against him.

They seem to want us to think they have never been so touched. Lying to themselves they want to lie also to us. What a warning when Christ bids us to repent! For this his Holy Word has set such examples before us. It is not only a question of liberty or bondage, the one or the other, but a question which starts with these two — either liberty, and this in ever growing measure, with ever growing joy, like the dawn growing to the perfect day; or bondage, and this getting worse and worse, until the devil's victim is ready for his final plunge.

The earthly end of Felix is hidden from our knowledge. You know the story of St. Paul. Vindicated and released by the great emperor himself to whom he appealed his case, St. Paul went on in his mission of bringing Christ's deliverance to the prisoners of sin. God, who bade St. Paul wait in patience as a prisoner, opened the door to him for further glorious work, until the hour came for his martyr death. Then he entered into the eternal liberty which Christ has prepared for all who yield their hearts to him.

Today in this story of the two prisoners in Caesarea Christ comes to us all. Pardon and salvation are in his hands. O let us fall at his feet in humble contrition! Cleanse us, O Lord, from all our guilt! Not one 'hour let us put him off, not one sin let us hold fast. The more our own conscience condemns us, the more let us fly to him alone. For in Jesus Christ alone your conscience and mine find rest. He sets us free, and to be thus freed is liberty indeed.

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## Outlines

The essential points in the text are two, what Luke reports concerning Paul's address, and what concerning Felix's reply. Both points center on contrition, at which Paul aimed, and to which Felix refused to be brought. We may accordingly preach on: Felix, and the necessity of true sorrow for sin: Only by such sorrow could Felix be turned from his sin — Only by such sorrow could Felix be brought to salvation. — A favorite point in the text is the word of Felix on the convenient season. The man who waits for a convenient season: He may recognize indeed the vanity of the world, but is still held by the lust of the world — He may be conscious indeed of the shame and bondage of sin, but is not ready to let loose from the attractions

of sin — He may feel indeed some of the power of the Word, but refuses to let this power become effective in his soul. — Paul and Felix: the judicial power of the Word. 1) Paul stands before Felix: as the inferior before his superior; as the prisoner before the free man; as the accused before his judge. Nevertheless, all is reversed by the power of the divine Word, of which the apostle is a minister. 2) It is now Felix who stands before Paul: as one accused by God's Word and his own conscience before an incorruptible judge; as one bound by the cords of unrighteousness and the lust of the flesh, before the Lord's freeman; as the inferior, alarmed, and irresolute, before the mighty hero of God, who, even in bonds, says, both in word and in deed: "I can do all things in Christ which strengthened! me." Ph. 4:13. (Lechler and Chas. Gerok.)

### **Felix, One of Many Thousands.**

1. Who like to hear the Gospel for a change;
2. But when they feel its power in conscience,
3. They refuse to submit to its rebuke,
4. And thus fail of salvation.

— CASPARI.

### **Felix, and his Attitude toward the Gospel.**

His attitude

1. At first quite tolerant — since it seems to do no harm.
2. Even attentive — since it seems to offer some interest.
3. Then averse — since it actually strikes his conscience.
4. Finally antagonistic — since it contradicts his shameful purpose.

— After Heydrenreich.

### **"When I have a Convenient Season."**

1. An evasion. Which means
2. A refusal. Which means

3. Complete opposition. And what this means need not be said.

**“Go thy Way for this Time!”**

1.. Cowardly. — 2. Untrue. — 3. Dangerous.

# **39. Your Case and My Case in the Court of Heaven. The Fourth Sunday After Trinity. Acts 13:38-43.**

Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. (Acts 13:38-43)

CHRIST OUR SAVIOR AND ALL HIS APOSTLES preached justification by faith, even as did the prophets of the Old Testament. Justification is the central doctrine of all the Scriptures, the heart and soul of the entire Christian religion. All believers are justified, all the saints in heaven now have been made what they are by justification, and at the last day the righteous at Christ's right hand will be there because they have continued in justification to the end.

No man is ever saved except he be justified by God. It is vital, then, for every one of us to know as much as possible about God's great act of justification, and equally vital for us to have the glorious certainty from God's own Word that we too are justified by him. This knowledge and this certainty is offered us today. Hear God's own messenger speaking in our text: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man," namely Jesus Christ, "is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not

be justified by the Law of Moses.” Here is the whole blessed doctrine summed up in a few words.

It centers in the divine act which the Bible terms *justification*. The full meaning of this word we must grasp and hold. It is the treasure chest in which our salvation lies. The term is a legal word. It speaks of God as a great Judge before whose judgment bar we must all appear, in fact, we stand before it at this very moment. Justification is the climax of a trial before this heavenly Judge. It is your trial that is meant, and mine. Let us follow God’s Word and hear what it says about

## **Your Case and My Case in the Court of Heaven.**

### **I. Our Sins**

The first essential thing to note in our trial in the court of heaven is our sins, for St. Paul declares that through Christ is preached unto us the forgiveness of sins. That is how we come for trial at God’s judgment bar — because you and I are sinners. If we had no sins there would be no trial at all for us. We would be God’s children and heirs with full and free admission to heaven at any time. But now we are sinners, and heaven’s door will not open to let us into its glory and joy. We are met by this great and mighty Judge, whose eyes are like flames of fire, who searches the heart and reins, and before whose vision nothing can possibly hide.

One of the most terrible mistakes which men make in regard to this Judge and their trial in his court is that they think they can hide or deny their sins before him. Nothing more hopeless or desperate has ever been tried. He knows all our sins better than we do ourselves. In fact, not one of them can ever escape him. The whole black and terrible record lies open before him this moment — every thought, word, and deed by which we have transgressed his holy commandments. Men may deny and cover up their sins here, and may in a fashion succeed; they will not succeed for one instant in the great court of Almighty God.

Another deadly mistake men make is that they persuade themselves, the great Judge in the heavenly court will close an eye and let their sins pass. They have heard something of his goodness and love, but instead of finding out just what that love of his does, they drag it down to their own base



level, and make this, great, divine Judge an unjust Judge, who will let sin pass as if it were no sin, and a lying Judge, who when the Law condemns will set the Law aside and contradict his own Word spoken in that Law. Here is a mistake you and I must not make, now or ever. The incorruptible Judge of heaven and earth will surely condemn every man forthwith who counts on his being unjust and false to his own Law.

There is absolutely nothing left for your case and mine as we step into the court of heaven but to see all our sins there, and all of them exposed completely to view, with all their damnable guilt and wickedness. And there before that court we will see thousands of our sins which we have forgotten, some of which we never even noticed when we did them. They are all there. And when the great Judge calls your name and mine there is no escape. We can only plead guilty, absolutely and completely guilty. If we try to refuse, this plea of guilty will be forced from us; no man who ever lived has found a way to evade it, and none ever will.

And here is the first thing to know about your case and mine in the court of heaven — all our sins are there before God. And in this trial our case is desperate when we look at our sins. It is absolutely desperate, for there is nothing that we can interpose to withdraw even one sin from the eyes of this Judge. Let that settle itself once for all in your minds. If it does not, you will be lost, forever lost, in this trial. You and I are guilty, guilty a thousand-fold, and we cannot deny or evade that guilt.

## **II. Our Good Works**

But our text draws attention to something else in your case and mine as it lies before this heavenly court. We must take note of what are called our good works. St. Paul refers to them here in our text when he speaks of the things from which the Law cannot justify us. He does that because so many people, beginning with the Jews of old, bank on their good works for their trial before God. They imagine that by their doing certain things which the Law of God names they will be able to stand in God's court and escape the sentence of condemnation.

Some are very earnest in trying to live up to the Law of God for this very reason. Many of the Jews were of this kind. They fasted and prayed and observed their legal regulations with painful care. They would not think of do-

ing the least labor on the Sabbath, or of withholding the tithes or tenth part from God of even the herbs they raised in their gardens. And all this they did so scrupulously because they thought they could thereby stand in God's court. There are people like that today. They fast and pray and run to mass for the same reason. Their one effort is, to pile up good works to bring forth before the great Judge above. "Holiness, holiness" is the cry of others, and some of them feel sure that they are totally sanctified and sin no more. And on that they count for their trial before God.

To be sure, others are not so zealous. They think a few good works will suffice. So they are satisfied with a fair measure of morality, a few moral rules of brotherly love, as in the secret orders, or the virtues of honesty, kindness, and helpfulness in ordinary life. Some add church attendance, church contributions, and the like. In a way they seek to measure up to the Law of God, and imagine that God will let them pass for that.

Here is a sad and wretched mistake against which we cannot be warned too earnestly. For let it be said at once — your case and mine is utterly lost in God's court if we intend to rest it on our good works. The great Judge has told us in advance that all our righteousnesses are nothing but filthy rags. Before these men who rely on their good works ever did a single one of them they sinned; in fact, every one of us is like King David in this respect, conceived and born in sin. And not one good work which you can do will wipe out one sin that you have done. Here is St. Paul in our text who solemnly assures us that the Law will never justify us before God. Sinful men have never succeeded in living up to it in any but a mere outward way, and mere outward obedience is an abomination to God, even men despise it when they see through it. In fact, God's own children, men like St. Paul and St. John, tell us that by the way of the Law and good works no flesh shall be saved, and they have learned to count all such righteousness as dung when it comes to God's court.

And this is the second thing you and I must know most thoroughly as regards our case in heaven. Whatever we may have or think we have of good works before God our case is hopeless when we count on our good works. Not one of them will stand God's examination; they are all full of flaws and faults, secret if not open. They are all nullified by our sins, not one of which our own good works can cover. In God's great court, though we could bring in wagon-loads of wonderful deeds of charity, churchliness, even sacrifice

and suffering, all would be cast aside — and there we would stand helpless and lost before the great Judge.

### **III. Our Hope and Help**

In that great court it is folly to deny our sins, and equal folly to trust in our good works. Our deliverance lies in a totally different direction. As far as anything in us is concerned we are lost before the trial ever begins. Our help must come from outside of us, from above, from God himself. And thank God this help is at hand. Our text points us to it, and does it twice over because it is so vital. “Through, this man,” says St. Paul, we have forgiveness of sins; “by him” we are justified. He is speaking of our Savior Jesus Christ. Our hope and help before the eternal Judge lies in him alone.

What does the apostle mean? We may well ask, for your case and mine in God’s heavenly court is lost without Christ, but it is completely changed when we bring in Christ. God knew our case, desperate because of our sins, hopeless with our worthless good works. So he himself sent his own Son to make good our omissions by his own holy and perfect life, and to make good our guilt by his own suffering and death. God made him the propitiation and sacrifice for our sins; he laid on him the iniquity of us all. He made him and his blood our ransom; he made him our great Substitute, our Redeemer, our Mediator, our Savior. And this God did because your case and mine had to come up in his heavenly court. If we appeared there alone, there would be no help for us, absolutely none. God cannot deny his own righteousness and justice. Men may count it cheap and make him out to be like themselves — it is only one more of their fearful sins. But God is God, holy, righteous, and absolutely true.

But this is his love, his love as it really is, that he made a way of escape for us in his own Son Jesus Christ. That Son’s righteousness is perfect, able to outbalance and cancel all our sin. God made him to be our Advocate in heaven, to enter his court at our side, to take our case into his hands, so that instead of God dealing with us sinners alone and with our sins and sinful good works alone, he might deal with us through his Son, and his Son’s perfect righteousness and all-sufficient atonement. Thus and thus alone can our case be changed in God’s court, completely changed and utterly reversed from what it would otherwise be. This is the infinite grace of our heavenly

Judge. He is just and gracious at the same time. His grace upholds his eternal justice, and his eternal justice uses and maintains itself by his grace.

And this is the supreme thing for us to hold fast as we go to trial with our cases in the court of heaven. Never, never for one moment dare we go alone — then all is lost. Christ must go with us, then, and then indeed, our case is changed.

## IV. How To Take Christ Along

But how shall we take Christ along? This too is told us in our text, and, in fact, all through the Scriptures, for it is another of the all-important things we must know in regard to our case in the court of heaven. St. Paul clearly states how we are to take Christ with us for our trial: “By him all that believe are justified.” And St. Luke tells us how earnestly he warned his hearers against unbelief. The whole Bible corroborates it: we are justified by faith alone at the judgment bar of God. He that believeth shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned.

And “believe” means that we must put our trust and confidence upon Christ and all that he has done for us, and in the judgment of God hold up to God nothing but Christ and his redemption to make him acquit us. That seems very little in one way, and it is; but in another way it is exceedingly much. Take Christ, his blood and cross; grasp him with your heart. You need not labor and strive and agonize to prepare something yourself to cover your sins and make them good before the great Judge above — only to find in the end that all your efforts are in vain. Christ has done all to change your case completely. His blood, writes St. John, cleanseth us from all sin. Embrace and hold him by faith and all is well. — But you must really do it, and that is why believing, which seems so little, is really so much. You must cast all other hopes and supposed helps aside, completely aside. None of them counts one particle with God. His Son alone counts with him, his Son’s life and death lived and died for you. Take that and go with that alone into the court of heaven. It is the all-decisive thing. Your case — my case: it is triumphantly certain when we come with faith. God, the great Judge, has himself said so in his whole Word. This is the glad news, the Gospel, which he wants preached to all men. Believe it, trust Christ whom he sends you, and so come into his august presence. All will be well.

Not that your believing, your act of believing, is such a grand good work that it makes good all your past and present sins. To think this is to ruin faith itself, to make your own believing your Savior instead of God's Son. No; your faith counts so with God because of the great treasure which it holds — Christ and his life and death for you. Faith is nothing but the hand which holds the diamond; it is the diamond which has the value. Faith is like the purse full of gold coins; the value is all in the coins, the purse may be old and cheap. But you must have the hand, the purse, else the great treasure will not be in your possession, else you will be without it.

Oh, that all poor sinners might learn this blessed secret as they go to trial before God! Away with these follies and schemes of our own, none of which will work with God, none of which will take away a single one of our sins. Believe in Jesus Christ and his atoning blood. So take your case into God's court, and triumphant certainty that God will indeed pardon you is yours.

## **V. Forgiveness and Justification**

This act of the great Judge St. Paul sets before us in our text. It is the most glorious thing in all the Bible. God himself has it proclaimed again and again that we may be absolutely sure of it and live in this certainty and in the peace and joy it gives. The apostle uses two blessed words; the one is "forgiveness," and the other is, we "are justified." Both mean the one great and wonderful act of the heavenly Judge when for Christ's sake he acquits the believing sinner at his judgment bar.

Learn to see this act as it really is. There in the great court of heaven your case is called and mine. At once there stand revealed all our sins. They are piled high like a great mountain, and in the light of heaven they will look blacker and more hideous than ever they looked on earth. And our good works will be there, but alas, how will they look in the pure and perfect light of heaven? All stained and tarnished, broken and spoiled. They will be placed in a pile with our sins, because of the sins in the best of them. But behold, here is Christ at our side; his holy five wounds lay before the Judge Christ's perfect sacrifice for our sins, his holy life lived for us lays before the Judge Christ's perfect good works. And you and I, as the eyes of the great Judge turn to us, kneel at the feet of Christ and clasp him with the

arms of faith — he is ours, he and all he has, and we are his. Then the verdict is rendered. It is the verdict of pardon and forgiveness, the verdict of justification and acquittal. We may put it into the blessed words which Jesus himself used: My son, my daughter, thy sins are forgiven — go in peace! O the blessedness of thus having our case settled in heaven! It is gloriously won when we hear God's sentence of pardon. For there is no sweeter word for you and me than the word "forgiven" from God's lips addressed to us, or the word "justified" when pronounced thus in our case.

Forgiven — do you know what it means? It means that for Christ's sake in whom we believe all our sins are sent away forever. That mountain of sin and guilt standing against us vanishes, like vapor devoured by the strong heat of the sun. Those sins disappear, like a shadow when the light strikes it. They are gone as far as the east is from the west, and no man can possibly measure the distance. They are buried out of sight as if sunk instantaneously into the bottom of the ocean where it is deepest. O heavenly joy, thus to be forgiven! — But more than this. The sins are gone, completely and forever gone, but something is left. Christ is left, he stands in the place of our sins. All his perfect, holy life and heavenly obedience with not one flaw in it in the sight of God, stands there where our sins stood, and all this is ours. It is his free and gracious gift to us. And God himself counts it as ours. His own lips declare of you and me: You are just, for Christ's sake! This is what justification means — declared by God himself righteous and just because Christ and all his righteousness is ours by faith. O heavenly joy once more! All that is ours, so black and damnable, gone; all that is Christ's, so holy and perfect, left, and all this ours now and forever.

And this mighty sentence of God is true. Nothing can change it, because God has rendered it. If we know that the word of earthly judges is decisive, what of him who with one word called the world into being? The heavens may fall, but God's pardoning Word for you and me in Jesus Christ shall stand forever. — And his Word is just. When God's own Son pays our debt shall not God count the debt paid? When Christ brings more than enough for sins, shall God count it as less than enough? — But oh, his Word of pardon is all grace too, and not merely cold justice. For God himself gave us his Son, and sends us his Gospel to make that Son ours by faith, in order that when your case and mine comes before him at his judgment seat, he may be able to forgive and justify us. This grace and mercy of his shines out in his glorious act. It is the deepest fountain of our joy.

When St. Paul closed his great sermon on Christ and justification through Christ by faith in him, he warned his hearers on the one point which to this day needs to be impressed upon us. Beware of unbelief! And when the service was over at which St. Paul preached, and when many of his hearers talked with him about it, he again came back to this point. Continue in the grace of God — never for a moment let go your faith. Here is the vital thing in our case in the court of heaven. It is won if we believe, it is lost if we refuse to believe. And as long as we believe, God's blessed verdict stands. But if we cast our faith aside, and thus cast Christ aside, we ourselves reverse the verdict, and our case would thus be lost. Lord Jesus Christ, our great Redeemer, our one hope before God's judgment bar, help us by thy Word and Spirit, to believe now, to hold out in faith, so that by thee and all thy saving work for us our sentence from God our Judge may be the blessed verdict of forgiveness and justification now and forever.

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## Outlines

The text as it stands presents three parts — Paul's word on justification — his warning against unbelief — his admonition to continue in the grace of God. These three may, of course, be used as the main heads of the sermon giving them a suitable theme and formulating accordingly. But the real center of the text lies in the two words "forgiveness" and "justified," since for these the text has been chosen. Theme and division will then most likely operate with this center. A simple handling would give us something like this: The sinner's only hope before God: Christ — faith in Christ — pardon through faith in Christ. — Too few of the sermons on justification by faith hold fast the judicial imagery contained in the very term the Bible uses for this doctrine. More efforts should be made in this direction. For instance: Your soul before God's judgment seat: Lost, if it comes alone — pardoned if it comes with Christ. — How can the righteous Judge of all the earth justify the guilty sinner? He never does justify the guilty sinner — he can justify only the redeemed sinner — and he actually does justify only the believing sinner.

### **The Sinner's Only Hope before God.**

1. Christ's atonement.
2. Faith in Christ's atonement.
3. God's pardon through faith in Christ's atonement.

## **How St. Paul Preached Justification by Faith in Antioch.**

1. He pointed to our sins.
2. He held up Jesus Christ.
3. He aimed at faith.
4. He proclaimed God's pardon.
5. He warned against unbelief.

## **Guilty! or: Not Guilty!**

What decides with the heavenly Judge?

1. Not sin — but Christ's blood.
2. Not works — but faith.

## **In God's Court**

1. The Judge and his righteousness.
2. Sin and its guilt.
3. Faith and its plea.
4. The verdict and its award.



# 40. Stephen a Tonic for our own Faith. The Fifth Sunday After Trinity. Acts 6:8-15.

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. (Acts 6:8-15)

THERE ARE TWO WAYS of reading the shining examples of faith recorded for us in Holy Writ. One way is to read them with our own faith asleep. Then these examples of true faith loom up before us like lofty mountain peaks. We admire them indeed, but the flesh still in us whispers that such heights are surely unattainable for us. We lean back idly, supinely, telling ourselves in a discouraging way that there is no use for us to vie with these men of old. Have you ever read the Bible story of heroic faith in this way?

There is another way. It is to read these glorious accounts with the eyes of our own faith wide open. This clear mountain air of God's Word braces us. The clear light of its lofty heights makes us see things as they are. Our miserable flesh receives a severe setback. The prayer rises to our lips: Would to God that my faith were like that! We come away from such reading with new vigor in our spiritual system. Have you ever read the Bible story of heroic faith in this way?

Well, this is the way to read the story of Stephen, the only way. We ought to find in

### **Stephen a Tonic for our own Faith.**

Let us try it with the help of God.

## **I. The Note of Grace**

There is first of all the note of grace. Stephen was full of faith and power because he was full of the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

The secret of all true faith is God's grace. That means that all the spiritual power of faith is wholly the product of divine grace. Stephen was a man of faith because he took in all the grace that God offered him in his Word; and he grew to such power because he allowed God's grace through the Word to develop his faith in the fullest way. He took Jesus Christ into his heart, and gave his heart with all its thoughts, words, and deeds wholly into Christ's hands. And this he did in the simple way that he made the Word of God the element in which his soul lived.. It was his meat and drink day by day, it was his joy and pleasure every hour. And that not to know this Word alone, but to live upon it and to live in it. It was thus that Stephen became a mighty man of faith — God's grace made him such a man.

Here is the tonic we need for our own faith — grace, more grace, and still more grace, and this as it stands ready for us in the Word. Here we are dwarfs when we ought to be giants, because we do not eat the food that will make us grow strong and stalwart. Here we are weak and puny, stunted and starved, because we will not take the strength that is offered us. There is exactly as much grace for us today as there was for Stephen, and God is just as generous with this grace for you and me as he was with Stephen. No. the fault of our littleness of faith is not his, it is our own. And one great element of strength for us is to recognize that; sufficiently that we may act: upon it. Read the Bible, read it daily and devoutly; Take its promises into your soul, and let them fill you completely with their joy and assurance. Above all look for Christ in the Word and make him your own. Let him be your joy and delight, your hope and help, your guide and stay, your support and strength. He is the very embodiment of God's grace. And every soul that

feeds on him and his Word is bound to grow in strength. See the power to which Stephen grew. This glorious figure is put here to beckon you on, and he beckons you first of all to the grace of God.

## II. Gifts

And this grace is coupled with gifts. As Stephen grew in grace and faith God gave him some of his choicest gifts, and they help to make Stephen such a man of power, a very tonic for us to behold.

Stephen was only an ordinary member in the church, and thus in his station far below the apostles. But when his faith began to show its power he was made a deacon in the church — that was his first gift, namely a new, hard duty and office. When he gave himself to that with all his might God gave him the gift, so abundant in the first church, of working miracles, even as the apostles were thus gifted. But the highest gift was that God opened opportunities for him in the synagogues of Jerusalem to testify for Christ and to win men for Christ by his ability to use the Word of God. In all these gifts he had a chance to exercise his faith to the fullest degree. As men saw it they marveled — Stephen appeared great to them. And one shining feature of this greatness was his measure of God's gifts.

Here is the tonic that we need for our faith. God has gifts for us, just as he had for Stephen. Only let us not make the mistake to think that we ought to get the identical gifts Stephen had, and then become disappointed when we fail to receive them. All God's gifts are given "to profit withal" that means for the benefit of his church, not for your own personal ambition or aggrandizement. And his hands are as full of gifts today as they were in the days of Stephen. But many of them he cannot bestow for the simple reason that we do not want them at all, would not use them at all, or would abuse them, or because we are not fitted by our puny faith to own and exercise them. Remember all spiritual gifts are rooted in faith — that is the tree on which these branches grow. Take a little, tree with a stem as thick as your thumb — can you put a branch on it as thick as your thigh? Well, God cannot grow mighty branches like that on little sapling trees — do not be disappointed when he does not try it.

But the moment faith grows gifts follow. Perhaps there is natural talent in you which if sanctified by faith would be a mighty blessing in the church.

Then there are talents that come with faith itself and its development, as in Stephen his power to speak for Christ in the synagogues. And finally God opens up unexpected doors for us when our faith gets ready for them, and ere we know it he is giving blessings through us to others of which we at first never thought. But true faith is always satisfied with its gifts whatever they may be; it does not envy others, nor does it let its gifts lie unused, losing them thus, because they seem small and are not praised of men. Some of God's finest and greatest gifts look small to men, but if used aright bring great and eternal results for his kingdom. Grow in faith, and let God adorn you with his gifts, and praise him alone when he does it. Take this tonic from Stephen, for surely your faith needs it.

### **III. Wisdom**

With grace and gifts we find wisdom in Stephen. By that his faith shone out and wrought for God. As we see it a new stimulus ought to come into our spiritual system.

Wisdom is knowledge put to the right use, and in the believer it is knowledge drawn from the Word and used in accord with the Word. There is no mystery about it at all, for here is the open fountain of wisdom in the Word, and all who will may come and drink. And that is exactly what Stephen did — he drank, and drank deeply. Filled with true knowledge and the way to use it, he went among the Jews and began this use. Men marveled at him, many were helped by him. We today have his words in the seventh chapter of the Acts, and they are still a tonic and uplift for us. Here we hear his faith confessing and speaking the words of eternal life, antagonizing unbelief and hardness of heart, at the same time glowing with forgiveness and love. It is the very tonic our faith needs.

The church is full of foolish people. One often marvels at their poor judgment in spiritual things, at their dangerous mistakes, at their false estimates. They keep talking as if they never read the holy words of divine wisdom. They do many things as if they did not even know what God has said on these matters. They try worldly ways, as if there were no spiritual ways, at least as if they had not heard of them. Perhaps they have heard, but their souls were full of foolish thoughts, and God's wisdom slipped off. There is

no excuse for this lack of wisdom, this proneness to deception and self-deception. We need men like Stephen to wake us up.

Let us take the tonic of his example, it will make us sounder and healthier, stronger and more robust in our faith. A hundred questions are up before the church today, some of them of supreme importance. The question of money, and how to raise it; the question of membership in the church, and what it requires; the question of unionism, and who are really our brethren; the question of confession, and what must be included therein; a thousand questions of what is right, and what is wrong, what a Christian may, and what he may not do. How shall we answer these questions? Shall we use our own natural wisdom? That is folly. Shall we look into the Bible a little, and mix our natural wisdom with this or that from Scripture? That surely will not answer. Shall we follow what supposedly great men have said, or now say? That too is never safe and wise. Do as- Stephen did — get God's wisdom in all its abundance. Oh, what a blessing it would be to the whole church and thousands outside of the church! Let Stephen stimulate us to grow mighty in faith and God's wisdom.

## **IV. Zeal**

In him grace, gifts, wisdom were augmented by zeal. All the faith he had he exercised to the fullest extent, and in the station God assigned to him. Look at the man, and let the tonic of his zealous faith stir you into stronger vitality.

Not by idling did he work wonders and signs, and not by sitting still, saying and doing nothing, did he stir up the enemies of Christ and reach a martyr's glorious crown. His faith burned like fire in him and made him zealous to build the church and serve his Lord. He did not make everything else the first duty in life, and faith and love the last. He put first things first, and so became the man of God he was, zealous for his cause. And do not forget, his wisdom was first, his zeal second, for there is often zeal in the church, but misguided, zeal without knowledge — like a horse drawing a wagon with the driver gone or asleep; the wagon generally upsets.

Idle faith is poor faith. It has too little red blood in it. It is like a consumptive, every little exertion 'overtaxes it. We need the tonic of Stephen, even those of us who have zeal in a measure. God's church is first of all a

gift-shop, where we may come and buy for ourselves without money or price, and the only rule is that we shall have exactly as much as we really want, and are really willing to take. Would to God we were as greedy here as if we were turned loose in an earthly gift-shop. Then, however, God's church is like a work-shop, and one in which the work never ends. As we do it, it grows and grows and grows. It just naturally keeps ahead of our zeal. That seems to discourage some people. They ought to have more wisdom. For every bit of true work done in faith for God is a blessing, first a blessing for the worker, secondly a blessing for others. Do we want less work then, or more? Surely, surely, more! And so zeal is like a plant that multiplies by layering. Every new layer grows a new plant, with new flowers and fruit, till the whole garden is full. Do we want less of this true zeal? less of these beautiful flowers and this fruit? See how much Stephen wrought in his short day of life for eternity. Let the stimulus of his zeal strengthen and stir you to do what you can in the short life-day still left to you.

## **V. Courage**

And now to grace, gifts, wisdom, and zeal courage is added, one of the very finest features of true faith, and one that must mark every genuine believer. This courageous faith of Stephen is the tonic to brace us in our cowardly, flabby age.

Stephen might have contented himself to stay at home with his faith, and to keep silent when he heard it attacked. Not he! He believed, and therefore he confessed. And where he could he pointed other men away from their false faith and dangerous ways to the one true faith and the way of life eternal. He had the wisdom of the Word and the gift of eloquence, and he used them both with no thought of fear or cowardice. Men stood against him, but he was unafraid. And this was indeed no child's play. These were men, some of them, who might prove very dangerous to Stephen, in fact did prove so, for they finally took his life. Stephen laid it down willingly — the first man to shed his blood for Jesus Christ. His name is imperishable in the annals of the kingdom. Stephen means crown. When his mother named him she may have thought of an earthly crown or honor for her little son; Christ gave him the glorious crown of martyrdom.

“O for a faith that will not shrink,  
Though pressed by ev’ry woe,  
That will not tremble on the brink  
Of any earthly woe!”

We sing it, but do we really want a faith like this? Stephen’s example is to serve as a tonic to make our faith courageous, unshrinking, unflinching indeed. Faith demands confession, and confession always means courage, especially when it meets opposition, as it ever must in this sinful world. Your employer wants you to do wrong? Will you be courageous and confess your Lord? Your friends and companions urge you to join in questionable ways? Are you courageous enough to say no? You meet all sorts of dangerous notions. Will you keep your mouth shut, or speak out like Stephen? But the threatening consequences? The mockery and derision, the opposition and hatred, the losses and hurts? Yes, we are prone to look at these, and then we deny, at least by our silence. A little denial often seems a very wise and profitable thing. A surrender once in a while seems like a great gain and victory. That is how Satan ties our hands, and one denial leads so easily to another. Let Stephen help us. Put all the consequences in God’s hands where they belong, and take every loss and pain as a cross from his hands, a badge of honor granted you from above for manliness of faith and the true courage of Christian valor. Leave the flowery beds of ease to those who feel safer there, but go and confess your faith, even if it cost your life. We are brothers of Stephen, and Christ is with us to uphold us in every trial of our courage.

## **VI. Support**

And this is the last thing we draw today from Stephen’s faith, this vision of divine support. When his great test came the Christ who had upheld him with his arm did not fail him. Let that support of his granted to Stephen serve as a tonic for your faith in any trial you may meet.

They dragged Stephen before the Jewish high court, brought lying witnesses against him with murderous intent, and made ready to take this noble believer’s life. It all came upon Stephen suddenly, giving him no time at all to prepare. But what does the sacred record tell us? Our hearts glow with admiration as we read it. Christ was with his faithful follower — there he

stood alone amid his implacable enemies. Downcast, trembling, begging for mercy? O no! Erect and joyful. And suddenly his face shone with a heavenly radiance. It looked like the face of an angel. All men saw it and stared at what they beheld. It was the wonderful divine support granted to Stephen in this supreme hour of his life. “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior.” Is. 43:2-3. Christ kept the faith of his servant and made it shine out brighter than ever at the end.

Here is the tonic we need. God will not forsake us in our trials when our faith is brought to undergo them. In the supreme trial of Stephen he found such wondrous and unexpected support, do you suppose that in the lesser trials set for us he will fail to furnish us support? No; our faith and its victory is too precious in his sight. Only let us look for that support, and not seek for a broken staff of human help to lean upon. Let us cry in every trial to him, and his angel will come to strengthen us. While Stephen’s experience is singular and exceptional in the way God’s support to him was made manifest to men, in another and more important way, in the fact of his having such all-sufficient support there is nothing singular at all about his case. All martyrs have experienced it; and where lighter trials than theirs came, the same Helper was always at hand. The Bible is full of promises to those who suffer for his name’s sake, and these promises all, with every example we have, including glorious Stephen, are our tonic now to help us to greater strength of faith and to give us also the victory in the end.

Stephen, a tonic for our own faith — may we read his story aright so that there shine out from it grace, gifts, wisdom, zeal, courage, and support, and our own faith may grow in strength and joy until it too receives its eternal reward.

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## Outlines

The figure of Stephen will always attract believers, since he is the first martyr. In our text, however, it is his faith which is to occupy us, and not his martyrdom as such. A simple outline will combine the main features of his



faith: Stephen's faith a model for us: in its reliance on God's grace — in its adherence to God's grace — in its defense of God's grace. And it is well to remember that we should speak of Stephen's faith, and not simply pass that by and speak only of the fruits of his faith. All these fruits must be referred back to their source, which is faith. — The glory of Stephen's faith: it trusted — it testified — it endured. Or: a faith reliant — a faith diligent — a faith militant — a faith persevering — a faith triumphant. — Since faith like Stephen's is often set aside as exceptional, with the plea that we cannot hope to equal it, we may approach his example from this angle: How shall we use an example of great faith like Stephen's? We may contrast our faith with his in order to stir our faith up — and we may liken our faith to his in order to stimulate and increase our faith.

### **Stephen, a Man full of Faith and Power.**

1. In his successful labors.
2. In his severe trials.
3. In the heavenly light which shone upon him.

— LECHLER AND GEROK.

### **The Glory of God's Grace in Stephen.**

1. In his faith.
2. In his contention for the faith.
3. In his suffering for the faith.
4. In his final testimony for the faith.

### **The Greatness of Stephen's Faith.**

1. Due to the grace of God.
2. Revealed in his work for God,
3. Crowned by his conflict for God.

### **God's Use of Men of Faith and Power.**

1. In the sweet work of building his church.

2. In the bitter work of contending for his church.

# 41. The Natural History of Hypocrisy. The Sixth Sunday After Trinity. Acts 5:1-11.

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. (Acts 5:1-11)

SINCE ITS BEGINNING the Christian church has been troubled with hypocrites. Judas Iscariot turned hypocrite, and in the first Christian congregation in Jerusalem two shameless hypocrites were exposed by the judgment of God, Ananias and Sapphira. It ought not to surprise us that there should be cases of hypocrisy still. In those first hypocrites God revealed to us the hand of Satan, whose work their hypocrisy was; the evil one is still busy, and he still delights in eating out the heart of true faith in some of Christ's followers, leaving them fair outside, but like a wormy nut, rotten and foul within. In fact, hypocrisy is one of Satan's real masterpieces; for "he abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him; when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it," John 8:44.

It is necessary, then, for us to study the sin of hypocrisy quite closely, even as God also reveals the whole course of it in his Word for our special warning. The coin of true, faith is so valuable for every one of us that we must know how to distinguish at first glance the counterfeit passed out by Satan, so that in the purse of our hearts no counterfeit may ever be found. In Ananias and Sapphira God sets before us in detail

## **The Natural History of Hypocrisy.**

### **I. Always Inspired by Satan**

The first thing that cannot be impressed upon us too deeply is that hypocrisy is always inspired by Satan.

It is his special masterpiece, and he takes the greatest delight in it. That is why St. Peter at once challenges Ananias with the question: “Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart?” It is the same thing with the hypocrisy of Judas Iscariot; St. John tells us repeatedly that Satan filled his heart. The whole plan of Ananias and his wife, not to follow in true faith and love the example of Barnabas and others in the congregation in Jerusalem in bringing their offerings to God, but merely to imitate their faith and love, and to lie about the amount in making the imitation, was a plan that could not possibly come from God. It was the very opposite of all that Ananias and Sapphira had heard preached unto them by the apostles. It was so directly opposite that the slightest reflection must have revealed it to their minds. They were going to appear among God’s people, before God’s apostles, in a service for God’s honor — before God himself with a bare-faced lie concerning their gift to God, a lie in their whole attitude and action, and on their lips besides. The whole scheme had and could have but one instigator, him who is a liar from the beginning. For hypocrisy is lying, the very worst form of it — lying in religious things, lying in word and deed in regard to our faith and love, lying before men indeed, but really to God himself and into his very face. It mocks the Spirit of God. He works true faith and love, and the hypocrite comes with a sham faith and love, as if these were the Holy Spirit’s work. It challenges or tempts the Holy Spirit. He discerns the very hearts of men, for in them he does his work, and the hypocrite secretly thinks the Holy Spirit cannot see what is in his heart, or if he does, cannot

do anything about it. If you ask how human beings can be so wicked as to sin against what is most holy to God, the Holy Spirit's own work, going squarely against the Holy Spirit's own Word, and this right to the face of the Holy Spirit himself, there is only one answer — it is Satan's power in those who open their hearts to him. His marks are over every case of hypocrisy, from that of Judas and of Ananias and Sapphira on down to this day.

This terrible sin, so deadly in its final results, like so many other sins, begins in a small way. The Word and Spirit of God did not impress the heart as they should. Satan closes the ears more and more. What if God does say this and that — the hypocrite pretends to hear, feigns assent, but inwardly follows other thoughts. The start is made with insincerity regarding the Spirit's Word. The heart thinks lightly of that Word, and secretly sets it aside. Outwardly it bows to that Word, but inwardly no longer. And when this first hold of Satan's hand is not broken, he presses his advantage. More and more he fills the heart, gains room in the mind and will. He leaves the outer husk, but eats the kernel completely away. The hypocrite goes to church, bows his head in prayer, uses the words of faith and love, brings his gifts to the altar, but in his soul faith and love have died out. His religion has become a lie, and since it is a matter of religion, it is not like ordinary lies to men, it is a lie to God himself. From the first unchecked insincerity it grows like the secret spreading of poison, until hypocrisy is complete. The devil laughs as he sees the thing develop. As he likes to build a chapel of his own beside every true church of God, so he likes to fill God's own church with sham believers, imitation Christians, hypocrites instead of true saints.

Watch your hearts well, lest insincerity creep in. Let God's Word hold you and move you in every secret thought of your soul. In that Word is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth, true faith, true love. No hypocrisy can start where the heart clings earnestly and loyally to him. He is our protection and guard.

## **II. Without Excuse**

In studying Ananias and Sapphira as they exhibit the natural history of hypocrisy, we must learn thoroughly that hypocrisy is entirely without excuse.

St. Peter brings this out very clearly when he deals with Ananias and Sapphira. Why should they do such a lying thing in the face of God? They could have kept all their property, and no one would have said one word to them in criticism. They could have come and offered in all sincerity a part of the price of their land, and again all would have been well. But no, they must bring part, and say it is the whole, and thus show that Satan ruled their hearts completely while they pretended that they were doing what the Holy Spirit said. — And not only this, these two agreed together in their hypocrisy. They planned and talked it over together. Neither of them cautioned and warned the other when they openly laid their plan before each other. They were utterly without excuse. It would have been a thousand times better, when they no longer wanted to follow God's Spirit, to turn openly away from him and leave the church. Instead they deliberately and wickedly chose the course of hypocrisy. No, they had no answer to St. Peter's questions. There was only one — their whole hypocrisy was without the shadow of excuse.

It is always so. In the first place the whole Word of God warns us against this inward falsity. One thing all must know who in any way have heard this Word, that God sees our hearts with every motive and thought in them. How then can and dare we ever act as if he did not see our hearts?

And then as regards the single acts of hypocrisy, how utterly without excuse they are! Take the question of money and contributions to the church. Why not tell the truth? If you do not want to give, say it, and keep your own. If you do not want to give a certain amount, give less. Why say that you cannot give, when you know you can? Why cover your niggardliness with a lie like this, when you know that the lie is Satan's worst work in your heart? Why pretend your gift is greater than it is, costs you more than it does, when you know it is false, and that this hypocrisy of yours is the devil's worst work in your soul? It is bad enough when our hearts are weak in regard to love, but it is the very poison of love and faith to add to our lack of love the devil's lie of hypocrisy. The moment God looks at it, every shadow of excuse disappears.

But money and giving are only one point in which the sin of hypocrisy displays itself; there are any number of other points. And they are all alike — the moment they are brought into the light, we see how inexcusable they are. Take the whole matter together. Why belong to the church at all, if your heart is not in it? Why say that you trust Christ's blood and righteousness,

when your trust is on something else? Why mock love for Christ, when you really love sin and the world and its ways? Why hear the Word of God, as if you intended to believe and do it, when this is not your intention at all? Why promise to follow Christ, when you have determined to do no such thing? Why say that you are sorry for your sins, when you know it is false? Why take the Holy Sacrament, when your soul has no use for this heavenly food? In other words, why pile up for yourself a double damnation, when one is already more than enough? Why mock and tempt God on top of turning inwardly away from him? Why this utterly inexcusable sin, when you have already more sins than you can bear? This is what makes hypocrisy so bad, and when fully developed almost hopeless of cure. Of all sins it is the most uncalled for and the most abominable in its insult of God. It cheats, lies, and pretends in the very holiest things God has given us. No man has ever found an excuse, and no man ever will.

Hold these things up before your hearts. They will expose the devil's efforts and drive him away. They will help to make and keep you sincere in whatever measure of true faith and love you have.

### **III. Hypocrisy Easily Deceives**

The natural history of hypocrisy as we see it displayed in Ananias and Sapphira makes it quite evident that hypocrisy easily deceives men.

How could any of those people present when Ananias brought in his gift have discovered that he was acting the hypocrite and lying to God? Even the apostles with their natural abilities could never have detected the lie in Ananias. For this is the very nature of hypocrisy — it takes advantage of men; it puts up such a close imitation of faith and Christian love that all or nearly all are deceived. Even when we feel there is something wrong, we hesitate to say so, because we may not judge rightly, and it is no small thing to charge a fellow member with a sin like hypocrisy. But this is the very thing the hypocrite counts on. Ananias and Sapphira reckoned on it; they felt sure no person would find them out, could find them out.

But let us mark it well, this sort of cunning is born of the devil and not of God. And like some of the other devices of Satan, it seems to succeed, and succeed so well, that for this reason the hypocrite is the more tempted to go on in his deadly sin. He gets the credit for faith, piety, goodness, liberality

and the like, and at the same time he satisfies his evil lust and desire. (The devil himself flatters him for being so shrewd. His conscience, of course, must be put to sleep in some way or other, and nearly always is. Ananias and Sapphira felt sure their names would be placed beside that of Barnabas on the honor roll of the church. And this would surely have been done, as far as men were concerned, if God had not intervened. It is constantly done now, except where providence helps the church in some special way.

But for every one of us let this very success of hypocrisy in deceiving men warn us of the danger that lurks in it. This success is the devil's bait by which he catches the wise in their own conceit. For where the hypocrite succeeds so well, another is succeeding even better, and the hypocrite is aiding that other's success.

## **IV. Deceives The Hypocrite Most Of All**

For the next point to mark in the natural history of hypocrisy as we see it in Ananias and Sapphira is this that hypocrisy deceives worst of all the hypocrite himself.

Suppose that God had not interfered when Ananias brought his gift, and when afterwards Sapphira came-in. To be sure, the church would have been deceived; no one would have known that these two people were traitors to Christ and his cross, traitors to the Holy Spirit and his Word of grace. And these hypocrites would have been elated at their success. But that is only a part of the story, and not the most important one even. Ananias and Sapphira were themselves deceived, and this not in regard to others, which may be bad, but in regard to themselves, which is far worse. What if I think better of a man than he really is — that may not hurt me much. But if I think falsely of myself in a vital matter, that is the worst mistake I can make. Hypocrites always hurt the church, but they hurt themselves most; their deception is harmful for others, but it is deadly for themselves. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira the church' was indeed disgraced by their hypocrisy, and the church was shocked when this hypocrisy came out, but Ananias and Sapphira were overwhelmed with the judgment of God when the exposure came. Here is where they had succeeded in deceiving themselves far worse than ever they could have deceived the church.



The devil likes to put hypocrites into the church to harm the church as much as possible. When people suspect hypocrisy among the members, especially the more prominent ones, they often are quick to turn away from the church. That is a far greater pity for them than it is for the church. For while there are some hypocrites in the church, there are far more outside of it, where no Spirit of truth rules. And they who leave the church because of some hypocrite they think they have discovered, will in the end meet that very hypocrite, if he really is one, in another place, where all they who leave Christ openly and who leave him secretly by hypocrisy will be compelled to stay in each other's society. — But Satan's real aim is the hypocrite himself, and the deception he perpetrates on himself. The devil has slipped a noose around his neck, and the hypocrite smiles at others for not seeing it, but does not realize himself what that noose means. That smile will die on his face when the devil at last draws the noose tight. Let every man look well to his own soul, to see that all is true, honest, upright there in regard to Christ and his Spirit. And let Ananias and Sapphira warn us, that husbands and wives, and other relatives who are thrown intimately together, as well as friends and associates, who come in touch with each other, can render no better service than to keep each other true and sincere, and to uproot the least tendency to inward falseness and self-deception. Hollow words, pious cant, superficial promises, and all mere pretense of faith and love is the devil's sowing. Uproot it in your own self, and by God's help uproot it in others where you can.

## **V. Bound To Be Exposed**

And now the last chapter in this natural history of hypocrisy. Ananias and Sapphira show us that hypocrisy is bound to be exposed.

Hear the word of Jesus, and believe it once for all "Nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad." Luke 8:17. And again he says: "There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops." Luke 12:2-8. You know well how this is God sees and hears everything.

Ananias and Sapphira discovered it, alas too late. God's Spirit revealed their whole hypocrisy to St. Peter at the very moment when it came to a head. It was revealed more completely than if both Ananias and his wife had stood up before the whole church and told it themselves. In their case that exposure ushered in their judgment. Not Peter by any power or authority of his, but God's Spirit himself struck these two hypocrites dead with the hand of almighty power. Who shall say the judgment was not deserved? God knows how long to let men go on in their sin; when the hour comes he calls them to judgment.

What happened with Ananias and Sapphira is only an illustration of what all secret sins, and especially all hypocrisy, will meet in the end. There will be complete exposure. Not indeed always before men, as in this double case in Jerusalem. Sometimes God permits the hypocrite to carry his sin successfully to the very grave. Then his judgment is sure, as was that of Ananias and Sapphira. Before the judgment bar of God, and at the last great day, every secret sin, and hypocrisy shall be fully exposed, and all the world of men shall behold it in all its damnableness. It will be a thousand times worse than if the sinners themselves should now shout it aloud from the housetops or advertise it in all the papers of the country. Sometimes the exposure comes already in this life more or less completely. Then it is a deed of God's grace, giving the sinner another chance to repent and amend before it is too late. It cuts deep to have any hypocritical thing in us exposed. Oh, may it crush us in repentance, if such a thing ever occurs with us. Christ's blood has atoned for all sins, also for any falseness that may lurk in us. Only let us apply that blood in time, sweep out the sin, rise to newness of life, and thus save our souls. And in all things let us make the prayer of the Psalmist ours: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Ps. 129:23.

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## Outlines

This is not a text on church discipline, although Langsdorff, and Lechler and Gerok attempt to use it as such. This text reveals God's judgment on hypocrisy, not the method in which the church is to deal with this sin. No

preacher can speak like Peter from direct revelation, and God's judgment in the case of Ananias and Sapphira is set by him as a warning for all future time. This shows how the text must be used. Here is: What God thinks of Hypocrisy: He points tis to the instigator of this sin — to its terrible character — to its final judgment. — The whole subject of hypocrisy is brought tip by this double case; so we may ask: What about hypocrisy, in the church? And our answer may run thus: It is not due to the church, but to the enemy of the church — it exists not with the consent, but contrary to the warning of the church — it will not remain in the church, but will be eradicated from her. — Instead of broadening we may also narrow the subject: Hypocrisy in giving: It creeps m easily — it must be kept out wholly.

## **Ananias and Sapphira, an Illustration of the Entire Class of Hypocrites in the Church.**

Here we see

1. How they come to occur (deception of Satan).
2. How they look (A. and S. imitated Barnabas closely).
- 3, How they must be rated (as highly dangerous to the church).
- 4 How they end (judgment awaits them).

## **Ananias and Sapphira the Great New Testament Warning against Hypocrisy.**

1. The warning in its origin.
2. The warning in its inexcusableness.
3. The warning in its abominableness.
4. The warning in its penalty.

## **The Deceptive Sin of Hypocrisy.**

1. It does deceive men.
2. It deceives the hypocrite worst of all.
3. But it never deceives God for a moment.

## **There is Nothing more Dangerous than Sham Christianity.**

1. Sham orthodoxy — it substitutes a show of truth for the substance of truth.
2. Sham faith — it substitutes obedience to Satan for obedience to Christ.
3. Sham piety — it substitutes hypocrisy for holiness and good works.
4. Sham salvation — it substitutes hell for heaven.

## 42. In the Little School of Aquila and Priscilla The Seventh Sunday After Trinity. Acts 18:24-28.

And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ. (Acts 18:24-28)

WE NEED MORE CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE. In order to secure it we need more desire for Christian knowledge. We must dismiss any wrong ideas we may have concerning this knowledge, its attainment, and its use, and put in place of such ideas those which shine out everywhere in the Holy Scriptures. Jesus declares: "This is life eternal that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent," and he means to know both thoroughly. St Paul prays that the Christians at Philippi "may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment"; and those at Colosse, that they "might be filled with the knowledge of his (God's) will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." St. Peter admonishes all his readers to add to their virtue knowledge. And so the Scriptures speak everywhere. In fact, one of the most significant names for Christ's followers is "disciples," pupils, learners, people bent on securing the highest and most blessed knowledge.

Look into our text, and see how all this is meant. Here is a humble tent maker's home, his shop with rolls of canvas, bundles of rope, and the different tools for his trade. The man's name is Aquila. Beside him we see his wife, busy with her household affairs, while her husband plies his trade. Her

name is Priscilla, a name which through her has become dear to all the church. They are in the city of Ephesus now, but just a short time ago they lived in Corinth and for a year and a half the apostle St. Paul lived with them and worked with Aquila at the tent maker's trade. This will explain some of the things we find in the home of Aquila and Priscilla. For presently the door opens into Aquila's shop. No, this is not a customer of his come to order some work done. We see at a glance that the visitor is a distinguished looking man. He has passed through some of the best schools of his day, and his face and bearing show at once that he is a man of far more than ordinary ability. His name is Apollos, and he comes from the famous old city in Egypt, Alexandria. But see what takes place in this humble tent maker's shop. All work is dropped at once by both Aquila and Priscilla, and when they have welcomed their guest they suddenly turn this little shop into a school, a school for the highest learning in 'the world. And more remarkable still, it is not Apollos, the man of great learning and ability, who acts as the teacher, but quite the reverse, Aquila and Priscilla are the teachers, and this learned Apollos is the pupil.

Here is a school where we too must enter, for there are some very needful things which here we may learn. Let us take our place, then beside Apollos

## **In the Little School of Aquila and Priscilla**

### **I. Humble Station Does Not Excuse**

Look first of all at the two teachers in this school, at the humble tent maker Aquila, and at his noble wife Priscilla. These two are a lesson for us, and one that we all need very much. They teach us, by all that we see of them here, that no man's humble station excuses him from being fully instructed in Christian knowledge.

Only a humble tent maker and his wife — that is all these two were. He had to work hard day by day to earn his daily bread for himself and his wife, and she had the care of the home. They are just like thousands of people today in our churches, who bear that most honorable of all titles, working people. They depended altogether on their daily earnings. Their only leisure was the one day of rest when work ceased and they went to the

house of God. And yet this tent maker and his wife never for a moment thought, that being people such as they were they could not be expected to know more than a few elementary things in the Christian religion. On the contrary, here we find them giving the fullest and completest instruction in the Christian faith to a man of education and refinement like Apollos. They were humble otherwise, but they were gloriously rich in Christian knowledge. This is the thing we all must learn from them. No matter how humble your station in life, no matter what your trade, work, or business may be, you have no excuse for thinking that you cannot be completely and thoroughly equipped with Christian knowledge. Put away that old Roman Catholic notion, as though this business of knowing the Bible well belongs to the clergy and not to you. That notion is the mother of the worst kind of ignorance. It has taken the Bible out of the hands and hearts of the Roman Catholic people, and it is doing the same thing among all those Protestants who in this vital point are just as Roman Catholic as ever. Only these are more inexcusable than any Roman Catholic can be, for you all have your Bibles, and are constantly urged to make the fullest use of them. How shall you ever answer for it if you do not? If this tent maker and his wife could gain such a fund of the finest knowledge, it is folly for you to think or say that you cannot do the same, or need not do the same.

But there is more to say. Aquila and Priscilla started late in this work of learning. About a year and a half ago they knew none of the things they were now teaching so excellently to their illustrious pupil Apollos. Within so short a time, and starting so late in life, with the handicap of their previous Jewish narrowness, they gained so rich and true a fund of Christian knowledge. What an admonition to us all, who have had the full light in Christ Jesus perhaps from our childhood on. How completely this cuts off any excuse which we may now offer. What an encouragement also to those in our midst who like Aquila and Priscilla came into the church in later years. A little time used faithfully and well, following the Spirit of Christ, will do for us just what it did for this tent maker and his wife. All we need is the earnest desire for this heavenly knowledge; it is easy indeed to have that desire satisfied.

Another significant thing in this school at Ephesus, and one we must not pass by, is that Priscilla was not only one with her husband in learning the things of Christ, a true yoke-fellow and help-meet of his, but from every indication she outranked him in her attainments. When St. Luke here tells of

how the two instructed Apollos he mentions Priscilla's name ahead of that of her husband. This is by no means accidental. In two other places in the Bible, when the great teacher of Aquila and Priscilla mentions their names in sending their greetings, he puts Priscilla's name first, and even uses the affectionate abbreviation of her name, Prisca. It is plain, then, that as in many a similar case the wife had a more gifted mind than the husband, quicker to learn the great truths of salvation, and abler to penetrate into their glorious depths. And this humble woman used and sanctified these her natural talents ill devoting them with a pure heart to the precious truth of the Gospel. Both were equally earnest in their faith, but the wife outranked the husband in her ability. What a fine example for every Christian woman! In those days especially, when women as a class lived far more retired and restricted than now, when social customs put many obstacles into their way, this woman did not think of excusing herself from learning all that she possibly could of the glorious Christian faith. She, said nothing about household cares, or other duties that called her. She did not think that because she was a woman she needed less of the divine knowledge, and could get along just as well with less. No; her heart burned with fervent desire, and she took all the wealth that St. Paul, their teacher, had to offer them. O for more women of this beautiful type in all our churches! God has gifted many of you, my sisters, highly. Put those gifts first of all, not upon earthly, fading, transient things, but first of all upon Christ and his heavenly Word. Let Prisca show you the way.

And indeed this woman had learned the Spirit of Christ well. There is no trace of her pushing herself forward unduly. There is no sign in her of this modern spirit in the world of women which sets aside the order both of nature and of grace in assigning to husband and wife their proper spheres, he the, head of the family and she his help-meet in the Lord. This great and wholesome truth Priscilla had fully learned from St Paul, who taught both that in the church of Christ there is "neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus," and at the same time that women should keep silence in the church, and should not teach publicly in the presence of the men. So ever in the church she kept the station divinely intended for her, but in the privacy of her home, when Apollos was to be taught, she used all the gifts God had given her, in the way acceptable to him. She resisted any temptation that might arise from her mental superiority over her husband, and so she shines on the pages of Holy Writ with a spiritual beauty which in its



very humility and loving submission to God's order makes her an example to all Christian women for all time. Aquila indeed found a pearl when he came to love Priscilla and made her his own in wedlock. Blessed is every one of her sisters who lets the Lord crown her with knowledge and graces like those of Priscilla!

## **II. Great Accomplishments Are No Excuse**

But there is another person in this little school of Aquila and Priscilla, from whom we may learn a second great lesson, necessary especially in our day. Look at this man Apollos who came to be taught by Priscilla and Aquila, and let this impress you, as you study the man: no man's great accomplishments put him beyond securing the fullest instruction in Christian knowledge.

Apollos was a Jew, born and reared in the great city of Alexandria. We are surely right in thinking that he had enjoyed the finest schooling his native city afforded. For St. Luke tells us that he was an eloquent man, and mighty in the Old Testament Scriptures. He had studied not only the ordinary branches of advanced knowledge, but also theology at the feet of learned rabbis. In both he displayed exceptional ability. When he came to Ephesus he was at once permitted to make addresses in the prominent synagogue there. St. Paul had begun his work here, but he had been constrained to leave before a Christian congregation was formed. So Apollos was received with open arms. But when he came to Ephesus he was only partly instructed in the way of the Lord. What he knew of Jesus he preached with the greatest fervor and enthusiasm, but it was only the preliminary knowledge concerning the work of John the Baptist, which he had learned from some disciple of the Baptist while in Alexandria. Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos in the synagogue. At once they said to each other: If only this man knew the full story of Jesus Christ as St. Paul taught it to us! And then they invited Apollos to come to them in order that they might instruct him more perfectly concerning all that Jesus had actually done for our salvation.

And Apollos came. He, the man of fine schooling and illustrious abilities, comes to take instruction of a humble tent maker. He, the admired speaker in the synagogue, is not too proud to learn of a tent maker's wife. He does not think himself superior to these lowly Christian people, but is

ready to lay all his high attainments at the feet of the cross. This is exactly what we need today. Our country is full of great schools, colleges and universities. And only too often they who attend them and graduate from them are filled with a false pride of worldly learning. They imbibe, the spirit of unbelief, and give up the humble Christian faith they have had. They either disdain the truths of Scripture, or begin to pervert them to make them agree with science as they have learned it, science falsely so-called as the Scriptures term it. Think of them going like Apollos to a tent maker's shop for the real wisdom? Their humble old church is too far behind the times for them. They have advanced — yes — in the wrong direction! Let Apollos and his godly humility and genuine wisdom drive out every notion of this kind from the heart of any young man or young woman who may have been touched by such folly. The pride of learning and ability is one of the snares by which the devil catches hearts; and the young are most easily caught in this way. Even a little learning is sometimes a dangerous thing in this respect. And the poison of false learning has often killed faith, or kept it out where it might have entered. The very thing every one of us needs, and needs in a special way when he climbs the educational ladder, is the fullest and most thorough instruction in Christian knowledge. Without that the more a man knows the worse will he go astray; but with the full knowledge of Christ and his Word the more you know, the more will you be able, with your purified and sanctified knowledge, to glorify your God.

Apollos was by no means ignorant of Christ when he went to the little school of Aquila and Priscilla; on the contrary, he knew the teaching of John the Baptist, and knew it well. Now he might have made a sad mistake — he might have stopped with that, and when Aquila and Priscilla pointed out to him his deficiency he might have allowed his pride to assert itself and might have refused to accept the full truth of Christ Jesus. Just because he was otherwise so superior in learning and ability, he might the more easily have been tempted in this direction. This is the mistake of thousands today. There are churches upon churches in which the way of the Lord, as St. Luke here calls it, is taught imperfectly, to say the least. Some of them have only a small portion of the truth, and what they have may even be awry and spoiled by error. And we ourselves must constantly be reminded that these faulty and erroneous teachings are sadly inadequate, and none of us dare to think that they are right, or superior to the full truth of God as by his grace it is taught to us in our own church. Look at Apollos who put every other

consideration aside and joyfully learned at the feet of Aquila and Priscilla. When the full truth came to him he recognized it for what it was and opened his heart and mind to it. You need all that you can possibly get of the saving knowledge of Christ. Your children need it in the same way. Whatever else they may know, they dare not fall short in this most vital knowledge of all. The grandest fund of mere human knowledge is no substitute for any ignorance regarding the things of Christ. And it is the same with all those who in the churches about us have been taught imperfectly and with all kinds of errors. If any such hear me today, let none of them make the mistake which Apollos avoided. Come and learn the full truth of Christ's precious Gospel! Let no consideration stop you. No matter how humble the teachers, how unpretentious the church, gold is gold, diamonds are diamonds, wherever you find them, and you must learn to recognize them when they are placed in your hands, and their heavenly wealth must be made your own. Only the devil is pleased when he sees you spurn these godly riches, for he alone wants you a spiritual pauper where God wants you a spiritual millionaire.

### **III. Only By Being Fully Instructed In Christian Knowledge**

And now let us combine these three, Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos, and learn one more great lesson in the little school of Apollos, namely that the humblest as well as the most accomplished Christians can render the highest service to God and his church only by being fully instructed in Christian knowledge.

Suppose that Aquila and Priscilla had neglected their opportunities when St. Paul lived with them a year and a half, what could they have done when Apollos afterwards came and St. Paul was away? That golden opportunity to serve God and his church in the highest way would have been lost for them. Suppose that Apollos, when he found Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus, had declined to learn in their little school, what could he have done afterwards with all his fervency and eloquence, knowing too little to help build the church of Christ, and in constant danger of going astray with the little he knew? Another great blessing would have been lost, and lost when it was so sorely needed. But Aquila and Priscilla were ready when the opportunity came. They, humble as they were, gave one of the great teachers

to the early church. And Apollos used his opportunity when it came, and so he became next to the apostles themselves one of the great preachers and leaders of the church. Our text tells us how he went with letters of recommendation from the little band of Christians in Ephesus, to the church at Corinth. There he worked with the highest kind of success. St. Luke writes: "He helped them much which believed, through grace." He publicly refuted the Jews. And St. Paul himself writes, that he planted in Corinth, but Apollos watered, he thus completing what the great apostle had done. Do you see the glory of it all? And it all starts in Aquila's little school. The blessedness of Christian knowledge goes out in golden streams to make many rich in Jesus Christ. Without this knowledge there would have been none of this blessing; with this knowledge all this blessing actually came.

It has always been so, and it always will be so in the Christian church. Close the gates of Christian knowledge, and you shut out thousands of God's choicest blessings, both for yourselves and for others. The tree that finds too little soil cannot grow and bring a harvest of fruit. But see what happens when God's blessed truth is sought, appropriated, and used. Here are parents like Aquila and Priscilla filling the hearts of their children with imperishable wealth. In all their lives these children find blessing and bring blessing to others. Among them some may be like Apollos, who become teachers and pastors in the church. Many a godly mother especially has thus left a priceless legacy to the church, and eternity alone can show how far this legacy has spread. In the manifold relations of life, when friend speaks with friend, one workman with another, one Christian brother or sister with another, what good may not be done when we know fully the grace of God, the preciousness of Christ's atoning blood, the wisdom of God's ways and judgments. See the good seed you can sow for eternity if you have the seed to sow. Think of the woeful ignorance in the world in spiritual things. Endless opportunities are yours, if equipped with Christian knowledge, to let your light shine and help others upward on the way to God.

Let no opportunity, then, escape you to know ever more thoroughly the truth of God in Christ Jesus. Hear the preaching of his Word, and never miss an opportunity for it. Use your Bibles, and may dust never accumulate upon them. Count that money well spent which you save from luxuries, pleasures, and even from needs, if this must be, to place Christian books in your homes and to use them faithfully. Your church paper is a constant teacher, full of the finest instruction, fitted exactly to your needs; and the tu-

ition he charges is less than that of any other. Your pastor, and any friends you may have like Aquila and Priscilla, may help you much too through grace and the knowledge they are able to impart. God fill us with wisdom and zeal that we may take for ourselves what he has so richly provided for us all.

Keep in mind the little school of Aquila and Priscilla, and let it inspire you to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ to the glory of his name.

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## Outlines

The chief points in the text are two, namely the insufficient knowledge of Apollos, and the more perfect instruction given him by Aquila and Priscilla, We may handle the text accordingly: In the tent maker's home at Ephesus: Here we find a man who knew much, and yet knew all too little — And we find others who knew little, yet knew altogether enough. — How God prepared a great blessing for his church through a humble tent maker and his wife: He sent them St. Paul to teach them the way of the Lord — He sent them Apollos for them to teach him the way of the Lord — And so he finally sent out a new and mighty teacher to teach many others the way of the Lord. — We may also generalize the text, working its specific color into the elaboration: The blessedness of Christian knowledge: It delivers from ignorance — It protects against error — It builds up faith — It instructs others — It glorifies God.

### **Faith and the Great Treasure of Christian Knowledge**

1. Faith counts Christian knowledge a great treasure, and is bent on acquiring it.
2. Faith treats Christian knowledge as a great treasure, and diligently uses it.

### **The Humble Tent Maker's Christian School**

1. The teachers. — 2. The pupil. — 3. The instruction. — 4. The graduation (v. 27-28).

## **Learn from Aquila and Priscilla the Value of Christian Knowledge.**

1. The value of having such knowledge.
2. The value of employing such knowledge.

## **Our Great Need of Christian Knowledge.**

1. Many a man is satisfied to know only his trade, and little more, as if Aquila had been content with tent making alone.
2. How many women care only for their home-work, as if Priscilla had cared only to cook and sweep.
3. Great men of learning are proud of their titles, as if Apollos had gloried in his school honors at Alexandria.
- 4., Vast numbers of Christians stop with a few bits of the Gospel, as if Apollos had cared nothing beyond what he knew of the doctrine of the Baptist.
5. Too few grow to full maturity in knowledge like Aquila and Priscilla.
6. And so all too few are able to serve God and his church like Aquila and Priscilla, and through them Apollos.

# 43. Why was the Humble Dress-maker Dorcas Raised from the Dead? The Eighth Sunday After Trinity. Acts 9:36-43.

Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner. (Acts 9:36-43)

THE NAME TABITHA, or as her Greek speaking friends preferred to call her, Dorcas, has been lifted to special prominence on the pages of Holy Writ. The Spirit of God bade St. Peter raise this woman to life after she had died, and thus her name has come to be recorded by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles for all future generations of the church to read. What was the purpose of God in thus distinguishing this humble member of the early church? It certainly was not because Dorcas was such an exceptional woman, different from all others, and superior to them in her faith or in her Christian works. God indeed glorified his grace and power in the miracle he wrought through St. Peter upon Dorcas. But this he did in every other miracle as well, and in this respect we may say that all the miracles are alike. Beside this general likeness there is, however, an individual distinction; each miracle has a specific message to us. And it is important for us to discover just

what this message and specific purpose of God is. And so the question returns:

### **Why was the Humble Dressmaker Dorcas Raised from the Dead?**

The answer is not difficult when we look, not at Dorcas alone, but also at ourselves for whom this sacred record of God's great deed upon Dorcas was written through the agency of God's Holy Spirit. Dorcas was raised to this prominence in Holy Writ, in order that her lowly example of fruitful faith might stand out by God's own act for the church of all ages as an example to stimulate, us to a like fruitful faith.

## **I. Her Example of Fruitful Faith**

In the little city of Joppa on the west coast of Palestine a Christian congregation was founded by the apostle Philip who worked in all this region. Among the members was this humble and unassuming woman Dorcas. She appears in the apostolic story without any family connection whatever, for when she came to die the only persons gathering about her were the members of the church — no relatives of any kind. Most likely she had remained single, and if she possessed relatives they lived elsewhere. But though she stood alone, with so many of the ordinary avenues of activity closed to her, when the Gospel came to her through the preaching of St. Philip, she made a beautiful place for herself in that little congregation in Joppa. A living faith glowed in her heart, one that found avenues of all kinds to put forth a blessed activity. She had faith like that which Luther has so finely described: it does not ask what is to be done, or wait till it is told to do this or that, but before anyone comes to tell, has already done all kinds of blessed and delightful works. Alone, and without a family, she made a family for herself through the one talent she possessed. She knew how to use the needle, she was a dressmaker, and began to make dresses and robes, such as were worn in those days, for the poor widows in the congregation. And this she did with such devotion, love, and zeal, that finally when she died, and when St. Peter was called to the side of her dead body, a circle of these poor widows, her beneficiaries, gathered around the apostle and showed him the



dresses her loving hands had made for them, weeping with true affection when they told him of the loving friend and benefactor they had lost. And St. Luke writes about her for us to read, saying that she was a disciple, “full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.”

These are the things God wants us to impress upon our minds. Dorcas was nothing but an ordinary member of the church, neither rich nor socially prominent in any way. She was only one of the common people, of whom one of our greatest presidents has said that God surely loves them, for he made so many of them. Dorcas, in fact, was less favored than many others, for she stood all alone in life, and that was much harder in those days than it is in our own. She might have withdrawn to herself, and lived only for herself. But she did nothing of the kind. She had only one talent, as far as we know; but she never for a moment thought that this might serve her as an excuse — that because she was able to do so little she might as well leave this little too undone. No; in her restricted station, with her one little talent, she did so much, that the Holy Spirit made St. Luke write of her that she was “full of good works.” And these were not self-chosen works. They were true fruits of faith. The love of Christ shone in her heart and shone out from her life. Her one great desire was to serve him who had died to cleanse her soul from sin and make her a child and heir of God. In her gratitude for Christ she sought to do only what she knew would please him, and all else she put aside. The Old Testament is full of admonitions to help the widowed and the fatherless; and St. James writes for us in the New: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” Dorcas saw her opportunity where God himself had pointed it out, and when she saw it she used it to the utmost. These are the features that make her example so precious to us all. She was faithful in that which is least. She had but one talent, but she did not lay it up in a napkin, to leave it unused, she made that one talent count as if it had been ten. Instead of complaining that she was not favored like others, instead of envying others more favored than herself, she praised God for what he had made her through Christ, and used all that she had to glorify his name.

## **II. For The Church Of All Ages**

And now let us note that God himself has made this lowly example of fruitful faith stand out for the church of all ages.

He did it in his own way. Dorcas suddenly took sick and died. Those whom she had filled with love through her own love for them came and prepared her body for burial. Under ordinary circumstances that burial would have followed; one of God's quiet, unassuming saints would have been laid to rest, and the memory of her kindly deeds of faith would have been a rich legacy for them, richer by far than the wealth of worldly people which they leave to their greedy and spendthrift heirs. Yet God took this case of Dorcas, one like thousands of others in love and faithful service, in order to show us all just what he thinks of such fruitful faith and love. It was God's providence that Dorcas died when St. Peter was only nine miles away in the little town of Lydda. He might have had St. Peter come and relieve Dorcas of her fatal illness; even so we might have had her name in the Scriptures. But far more telling is this scene, when now St. Peter stands beside the dead body of Dorcas in the upper room in which her friends had laid her, and when all these weeping widows show to him the dresses Dorcas had made for them — mute, yet eloquent evidences of fruitful faith in Christ. What St. Peter saw and heard, God saw still more clearly, and God prized this as the true work of his Spirit. And so we see how through the apostle God himself in a most wonderful way put his divine approval upon such faith and love. St. Peter put them all out of the room, then knelt down and prayed that God might reveal to him his will. We know what that will was — to call Dorcas back to life by his almighty power. God made her a sign by this great miracle, a sign for all time to his church, that this example of fruitful faith, so lowly and unassuming in itself, might stand out before our eyes and proclaim to us what he thinks of Dorcas, and of all who by his grace become like unto her.

Beside the great examples of heroic faith God thus places this and other examples of lowly, humble faith and its precious fruit of love and good works. He needs heroic figures to stand out in battle with sin and unbelief, but he needs also gentle souls like Dorcas, who only had her needle, to help the needy and ease the affliction of the distressed, in the quiet places of the church. God bade none of the apostles call Stephen back to life when his enemies stoned him in their hate. St. James was killed by the sword, and he too was not raised from the dead. The glorious death of these martyrs speaks for itself. In their death they stand out so that we all can see them

and let their example stir us to follow in their steps. But we might easily overlook faith like that of Dorcas, good works like those of a lone dress-maker in Joppa. Therefore God puts his own shining approval upon their deeds. We have heard of Aquila and Priscilla, and how in their lowly station they served the Lord. And now we are told of Dorcas, more humble and with less opportunity still, yet one of the stars in the early church, bright with the light of Christ, in order to stir the humblest among us to know that their faith is precious too in God's eyes, and that every deed of faith, wrought by them in true love, is not forgotten by him. Not that God must now distinguish every humble disciple of Jesus for his faithfulness in the same way, or give his divine approval by miraculous means. This is wholly for him to determine. He knew what his church needed, and this need he has fully satisfied. The chief thing for you and me to know is what he thinks of fruitful faith like that of Dorcas. In the glorious miracle he wrought upon her learn to read what his grace and power will do at last for all those who follow the faith and good works of Dorcas.

### **III. To Stimulate Us To A Like Fruitful Faith**

The great miracle wrought upon Dorcas is thus to impress upon us her example, in order to stimulate us to a like fruitful faith.

Our whole church testifies in the Augsburg Confession that "faith should bring forth good fruits, and that men ought to do the good works commanded of God, because it is his will, and not on any confidence of meriting justification before God by their works." This sums it all up, and blessed are we if we translate this confession of Gospel truth into reality in our own lives.

It is the very nature of true faith in Christ to bring forth good fruits or good works. Faith like a tree planted by the rivers of water, the never failing streams of divine grace; it bringeth forth its fruit in due season, all manner of good works to the honor of God; and its leaf also shall not wither, for the life of faith constantly sends out new evidence of its presence. Only a dead faith is without good works, exactly like a dead tree without leaves or fruit. This great and precious doctrine is to be made alive for us by the example of Dorcas. See how her faith blossomed and bore fruit in the greatest abundance. Her very lowliness, and the restrictions of her life, call to us all, that

even the humblest life of faith can be and should be rich with good works. Think not of the handicaps in your station, but think of the grace and love of Christ who shed his blood for you. When the malefactor at Christ's right side came to faith, though his hands and feet were nailed fast, he used his tongue in good works, confessing his sins and his faith, praying to Christ, rebuking the impenitent malefactor, and giving an example to all who were near. Away then with these excuses which act like a blight on faith. Let not the decay of a worldly life and a love for sinful things eat into the tree of your faith and make it cease to bear. "Herein," said Christ in the parable of the vine and the branches, "herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." Jn. 15:8. Who wants a tree that is sickly or infested with worms, or fruit that is gnarly and half rotten? But a beautiful tree, covered with bloom, and then loaded with perfect luscious fruit — what a delight to call it your own! Such a tree in a quiet little corner in Joppa was Dorcas; such trees let us become in whatever part of his garden God has planted us.

But the true beauty of all good works is that they must be such as God has commanded. The heart of them is the fear and love of God; as Jesus said: "Ye have done it unto me." The world calls many things good, merely because they are outwardly beneficial. But the believer knows that God always looks at the inner motive of every word and work. Hence no work is good in God's sight that is not done for his sake, according to his will and command. Even when men try to please God, but set aside his Word and command, their acts are evil in God's sight. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love," says Jesus, "even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." This is what makes the good works of Dorcas so beautiful, they glowed with love to Christ and were all in true obedience to his commands. She chose no worldly scheme to help the poor, like those who arrange charity dances and balls. She sought no money from Jew and Gentile to clothe the widows in the church. She humbly followed the Master's command. The fruit she bore was sound and sweet. May all your good works have the same flavor.

And added to all this Dorcas placed no trust in her good works or their abundance. St. Luke emphasizes that she was a "disciple" of Jesus, that means a true believer in his all-sufficient merits. After Jesus bought forgiveness and salvation for her by his blood and death, and gave this priceless gift to her through faith, she did not try to buy it herself by her own

good works, or dishonor the gift Christ had bestowed upon her, by pretending to pay for it, or at least for part of it, by merits of her own. Thousands today are making all their supposed good works evil works in God's sight by trying to earn their salvation by them. Good works are delightful to God as fruits of faith, but abominable to him when offered as substitutes for faith. Good works are lovely in the sight of God as marks of our gratitude for Christ's gift of heaven to us, but they are insults to God when brought as payment of ours, in whole or in part, for entrance into heaven. And this we ought to realize the more since even our best works, though very fine in our sight, are imperfect and faulty in God's sight, needing Christ's blood to make them acceptable to him. But with a mind and heart like that of Dorcas we will never make the mistake of placing any trust in our works, but trusting alone in Christ's blood and righteousness we will lay our good works full of love and gratitude at the Savior's feet.

Thank God, then, for the example of Dorcas, and for having made this example so impressive by his miracle and by the pen of his inspired writer.

“Lord, may I ever keep in view  
The patterns thou hast giv'n,  
And ne'er forsake the blessed road  
That led them safe to heav'n.”

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## Outlines

When one glances at the outlines offered by Chas. Gerok in Lechler's commentary a warning against using allegory on this text will be seen to be necessary. It is an abuse of the simple, honest Scripture sense to make “Tabitha, arise!” a call to the “spirit of love and mercy” for it to arise, if not in men, then at any rate in women, and then to go on in this superficial allegorical strain. The same thing is true when Tabitha's arising is used to illustrate “the miracle of grace when a sinner is spiritually awakened.” May God preserve the church from these supposedly spiritual efforts — they are distressing inflictions! — As the text stands in our series its theme should center in good works. If the miracle as such is made the pivot of the sermon the text should have a different place in the church year. But there is no reason why

we may not dwell at length on the good works of Dorcas: The lovely example of Dorcas — her life so poor outwardly — so rich in faith and good works — so prominently set before us by God's miracle. — A dressmaker's wonderful legacy — what, she left for her friends in Joppa — what she left through God's intervention for us all. — Dorcas is a fine example for the work of Inner Missions, or true Christian charity — and we need no allegorical legerdemain to bring this example out. Dorcas, one of the first workers in Inner Missions: She had the true spirit which must animate this work — She found the right way to perform this work — She proved a great blessing to the church in this work — She was granted a signal commendation from God, one intended to commend all this work.

### **Tabitha's Obituary: An Example of how your Obituary ought to Read.**

1. It ought to have a section treating of your discipleship.
2. It ought to have a section telling of your good works.
3. It ought to have a section stating how God used you in furthering his church.

### **Woman's Highest Beauty.**

1. The beauty of faith. — 2. The beauty of good works and alms deeds.

### **A Little History of Dorcas, the Dressmaker.**

1. Her heart was filled with faith.
2. Her eyes were open to the need about her.
3. Her hands were diligent in works of love.
4. Her work was highly appreciated by the church.
5. Her whole life was signally approved by God.

### **Dorcas in the Work of Inner Missions.**

1. The Lord equipped her in a gracious way.
2. The Lord wrought through her in a beneficent way.

3. The Lord distinguished her in an exceptional way.

# 44. The Way to Real Spiritual Certainty. The Ninth Sunday After Trinity. John 7:10-18.

But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. Then the Jews sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he? And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people. Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews.

Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him. (John 7:10-18)

THE WORLD AROUND US is full of utterly false certainty, of complete uncertainty, and of all shades and degrees of doubt concerning things religious. One does not need to go far to find men firmly believing the most outrageous and preposterous things in religion, and staking their souls on what they believe — when it is perfectly plain that what they believe is wholly imaginary and without reality. Besides these with a false certainty there is a host completely uncertain; ask them, and they are not sure, and many of them think nobody really can be sure. They have come to the conviction that religion is a mere matter of opinion, and one opinion is about as good as another, especially if it tends to make people kind and brotherly toward each other. A third class includes many church members — they say and confess indeed with the church that they believe in Jesus Christ, but they are not really sure about their faith, they have all kinds of doubts, and are easily disturbed and upset. Many of them, when put to the test, fail utterly and fall away from their faith.



Now into this world full of false certainty, uncertainty, and tangles of doubt we are placed. In a way our position is by no means easy or devoid of danger. If left to ourselves we certainly would become the devil's prey. Even if we held to some convictions as certain and sure, like so many others we might be wholly wrong, wretchedly deceived. And if we had no such solid convictions we would, most likely be like the unsteady waves of the sea, or like the unstable sands of the sea-shore. But thank God, we are not left alone, to depend upon our own poor wisdom and foolish devices. God has come to us, and by his grace has opened to us

### **The Way to Real Spiritual Certainty,**

In our text Jesus meets us to lead us upon this way, to give us this blessed certainty. Let us yield our hearts to him, that this divine certainty may be ours.

## **I. Divine Realities of Blessed Importance**

The way to real spiritual certainty, as Jesus opens it to us, rests altogether on the mighty fact that there are divine realities of infinite and blessed importance to our souls.

When it comes to real spiritual certainty, mere thoughts, ideas, convictions on our part will not answer, I may think there is a bridge across the gulf. I may in my own mind be so sure of it that when I come to the brink of that gulf I actually step out, thinking my feet will be supported by that bridge. But there is no bridge, and so I plunge down into the abyss. This is the error of thousands. They have nothing but a sham spiritual certainty! They have made a certainty for themselves, or have let other men make it for them. It seems very real while it lasts, but the moment it is put to the test it vanishes like vapor. There is no reality behind it. The kind of God they thought existed, never existed at all — he was merely a picture of their imagination. The way of salvation they thought so sure and safe, was only a mirage in the clouds. There never was such a way except in their own heads. Can you think of anything more terrible than to find out at the end of life, when it is all too late, that your God is no God at all — just nothing? and your way of salvation no way at all — just nothing also? How the devil

must laugh when he sees the faces of the fools he thus deludes, at the moment when their fatal discovery is made!

There is a reverse to all this, equally terrible, and equally fatal. It is when men are so certain that the God revealed in the Scriptures is no God at all. They are sure either that there is no God, like the fool of whom the Psalmist writes, or they are sure that God is totally different from this revelation in the Scriptures. So also with the Savior Jesus Christ, with his doctrine, and his way of salvation. They are thoroughly convinced that all these are nothing but dreams, myths, fables, legends, either without any reality at all, or totally different from what the Scriptures record. You see at once what this means. When now life is over, when at the moment of death the great curtain of eternity lifts, what will they say when there they see God, Christ, all the realities Christ told them about, and the one glorious way of salvation he made for them and us all — and they despised all these realities as mere fables, they were so sure that these realities could be nothing but just fables. One of these scoffers has well said: If after all the Christians are right, we are certainly out!

The first and fundamental point, then, as regards real spiritual certainty is this, that there are divine realities on which to rest our certainty. If we fail to discover these realities, or if we cast them aside as unrealities, anything and everything else which we may put in their place will only make our doom certain. Build up a thousand dreams of your own, make them as fair and glorious as you please, they are nothing but dreams. They delude, they cannot save. We pity the insane man who in the asylum thinks himself a king, or a millionaire, when he is nothing but a beggar who has lost his mind. His attendants may humor him for the moment, but this does not change the reality. But a thousand times more pitiful are the sane men and women who go on through life with the same kind of hallucinations regarding God, Christ, and eternal salvation, with thousands encouraging them in their vain imaginations, till the day of grace is past and the fatal hour of reckoning comes. God deliver us from such folly. Away with all self-made notions! There are divine realities, more real than the earth we tread, the sky we see, the air we breathe, the food we eat. For all these earthly things will pass away at last. But God and the real things of God abide forever. And these we must find, really find, or we are lost.

Take warning then from the men in our text. Here are the wicked Jews who are certain Jesus is not the Savior. See how they mock him, saying that

all his teaching is nothing, because he did not learn it from their rabbis. Did they stop to think that their rabbis perhaps were wrong? and that the teaching of Jesus, just because it was totally different from that of their rabbis, was the divine reality? And here are the Jewish people, talking among themselves; some of them admitting that Jesus was at least a good man, others entirely certain that he was a deceiver. How wide of the mark they all are, even the best of them; groping in the dark, with no divine reality to hold to. And last of all we see here the brethren of Jesus, his own relatives, who thought he ought to follow a different course entirely, if he were really the Messiah or Savior of God. They thought that at once he ought to show himself as a wonderful king in Jerusalem at the great Jewish festival, work his mightiest miracles there in the capital, and get all men to acclaim him as king. That was their dream of a Savior — a poor, wretched dream indeed! Every one of these people put his own foolish ideas in place of the divine reality. As long as they did that they were lost. The day would come when they would wake up, and then too late see the true reality, realize that all their dreams were dreams only, and so go down in terror and dismay. Make no mistake like that. No thoughts or notions of yours will help you when the eternal realities of God finally assert themselves and blow all such notions and dreams away. Real spiritual certainty rests on the true realities alone. And resting there it will stand unshaken and triumphant forever.

## **II. The Divine Realities Must Be Brought To Us**

The way to real spiritual certainty, as Jesus reveals it to us and leads us upon it, takes us first of all to the divine realities, on which alone true certainty can rest. But how shall we find them? how shall we get hold of them in order to be sure of them? Our text gives answer: they must be brought to us.

Here is another fatal mistake which men make; many of them think that their own ability is enough to enable them to find out all they need to know about God and the way of salvation. This is the presumption they love to go on, and invariably it leads them astray. Not only do they set up their own wisdom in regard to life, death, and eternity, but setting that up they cast aside all that God tries to bring them when they find that it does not agree

with this wisdom of theirs. Instead of humbling themselves before God, they rise up proudly before him. He must say what they think, or they will not listen. He must do as they think he should, or else they scorn what he does. They are like the foolish patient who wants to dictate to the physician how he must cure the disease or heal the wounds, and when the physician attempts to follow the true course which would bring help they throw his remedies aside and use their own which are no remedies at all. In fact, as far as the soul is concerned, the thing is far worse. For we are all spiritually blind by nature. We cannot even see where our disease really is, and what our hurts really are. In our blindness we do not even know what we need to help us, to say nothing of ourselves applying any remedy. The one and only hope for us is that God in his mercy come to us, like the good Samaritan, and bring his help to us. What a pity when men refuse to do this — when they prescribe for God instead of letting him prescribe for them, and then in their blindness feel sure that they, and they alone are right.

Thank God that he follows a different course. All through the Scriptures we see that he comes to us, bringing the great saving realities of his love and help to us. He spoke to men by his own revelation, he sent them his holy prophets, and last of all his own Son. See him here in our text, as he came to Jerusalem with his heavenly teaching so different from the useless doctrine of their rabbis. And when the Jews found fault with that teaching, he never swerved from it for a moment, for in it alone was help for men. And now through the Scriptures he brings this blessed teaching to us, telling us still: “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.” He is not like the men of learning who have studied out something themselves, which they think is good for us, or which they offer because they are proud of it as their own production. No; the divine realities alone will help us — what God really wills concerning us, what he has really planned for our salvation. This, and this alone, we must have. And because of ourselves we cannot get it, God brings it to us himself. Here it is in his blessed Word.

It ought to go without much saying that what God thus brings to us through his Son is totally different from anything which men of themselves think. Has not God said: “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”? Is. 55:9. Blind reason constantly thinks it needs only a little moral help in order to rise at last to heaven; but God tells us that it takes nothing less than the blood and death of his own Son to free us from sin and make us fit for

heaven: And so in his Word he reveals to us all the wonders of his grace, showing us how he himself through his Son and Spirit has worked and still works to save our souls. What a mistake to set up our own thoughts against all this, and to top it off by pretending our own thoughts are more certain than those of God. Such wisdom and certainty are bound to prove utterly false. Learn then the only true way to certainty in things of the soul. God must teach us, and we must humbly bow to him and learn of him. The more we put our own blind wisdom aside, the more can true knowledge and real spiritual certainty enter our hearts through his Word. When the Jews followed their own thoughts they brought destruction upon themselves. The greater such perverted, baseless certainty is, the surer will be its overthrow at last. But they who sit at Jesus' feet shall find indeed what real spiritual certainty is, and the stronger it grows in them the happier will they be in consequence.

### **III. We Must Come Into Their Actual Experience**

The way to real spiritual certainty is the way of the divine realities which God himself must bring to us. But when he does bring them we must come into living touch and actual experience with them. Thus will real certainty be attained.

When the Jews mocked at Jesus because of his doctrine, trying to discredit it and him at the same time, Jesus told them and all his hearers plainly how his doctrine must be tested in order that we may be certain indeed that it is of God, and not some uncertain notion of man. This word of his counts for us today, for the test of certainty concerning the divine realities and the doctrine which brings them to us is forever the same. The great mistake of men is that they merely reason and argue about these realities and their doctrine. Then some think this, and others think that, just as the Jews in our text had various notions about Jesus, and just as the world today is full of them — every one a grand mistake. Blind men may stand around an object and argue all day what its form, color, qualities, and uses are, they get nowhere, even if they think they do. It is so with the great truth which is set before us in Jesus and by Jesus. All the arguments of men about him are blind judgments of the blind. One thing alone will lead to true certainty, and

Jesus himself tells us what it is — try this doctrine of his. It is not intended for the brain, but for the soul. Put it into your soul, and you will find that it does what it says, far more than you ever thought. “If any man will do his will,” Jesus declares, “he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself,” that is some foolish wisdom of men.

Let us understand well what Jesus means. What is God’s will concerning us? and what does it mean to do his will? His will is by no means that as we are we shall try to come up to his commandments, attempting to fulfill them. Not a man of us could succeed. We would all fail miserably, and God would have to reject us all in his righteous judgment. This will that Jesus names is the good and gracious will of God. “This is the will of him that sent me,” Jesus says, “that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” John 6:40. To will the will of God, then, is by his grace to believe in Jesus Christ as God sets him before us in his Word. To will God’s will is to take his Savior, to accept his salvation, to let him apply it to our hearts. Then, not by reasoning and arguing about Jesus, but by our own living experience with him will we come to know him, and that means to know his teaching or doctrine. The moment we yield to the grace of God and let him make Jesus our own by faith, that moment our eyes will begin to open, we will see what no man without God’s ’grace in his soul, without such faith in his soul can possibly see. Thus, and thus alone, the full reality of God’s salvation will become to us what it is, namely a blessed reality. In other words real spiritual certainty will thus be ours.

There are indeed some things, and Christ’s salvation is the greatest among them, which we can know, really know, and thus be sure of, only by our own personal experience of them. Savages in tropical countries laugh incredulously when you tell them that water can be as hard as rock; they cannot think such a thing possible, until they actually see and feel the water that is frozen to ice. That simple personal experience gives them a new certainty. A man born stone deaf has no conception of sound, even though you tell him a thousand times about its wonders. If God by a miracle opens his ears, a whole new world is revealed to him — he now knows with a certainty he never thought possible just what sound is, the singing of birds, the human voice, and all the harmonies of music. It is similarly with real spiritual certainty, only that it deals with higher realities in a higher world. It is

not a certainty of the senses merely, of the eye or of the ear, but of the soul itself.

Here is conscience, shaking your soul with secret terrors. You try to hush it, but it breaks out again and again. There is only one real help against the accusations and fears of conscience. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin; there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. Christ's pardon gives us what all the millions of earth could not buy, true peace and rest for the stricken conscience. When once you have tasted that, then, you will know, and know with a blessed inward certainty, that this doctrine of Jesus and of the pardon in his blood is indeed just what he says it is. And the more you press that doctrine to your soul, the more its certainty will fill and strengthen you.

Take the doctrine of the new life which Jesus creates in us by his Spirit. It sounds like folly to men of unbelief. But let him implant that life in you, and you will know with certainty that it is real and blessed indeed. He who feels the power of Christ in his soul, enabling him to trample sin under foot, to resist the devil and make him flee; he who feels the promptings of God's Spirit to do in holy love what God wants him to do — he, I say, will know indeed that there is such a divine life. And the more he lives that life and enjoys what it brings, the more will he smile at those who think that life is nothing but a delusion.

Especially when we pass into the dark shadows of life, into its dangers and terrors, this heavenly certainty regarding Christ and his promises and help comes out for our souls as a blessed possession. To know that we are not alone, that Christ is with us as he has said, that he will never leave us nor forsake us, to find that he does hear our prayers, and that they bring us a mighty comfort from above — this experience has helped many a wavering soul. With the great Rock of Ages to support him he passes safely through the flood, and his soul is filled with the divine certainty which Jesus works through faith. It is voiced in the beautiful lines:

“I know, whom I believe in,  
I know what firm abides,  
When all around me fading  
Away like vapor glides.  
I know what lasts forever,  
When all things shake and fall,  
When wit the wise forsaketh,  
And craft doth craft forestall.”

The one way to attain this certainty is the will to do God's will, the will which means living faith and trust in Jesus Christ, an actual and blessed experience with the divine realities which center in him.

## **IV. True Certainty**

When by his grace Jesus has wrought this faith in us, then will we be certain indeed.

Heavenly treasures will be ours, and we will enjoy them day by day. They are pardon from God, peace in God, a new and living hope, a strong and abiding comfort, strength and help to live a new life. All these will be ours through Christ. All of them will be wrought in us by the power of his Word. All the golden promises of God in Christ will no longer be to us mere beautiful pictures, but we will be in the midst of these promises, their heavenly fulfillment actually begun in our souls and going on in ever richer fulfillment day by day. No uncertainty will threaten our future; ours will be the divine assurance, sealed and made our own through Christ, that joys eternal await us just beyond the shadow line of death. We will sing like David: "I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me... And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

This is the highest kind of certainty possible for our souls. God himself is behind it, the heavenly gift of his own Son who lived and died for us, and a thousand promises of his all sealed with the blood and death of Jesus. What if the glories of heaven are still hidden from our vision — God's promises are not hidden, on them we can feast our eyes. What if unbelief mocks at us — it has nothing to offer but cold, empty denials, and the fading joys of earth which Ave know cannot reach beyond the grave. Shall we trade our blessed joys for these dead leaves? Shall we drop the pearls of God's promises for such a handful of dead ashes? That were folly indeed. No; let us hold to this real spiritual certainty, made ours by the living experience of faith, and sing with ever increasing joy and satisfaction:



"Faith is sure, where sight is blind:  
While lost sense may nowhere find  
Hope, to stay a sinking soul  
When the billows o'er it roll,  
Faith directs its saving quest  
To the cross, and there finds rest;

Faith, in childlike trust, is wise:  
Trusting him who never lies;  
By whose grace the weak grow strong,  
Change their sighing into song.  
Praise be thine, O Lord of might!  
Faith shall end in glorious sight."

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## Outlines

The heart of the text is the 17th verse, which answers the question: How can I know that the doctrine of Jesus is really from God? The answer is plain: Not by listening to what men say of his doctrine (v. 10-15) — but by doing with this doctrine what Jesus says. — Jesus shows us the way to real spiritual knowledge: this is not a theoretical way — this is simply the experimental way. — Different classes of men are brought before us in our text. Their attitude toward Jesus is wrong. Some are hostile, others are more or less undecided, while Jesus points to a full and satisfying decision. A theme following out this thought would be: What about Jesus and his doctrine? Are you (1) against him? Then you are fighting against God. — Are you (2) undecided? God help you. — Are you (3) entirely for him? Then thank God. (Langsdorff.) — In any sermon which deals with the human will doing the will of God the preacher must hold fast the bondage of the natural will, as this is fully confessed in F. C. II.

### **The Blessed Certainty of Faith.**

1. It takes the teaching of Jesus.
2. And does with that teaching just what Jesus says.
3. And thus it learns in the surest way what that teaching is and what it brings.

## **Can I Really be Certain in regard to the Doctrine of Christ?**

1. No — if I listen to men.
2. Yes — if I do what Jesus says.

## **Faith as a Living Experience.**

1. Faith is indeed an experience —
2. An experience filled with certainty —
3. An experience with such certainty as to triumph over all opposition.

## **The Divine Certainty of Faith.**

1. It rests on the Word
2. It comes by faith.
3. It brings joy and victory.

# 45. The Greatest Guilt in the World. The Tenth Sunday After Trinity. Acts 13:44-49.

And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. (Acts 13:44-49)

IN THE SERMONS OF THE PAST SUNDAYS we have heard one great call after another to faith. God himself came to us with his grace, with his gift of salvation in Christ Jesus, with his promises of heaven and eternal glory, and in his gracious coming a power was exerted upon our hearts to draw us unto him, to lift us out of our sins, to fill us with faith and trust, and thus to make us God's children and heirs of salvation. Again and again we were also shown examples of true faith. We saw how men did believe and receive all God's blessings for time and for eternity. Our text continues in this line. Here too we see how in the city of Antioch in Asia Minor, when St. Paul preached there the grace of God in Christ Jesus, many of the Gentile people were glad, received the Word by faith, and entered the door of salvation. But as in some of the previous texts we are here shown also those who after all refused to believe and continued in unbelief. The same grace and help came to them as to the rest, but they would not have it. The chief unbelievers set before us in our text are the Jews of Antioch. All through the story of the New Testament, beginning with Jesus' own personal work, and continuing through the work of the apostles we constantly meet this unbelief of the

Jews. It has persisted to this day. Jesus himself foretold that the generation of the Jews would not disappear till the end of time. They would stand out in the entire history of the world since the days of Christ as the most fearful example of unbelief, and warning for all of us that none of us may become like them.

We certainly need this warning, for men are ever inclined to reject Christ in unbelief. God's call to faith and to continuance in faith must be reinforced by his warning against unbelief. Too often we fail to see what unbelief really is; the enormity and terribleness of it is felt too little. It is for this reason that the Scriptures hold up the Jews before us in warning. In them we are to see that of all the guilt which sinful men incur in the world none is greater, none more deadly than that of unbelief. Mark well, then, what God has to say concerning

### **The Greatest Guilt in the World**

Note: I. It is the outcome of the greatest crime, and II. Its own outcome is the greatest judgment.

## **I. It Is The Outcome Of The Greatest Crime**

The greatest guilt in the world — can it be that unbelief produces this guilt? Thousands of unbelievers will deny it most emphatically, and I fear that many a believer may feel that the statement is too strong. But unbelief dare not be judged by its own blindness, nor by the imperfect sight of some who believe. God alone is the true judge, and his verdict is recorded in his Holy Word. And there indeed we learn that in God's sight the guilt of unbelief is that of the greatest crime, and thus beyond question the greatest guilt in the world. And once that is duly impressed upon us, our hearts will shrink from all unbelief. We will no longer tamper with it in any form. Our one confession and prayer will be: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!"

The world is full of guilt of all kinds, and much of it to our minds is black and terrible enough. We think of theft and murder, and the whole long line of what are called crimes. These sometimes rise to enormous proportions, as when through one man's wickedness thousands are robbed or plunged into cruel torture and death. If we had been with St. Paul at Anti-

och and had asked those Jews assembled in the synagogue what the greatest guilt in the world is, we very likely would have heard the same kind of an answer so many, and even Christians today, would give — they would have pointed us to flagrant and dastardly deeds of criminals who set at naught the laws of God and man. Now there is no question as to the greatness of the guilt thus incurred. But think a moment. The Law of God is the expression of his holy will. It is so written in men's hearts that their own consciences, at least to, a large extent, second that Law and cry out against the open crimes which trample upon that Law. It is terrible guilt to go against God and his Law and set him and his holy will at open defiance. But when all is said, and the full measure of this guilt is taken, we will find that there is still greater guilt in the world — this that we see exemplified in the Jews, and in so many around us today who repeat the guilt of the Jews. It is the guilt of unbelief.

Why is this so great? Unbelief deals with something higher than the holy will of God. When St. Paul came to the Jews in Antioch he brought something higher than the Law of God which the Jews already had. He brought the message of God's love, of his good and gracious will for our salvation. This is far higher than God's holy will, because in his gracious and saving will God gave his only begotten Son Jesus Christ to work out this saving will of his. Not in the Law, but in the Gospel God offered his Son for us. Not to the Law, but to the Gospel God attached the priceless blood of his own Son. If God revealed his holy will in the Law and its commandments, in the Gospel he laid open his heart to us, and all the love, grace, and mercy that is in this heart. In the Law he makes demands upon us, and because he is our God and Maker we are under obligation to honor those demands by perfect obedience, and we incur terrible guilt when we rebel against these demands and transgress them openly in sin and crime. But in the Gospel God makes no demands, he comes to us with the highest and most precious gift of his love, he comes to give us the blood of his own Son to cleanse and save us forever. St. Paul was the bearer of this heavenly gift to the Jews at Antioch. In fact, he declared to the Jews that God's love toward them was so great that to them first of all men the Word of God with its heavenly gift should be spoken. And this same Word is now spoken to us by similar messengers sent of God. To go counter to this Word is more serious, more wicked, more damnable than to rebel against any or all the commandments which God has given.

And here the enormity of the guilt of unbelief rises before our eyes. What did the Jews in Antioch do when they set themselves against the Gospel of God? They opposed God not only in a general way, they opposed what is highest and most blessed in God. They scorned his love and grace. They cast down and trampled upon what is dearest of all to God, namely the blood of his own Son. Think of the sacrifice which God made in his Son's death for these Jews and for all the sinners in the whole world, utterly unworthy of such sacrifice. Yet God gave his own Son in order to save and deliver them from their sin and guilt. To free these unworthy sinners he heaped their sins upon his innocent Son, and made him die that they might escape. And now, having done this, and bringing all this love of his, this precious, saving blood of his Son by his Gospel herald to these miserable sinners, what do they do? They cast it from them. Our text says the Jews at Antioch contradicted and blasphemed the Gospel of Christ which St. Paul preached to save them. That was their crime. Its name is unbelief. It shows itself sometimes in an open and coarse way, as in these Jews, sometimes without such open and violent antagonism. But always at bottom it is the same. It is man's crime against God's love, against God's Son and his blood, against God's Word and Spirit bringing this blood to us. Measure the crime aright — it is so great because it sins against the greatest thing in all heaven and earth, against the very blood of God's Son, and the salvation so dearly bought by this blood for us all. As great as is our salvation, namely the highest gift of heaven; as great as is the love which prepared our salvation, namely the highest thing in God himself; as great as is the price of our salvation, namely the blood and death of God's own Son; as great as is the Gospel, having all these highest treasures in it and bringing them to us, who deserve them in no way whatever — so great is the crime which rejects these gifts of God, treats them like lies and follies, fights against them, and tramples upon them. And so great is the ensuing guilt — indeed the greatest guilt in the world.

And this guilt is even increased when we note what unbelief in its desperate wickedness involves for others. Jesus said it of the Pharisees, and we see it again here in Antioch among the Jews who opposed St. Paul. It is the same today wherever unbelief arises and shows itself. Jesus said, the Pharisees would not enter the kingdom of God themselves through his ministration, and in addition they tried to keep other sinners from entering. This is the other side of the terrible crime of unbelief. The Jews at Antioch, when

they rejected Christ, contradicting and blaspheming against the Gospel of St. Paul, thereby did all that was in their power to rob also the souls of the Gentiles in that city of Christ and salvation. Measure this part of the guilt of unbelief aright. What a crime to rob a man of his property, to filch a woman's honor from her, to take a man's life in cold blood. But to destroy a man's soul by snatching Christ's blood away from it, and by filling that soul also with unbelief — there is no greater crime than this, and therefore no greater guilt in the world, Jesus says, it were better for a man to have a millstone hung about his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea, than to offend and lead into unbelief and damnation the soul of one of his little ones. And this unspeakable guilt, the guilt against other men's souls, must be added to the guilt against God's love and his Son's blood, when weighing unbelief.

Do you see now why God's Word is full of warning against unbelief? If, then, you have ever thought of unbelief as a light thing, by all means revise your estimate of it. If ever thoughts of unbelief or doubt have entered your heart, see now what they involve and crush them out by God's grace and Word as the worst poison of the devil. There is no greater guilt than this, because unbelief is the greatest crime possible in this world.

## **II. Its Own Outcome Is The Greatest Judgment**

And just as the greatest of all guilt is the outcome of this greatest of all crimes, so also its own outcome is the greatest of all the judgments of God.

All other sins, however great and terrible they may be, are after all only part and parcel of the sin of man which God saw dragging our race down to perdition, and for which in his boundless grace he provided full and complete atonement in his Son's blood. Look at the sinful woman in Simon's house. She was an outcast among men, and yet when she came and knelt in sorrow at Jesus' feet, he did not cast her off — he pardoned all her guilt. Look at the malefactor on the cross. He had committed crimes so great that not only the law of the land condemned him to the most ignominious death on the cross, but he himself confessed that he and his fellow malefactor were receiving the due reward of their deeds. But when he turned in repentance to Jesus and asked to be remembered in his kingdom, Jesus forgave

him all his sins and promised to meet him in paradise. It is so with men's sins generally. There is pardon for all of them the moment men repent. In fact, in view of these very sins God sent his Son and made him to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

But what of unbelief? Our text tells us. When the Jews in Antioch, with all their past sins upon them, spurned the Gospel of God's pardon in Christ Jesus, the holy apostle had to announce to them: "Seeing you put the Word of God from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." Understand well what these words of Paul mean. There is something peculiar about unbelief. All other sins still leave the door of God's pardon open, but when men settle down in unbelief, their very unbelief shuts this door of pardon for them. When men have had the Gospel and its blessed pardon, but have determined to put it from them, casting it aside as something they do not want, then there is nothing left for God but to take his precious Gospel away, and leave such men to their self-imposed judgment and damnation. So St Paul ceased preaching Christ to the Jews at Antioch; he preached only to the Gentiles who still left open the hope of winning them for salvation. No doubt the Jews mocked at Paul for thus going to the Gentiles in Antioch. They were now more than ever averse to this Gospel which would bring people like the Gentiles into the church of God. In this they are like unbelievers generally who deride the Gospel when it turns from them at last to seek out poor sinners who will receive it by faith. All such unbelievers, however, fail to see what we must see clearly and learn well today, namely that the worst judgment and penalty which can possibly come upon a man is this that God abandons him to his fate, takes Christ, Christ's pardon and blood away, and carries it to others, leaving them in their sins and unbelief, damned and lost as they are.

So fearful is this greatest of all judgments of God upon living men that we must view it carefully in order to draw no wrong conclusions. Note, then, that it is the nature of unbelief to put away from the sinner's soul his only means of escape. God prepares for man an hour of grace when he makes a strong and effective effort to bring him to repentance and faith. It is the accepted time, the day of salvation, 2 Cor. 6:2. God so guides the lost sinner and the course of the Gospel that the two meet, and meet in such a way as to enable the Gospel with its heavenly power to reach down into the sinner's heart. Then saving faith ought to be the outcome. But if in that precious day of salvation man hardens his heart in unbelief against the Gospel,



thrusting it and all its saving power away from his soul, the grace of God and all his saving guidance is brought to naught. Then, in the words of our text, man himself judges himself unworthy of his salvation. By casting away his own salvation intended for him by God he adjudges himself worthy only of damnation. There is nothing more terrible that any man can do.

Thank God, however, that his grace and patience are so great that he on his part never acts hastily. In thousands of cases, instead of at once accepting man's wicked judgment on himself when casting God's Gospel aside, and making that the final judgment of man's damnation, God tries again and again. Jesus has pictured this patience to us in the parable of the unfruitful fig tree. He digs about it and dungs it, to see if after all his grace will succeed. All this patience, this waiting, this renewed effort is God's superabounding grace. Not one bit of it has man deserved when he turns against the Gospel in unbelief. It is God's praise and glory that so often when man begins in unbelief God's grace in Christ Jesus after all triumphs over that beginning unbelief. This too we see among the Jews down to the present day. Though as a people they are hardened in unbelief, here and there some after all are won for Christ and salvation. Praise God for every case of this kind! And the same thing we see among those who are not Jews. At first some spurn the Gospel and refuse to believe it. If God left them at once they would be irrevocably lost. But his grace returns, and in many a case it triumphs in the end, implanting faith in the heart after all. — O the mercy of God whose patience is so great! When we see it among men, how at times even in the eleventh hour it brings them to Christ and the heavenly goal, let us adore it and glorify his name.

But be not deceived; God is not mocked. His Gospel is no shoe-rag for any man to kick aside, and think that God, because he is so kind and patient, must return to him. The blood of Christ is no cheap thing, because God offers it to sinners without money or price. Let no man dream that he can mistreat that blood and make God offer it to him anew. There comes a time when even the patience of God is at an end. In the city of Antioch the Jewish synagogue was left bare of the Gospel — God took it away. It rests in the secret counsel and judgment of God when he will abandon those who start in unbelief, by drawing his Gospel away from them. No man is able to pry into these mysterious judgments. But woe to him whom God's grace is thus compelled to abandon. It is the greatest of his judgments; for with grace and the Gospel withdrawn man's soul is forever doomed.

Whenever, then, man says no to God in unbelief, let him realize that God too may accept that no. What a fearful risk and danger! Is there anyone among us who would for a moment dare to incur it? Oh, then, let us ever keep our hearts open for the Word of his grace. Only thus, by constant faith and submission to him, can we be safe and have the comfort of his salvation.

Finally, let us realize too what it means when in our waywardness, in our many sins and faults, God's Word, instead of abandoning us, comes to rebuke us, to correct us, to smite us, to turn us if possible into a better course. Let no man among us resent this work of God upon his heart. For as long as God follows us with his Word, so long he has not turned away from us, although on our part we may often have turned away from him. With this thought to help us, let us gladly bow before God in repentance and kneel in faith at the foot of the cross. Blessed are they who by God's grace cut loose from all unbelief and yield themselves wholly and constantly to him and his Word in humble faith.

The greatest guilt in the world is that of unbelief, because it is the outcome of the greatest crime, insulting the blood of God's own Son, and because its own outcome is the greatest judgment, casting away salvation and itself choosing damnation. Once unbelief is fixed and established in a man, his doom is sealed. He who makes God turn from him with his grace in Christ is surely lost forever, and lost where he might have been saved. May God impress these mighty truths upon our souls, in order that we may turn in utter dread from all forms of unbelief, diligently hold to his Word and grace, prize our faith above every treasure, and pray to him that he may keep and augment it, until the heavenly goal is reached at last.

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## Outlines

While this text deals chiefly with unbelief and obduracy it also contains an example of faith, for the Gentiles at Antioch were glad to hear the Gospel, and many came to faith. So we may preach on: The division caused by the Gospel: Some through guilt of their own turn against the Gospel — Some through the grace of God are won for the Gospel — To which class do you mean to belong? — If we center our attention on the unbelief and hardness

of heart manifested by the Jews of Antioch, we may use Paul's summary of what unbelief really does: The Jews at Antioch show us why unbelief is so fatal: It is because unbelief puts the Gospel from itself — It is because unbelief judges itself unworthy of everlasting life — It is because unbelief makes God withdraw the Gospel. — Again we may ask: Whose fault is it when men refuse to believe? We have an answer when we look at the Gospel — We have a fuller answer when we look at those who do not believe — We have the complete answer when finally we look also at those who do believe. — A point of interest is found in the last half of v. 48: Am I ordained unto eternal life? I surely am not, if I reject God's order of salvation in the Gospel, as did so many of the Jews in Antioch. — I surely am, if I accept God's order of salvation in the Gospel, as did so many of the Gentiles in Antioch.

### **The Word of God the Door to Eternal Life.**

1. Opened for all alike.
2. Barred only by obduracy.
3. Entered through divine grace.

### **The Tragic Story of the Hardening of the Heart, Repeated in the Jews at Antioch.**

1. The first chapter — God graciously brings the Gospel of salvation to lost sinners.
2. The second chapter — men wickedly close their hearts and ears against the Gospel.
3. The third chapter — God is compelled to withdraw his Gospel and leave the hardened sinners to their fate.
4. The fourth chapter — God always finds others in whom his Gospel succeeds with its blessed work.

### **The Grace of God in the Word.**

1. It is all-sufficient — as all those attest who are brought to faith.
2. It is not irresistible — as all those attest who harden themselves in unbelief.

## **What The Gospel Did At Antioch**

1. The Jews refused to hear the Gospel — and it left them.
2. The Gentiles rejoiced to hear the Gospel — and it blessed them.

# 46. The Little Child in Jesus' Arms. The Eleventh Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 18:1-5.

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. (Matthew 18:1-5)

OUR TEXT TELLS US something of the last visit which Jesus paid to Capernaum, where he established his mother and thus made his home during the three years of his public ministry. His disciples gathered about him in the house where he made his stay.

On the road, when together they had traveled to Capernaum, the disciples had discussed what to them seemed a very important question. It was — who of them should be the greatest in the kingdom which they expected Jesus was about to establish. In spite of all that Jesus had taught them they thought only of a grand outward and earthly kingdom, and Jesus as the most exalted and glorious earthly king. Each of the disciples, accordingly, was eager to have as high a place as possible in this kingdom, to be as great a lord and prince as he could in this coming realm. Very likely in their discussions with each other each disciple emphasized his special claims to be ranked above some at least of the others. They were careful, however, to say nothing about this matter to Jesus himself; it seems, after all, they were a little ashamed of this rivalry of theirs. But what happens now when they are all together with the Lord in the house at Capernaum? Jesus knows all about their dispute; he makes them tell what they have been talking about; he does it in order to settle this question for them once for all — to settle it

also for all future time for all of his followers and does it in his striking and effective way, so that none of us may ever forget the answer he makes.

In the house where Jesus stayed there were little children; and now when the disciples needed to be taught who is the greatest in the spiritual kingdom of Jesus, he called one of these little children to him, set this little child into the midst of the disciples, and then took the child in his arms — there was the answer the disciples needed — there is the answer we all need. It is right there in

### **The Little Child in Jesus' Arms.**

## **I. What Every Follower Must Be**

Look at this child in Jesus' arms. It is an illustration of what you and I and every follower of Jesus must be in his kingdom.

What a wonderful picture — this little child in the arms of Jesus! What does it illustrate about us and our relation to Jesus and his kingdom?

Hear what Jesus says about this little child and us. “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the, kingdom of heaven.” The disciples had disputed about the high places in the kingdom; Jesus tells them that none of them would even get into the kingdom unless they became as the little child in his arms. For every one who enters his kingdom and really gets into his kingdom does it only by becoming just like this little child. That child is a true picture of every follower of Jesus. We can sum it all up in one word. Christ's followers are all childlike.

Look what the little one did, when Jesus, called. It came to him. Look what it did when he spread his arms to take it. It let him lift it to his breast. There it nestled quiet and content, happy to be held by this loving friend. So is every true believer.

Childlike trust and childlike humility are the marks of true faith. A little child is wholly dependent. It cannot care for itself; another must care for it. It needs the love that will call it, take it up, and give to it what it ought to have. It sets up no claims and requirements of its own — how can it? It is able to earn nothing, to bring no deeds or great works for which it ought to be paid. It has nothing but its needs, and could never satisfy these itself.

Love must take it, tenderly embrace it, care and provide for it, give it all that it ought to have. And on that love every little child casts itself without question, and is happy and content to receive it in sufficient measure. That is childlikeness, and that is the mark of true faith wherever faith is found.

Have you thought of your soul after the manner pictured by this little child in Jesus' arms? Do you realize that your soul is wholly dependent just like a little child? What could you do for your soul, if left to yourself? As little as a tiny child could do for itself, if it were abandoned. It would perish, and so would you. And dependent means that one far greater, wiser, mightier than you must open his arms' to you, stoop down to you, and with his mighty love embrace your soul and give it what it needs, just as Jesus pictured it in taking up the little child. You know what this love of his is. You see its outstretched arms on the cross, when Jesus died to wipe out your sins with his blood. You hear his loving voice in the Gospel: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." You feel its power when this love absolves you from all your sins, assures you that you are God's child, comforts you with the sweetest promises, and guides and keeps you amid temptations and dangers. What does all this ask of you? Only this that you take it all just as a little child takes the love showered upon it. It is all so simple and easy, if only we will learn what Jesus shows us here. Give up all your own thought, effort, striving, claims, and demands. Sink into the Savior's arms, pillow your head on his bosom. Be nothing but a little trustful, humble child, and Jesus' arms will close about you — you will be his indeed, and thus truly in his kingdom.

But notice that the Savior adds another word in showing us what the child in his arms illustrates about us and his kingdom. "Whoso therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Only by becoming childlike can we enter Christ's kingdom, and then by growing in childlikeness will we become greater and greater in his kingdom.

That little child in Jesus' arms never thought of itself at all when Jesus picked it up. It did not boast of being such a lovely, deserving, excellent, worthy child. It looked only at Jesus, his loving eyes and face, and regarded only his voice and manner so assuring and kind. On its part it was just a little child, and nothing more. It did not even try to be more, it let Jesus be more. That was its humility as a child. And in that it is an illustration for us.

In Christ's kingdom those are the greatest who are most like this little child in Jesus' arms. We grow in spiritual greatness as we grow in childlike humility. The less we trust ourselves, and the more we trust him; the less we boast of ourselves, and the more we glory in his gifts; the less we think of what we deserve, and the more we rejoice in what the Lord deserves from us — the greater will we be in his kingdom. And that means greater in this sense — not that men will call us great, or that we will appear grand and important, but that the Lord will think more of us, because thus we are more and more as he wants us to be. Behind this thought of the Lord, however, and his estimate of greatness in his kingdom, lies this secret that we must all learn more and more. The humbler we are before the Lord, the more we realize our utter helplessness and nothingness, the more is he able to bestow of his grace and gifts upon us. If you are a vessel already half full, how much can he put in? Only half as much as he could, if you came to him a vessel empty altogether. The less we have of our own, and the more we have from him, the richer, higher, greater, and the more blessed are we in his sight. The little child in Jesus' arms illustrates it. Its complete and lovely humility made it so lovely in the eyes of all who beheld it. That child is to be our pattern. Christ's Spirit wants to make us like it, and thus raise us as high as possible in his kingdom.

## **II. A Warning For Us**

But just as this little child in Jesus' arms is an illustration for us, so also it stands as a warning for us.

Remember the disciples and their foolish dispute about being the greatest in their Lord's kingdom. They were in danger of losing thereby not only all greatness in Christ's kingdom, but the very kingdom itself. Think for a moment what eventually must have happened, if St. Peter for instance had claimed preeminence because on various occasions he had stood up and spoken for all the rest, and the Lord had addressed him too as the spokesman of the rest. Or if John and James had claimed preeminence because they forsook more property and a greater business and income here in Galilee than any of the rest of the Twelve; or if they had claimed greater consideration because they were among the first to follow the call of John the Baptist, and then again first in following the call of Jesus. Or if Judas Is-



cariot had put forth his claims of being such an excellent administrator, since the Lord himself had made him treasurer of their little company. Beyond question when the disciples argued about greatness in the coming kingdom of Christ, each one found something in himself for which he thought he ought to have special recognition, and when the claims of the one were held against those of another there was danger of quarreling and envy, of actual strife' and division. No wonder that Jesus treated this? dispute among his disciples as a serious matter, gathered them all about him, and then placed before them the warning pictured in the little child in his arms.

We, the later disciples of Christ, are often enough thrown into the same kind of danger as the original Twelve, when we begin to think of our own high qualities, our work, our gifts, our sacrifices, etc., for the Lord and his church. And this danger increases when we are actually honored in the church by the Lord and our brethren. It is as when Peter thought himself great when Jesus honored him; or Peter, James, and John, when on several occasions the Lord selected them to witness what the rest were not called to witness. Again we are likely to fall into this danger, either of being very little in Christ's kingdom, or of falling out of it entirely, when men refuse to honor us as we think we ought to be honored — when our names are put last instead of first, when others are chosen for office and work, and we are left out, when others are praised, and no one mentions our merits and good deeds. How easy then to feel aggrieved, just as it is easy to feel puffed up when we are praised and honored.

Look at that little child in Jesus' arms, and together with the twelve disciples take, to heart the warning which is set before us by this child.

It was nothing but Jesus' love which so distinguished that child. It made no boast or claim of any kind, it simply let Jesus' arms enfold it. It was proud not of anything it did or had done for him, but of what he was now doing for it. It did not exalt itself in the least, it let Jesus alone exalt it.

Read the warning here set before us. He that exalteth himself shall be abased, but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. We are great in the church of Christ, not for what we are and have, but for what Christ gives us, does for us, makes of us. Now the moment we begin to reckon up what we are and have done, and thus try to set ourselves up above others, we lose what Christ would give us and the honor he would bestow upon us. Thus in the very effort of making ourselves great we become small and inferior.

Grasping at the shadow of our own excellence, we drop and let go the gifts of Jesus. We are like the fool who changes the gold which is given him for the cheap brass which he is able to secure. And remember that all our work, gifts, sufferings, and any other merits in the church of Christ all have their value only through Jesus himself, especially through the humility with which we lay these deeds at his feet. If we make a boast of these things we spoil them completely, Christ cannot accept them, and if we keep on in this boast and look down upon others in thus boasting we sink far beneath them, and may, in fact, sink so far that we' drop out of Christ's kingdom altogether.

What a revelation there will be at the last day! Many who thought themselves high in the church, who pushed themselves forward, and made others bow to them, who had their names first on every occasion and all other names placed behind theirs, will then discover that their pride only deceived them. They lost the humility of faith which makes truly great with Christ; they threw away the childlikeness which looks only to Jesus and his gifts and love, while others whom they despised will be put into the front rank by Christ, because they never dreamed that what they did was great, and gloried only in what the Savior did for them. Little unassuming children are pushed aside in this world, but in the church of Christ and at the last great judgment those who are most like little unassuming children shall be highest. "Whosoever, therefore," says Jesus, "shall humble himself as this little child," the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." It is the warning our pride needs, that we may reach the greatness of true humility which alone counts in the Savior's eyes.

### **III. Encouragement**

There is one thing more in this beautiful picture of the child in Jesus' arms. There is instruction and warning, and coupled with these there is an encouragement, one meant for all who are truly childlike in following Jesus.

There is something symbolic in the action of Jesus calling the little child to him, placing it in the midst of the disciples as a picture of true greatness in his kingdom, finally, as St. Mark adds, taking the little child up in his arms and holding it to his bosom. You see at once that Jesus could do these things only with a little child. As you place the picture before you there

must come involuntarily to your mind the wish: Oh, that I could have been that child! And that is exactly what Jesus wants you to desire. You can indeed become this child, and even in a higher sense than the picture shows with that special child there in the house at Capernaum. For that was only a natural child and no more, and Jesus used it only as an illustration. But you can become a true spiritual child, in fact reverse the process we see in nature, growing back more and more into real childhood, and remaining permanently in that blessed spiritual state. By the grace and help of Jesus you can learn more and more that you are utterly helpless, wholly dependent on him; that all you are able to produce is nothing, that you must take wholly from him; that apart from him you will surely be lost, but folded in his grace you will be saved indeed. And so you will do, just what Jesus bids you here, lay your soul like a little child into his mighty Savior arms. Those arms are held out to you now., He calls to you encouragingly: Come! Yes, we will come — each one in simple childlike trust, to be his forever and live in his love.

It is true indeed, it hurts our pride to be told that we must come thus as nothing but little children. We like to feel proud of our strength, our achievements, our standing among men. But thank God, that Christ has not set the mark at such high attainment for us. There are always those who feel their littleness and want. And then, for so many who for a time are strong and great among men there comes at last the hour when their strength fades, their greatness no longer seems grand. Poor, helpless, suffering they lie perhaps upon a sickbed. One thing only is left. Thank God that his Son has provided it! Like a little child they can lay themselves in Jesus' arms. Away with everything else, it is utterly vain. Jesus alone is our hope and help, all our treasures and blessings rest in him. And here is his encouragement for for you and me — this child which he took into his loving arms, thus pointing out to us what he will do for us if we become like this child in relying wholly on him.

It would be excellent if in the church of Jesus all its members would recognize that true greatness consists of spiritual childlikeness. But there is much of the old spirit left which once made the disciples dispute among themselves as to who should be counted the greatest of their number. So Jesus was constrained to say: "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me." He is not speaking merely of natural children, but of any and all, young or old, who are as he would have them, humble and

unassuming like children. He is extending a protecting hand over them. Just because they are so childlike others might treat them slightly, neglect and scorn them for this very childlikeness. Let us know, then, that in such hearts Jesus dwells; they are dear to him as his very own. Blessed are they who receive them. That means that we consider them, help them, think highly of them, and never do anything to hurt or harm them. Christ's dearest treasures in our congregation are the humblest believers. Some of them are our own little children who have learned to love the Savior, and the others are the older ones, on up to the most aged, who in their minds and hearts cling to Jesus in humble, childlike love and trust. He who serves them serves Jesus himself. But to do it as we should we ourselves must not only appreciate what they are in childlikeness, but must ourselves become like them. Men may not count this as anything high, but the Lord has told us what he thinks, and blessed are we, if we let his Word govern us. In his kingdom all are children. May our joy be to be nothing else.

Remember, then, the little child which Jesus called and set before his disciples and took into his loving arms. Apply the instruction, the warning, and the encouragement he thus offers us, that we may drop all our own foolish thoughts of greatness, and grow great spiritually by growing in grace and thus becoming childlike in simple trust and humbleness. That child in Jesus arms is our pattern, and Jesus himself is our aid in translating that pattern into a blessed and happy reality.

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## Outlines

There are several angles from which to approach the text and reach its contents in the sermon. One is the thought of greatness mentioned in verses 1 and 4, and we may take the question of the disciples as our theme: Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? We have then, first, the strange answer of Jesus to this question; and secondly, the plain reason for the answer. — A second angle is the thought of childlikeness. We may use the word of Jesus: Become as little children! It is impossible when we follow our own hearts — It is easy when we let Jesus convert us — It is blessed when we realize all that is involved. — A third angle appears in an analysis of what Jesus means by childlikeness on our part: True Christian childlikeness:

trustfulness — receptiveness — humbleness. Or more concretely: The childlike heart which every follower of Jesus must have: We get it by conversion — It is molded more and more by grace — Its marks are trust and humility — Its possession bestows the highest blessings. — Still another form of treatment results when we combine the idea of greatness and littleness: The greater we try to make ourselves, the littler we are in Jesus eyes — The littler we let Jesus make us, the greater will we be in his sight.

## **Become as Little Children!**

Let Jesus make you as *trustful* — *as receptive* — *as humble*.

## **God's Children are all Childlike.**

1. God makes them so.
2. They delight to be so.

## **Who is the Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?**

1. Not those who strive to be great.
2. But those who became little.
3. And whom God thereby makes great.

## **Christ's Kingdom a Kingdom of Children.**

1. He makes us children when we enter his kingdom.
2. After we enter we become children still more in this kingdom.
3. The more we become children the greater are we in this kingdom.
4. And the greater we are as children the higher are our honors and blessings in this kingdom.

# 47. Our Father Seeth in Secret. The Twelfth Sunday After Trin- ity. Matt. 6:1-8.

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. (Matthew 6:1-8)

THE TEXT JUST READ TO YOU deals with the practical side of the Christian religion. The man who falls at the feet of Jesus, confessing his sins, and embracing the forgiveness in Jesus' blood, will be a new man. With his sins pardoned he will be a child of God. And that means that henceforth he will live a new life. He will put away his old careless, worldly, self-centered ways, and by God's help will do the things pleasing to him. In a thousand practical, tangible, obvious ways he will show that his soul belongs to Christ and that the Spirit of Christ rules it.

There are certain well marked lines of action in which this newness of life shows itself. The Savior names two of them in our text, and uses them in his admonition and warning. One of them is almsgiving, and giving in the Lord's work in general: the other is prayer and worship in general. So self-evident is it that every true Christian will both give and pray that the

Lord takes these two marks of the Christian life for granted in our text. No man rightly bears the Christian name who closes his heart and hand against his fellow men, and who will not bow in prayer and worship to God and the Savior Jesus Christ.

But right here there lurks a great danger. We know how jewels, because they are so precious, are often imitated. It is the same with the precious things of the Christian life. They are constantly imitated, and every one of us needs to be warned lest we too resort to such imitation. One mighty truth is used by the Lord in his warning against all shams in our religious life. It is so effective that once we get hold of it properly it will fortify us forever against all falseness, and will fill us with genuine honesty and sincerity in all that we say and do in the exercise of our faith. What is this truth, so effective and helpful in making us true and upright in doing his will? The Lord states it twice in our text. It is this that

### **Our Father Seeth in Secret.**

Beyond question, our Father, whose children we are by faith in Christ Jesus, seeth in secret, and nothing whatever is hidden from his sight. But it is one thing merely to admit this obvious truth, and another so to put it into our hearts that we will be completely controlled by it in our lives. The latter Jesus would do in our text.

## **I. He Penetrates Every Sham**

When Jesus speaks of our Father seeing in secret he shows first of all regarding our heavenly Father that he penetrates every sham.

One of the strangest things in religion, including even the Christian religion, is this that men pass off all kinds of shams and hollow imitations, as if they could easily deceive God, when but a little thought will show that such a thing is absolutely impossible. How can men delude themselves in such a childish fashion? One answer is because they are able thus to deceive other men.

Look at the men Jesus sketches in our text. They are the Pharisees, a class of Jews in Jesus days claiming superior holiness and faithfulness in observing the divine commandments. God had commanded to give alms

and remember the poor. Now these Pharisees did that, and did it regularly, giving abundantly. But how did they do it? They made a grand display of it. They advertised their liberality and charity. They gathered the poor together in the streets, and handed out their alms where everybody would be sure to see the thing. They did the same in the synagogues. Before all the worshippers they would lay down their handsome gifts, letting all men see how generous they were. Jesus lays bare their real purpose — “that they may have glory of men.” — They did the same thing when they prayed. The old Jews had three regular hours for prayer, at nine in the morning, at noon, and at three o’clock in the afternoon. These Pharisees made a point of it never to miss these hours of prayer. They were sure to be in the synagogues praying at the appointed hour, where men were bound to see their devotions. Or they arranged it to have the hour of prayer overtake them at the corner of some busy street. Right there on the street corner, where men were sure to see them from different directions, they stopped in their tracks, turned their faces in the direction of the Temple, and recited their prescribed prayer formulas. Again Jesus defines their purpose: “that they may be seen of men.”

Well, you will say, nobody does anything like that today. Would that your statement were true. Of course, the Pharisees as such are gone, but there are all kinds of new Pharisees taking their places. Tell me, are there no charity gifts made now in order to gain the praise of men? And the gifts for church purposes of all kinds — are none of them made to gain human applause? Let me tell you, the old sin of imitation charity, of sham offerings to God still persists. Many a gift is made merely that it may be seen of men, and many a gift is as large as it is simply in order to gain the praise of men. — And it is no better with the holy act of prayer and worship, including even the attendance at the holy Supper of our Lord. Not all who attend our services come here because their hearts are moving them to honor God. There are always some who come because they want to be seen of men. Men come often enough simply for business reasons, women to display their finery, young people because of their attraction for each other. They go through the forms of worship, but their thoughts are bent on other things entirely foreign to worship. Among them are those who love the upraise/of men for their faithfulness and piety. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” Jer. 17:9.

Now it is true, men are easily deceived by such sham religious practices, even men in the Christian church. The Pharisees of old were esteemed



by the Jews who really considered them men of God and looked up to them in every way. Men who give liberally to all kinds of worthy causes, though from purely selfish motives, who help to build and keep churches and missions, though merely to gain reputation and praise, are often highly honored. Churches and institutions are named after them, their names are mentioned in public and printed in the papers as the great benefactors of the church. Who of us can see into their hearts or judge their motives aright? Even when we have our suspicions about them we are afraid lest we wrong them, seeing that we cannot look into their hearts. — It is the same with all the acts of worship. We are unable to judge the hearts who stand or kneel with us in prayer, who sit with us in the church pews attending the worship, who accompany us to the Lord's table. — The worst of it, however, is that we detect at least some of this falseness and dishonesty in our own religious acts. We are all susceptible to the praise of men and like to glory in what we do for the Lord. Not all of our gifts are pure and disinterested, nor all of our prayer and worship an expression of true inner devotion and godliness. Some of it is mere form, some of it just habit, some of it a desire to be well thought of and well spoken of. Look into your hearts, and see whether these things are not true. Jesus gives us some gross and open examples here, in order to make his warning very plain; but he surely includes all the lesser examples as well. A poisonous plant does not need to be full-grown in order to be poisonous; and even a little serpent is already a serpent.

But now apply the truth which Jesus sets before us: Our Father seeth in secret. All this sham in religious things lies fully exposed before his eyes. He sees every man's most secret thoughts and purpose in every religious act he performs. (Even when we are ashamed to acknowledge our own falseness to ourselves, it lies bare and naked before him. — He sees that in such shams we really declare: Lord, I care nothing whatever for thee; I care only for myself and for what men may say! He hears the voice of our falseness crying: I can mock God with my shams, and he can do nothing about it, and I can fool men and get what I want from them! Yes, our Father seeth in secret, and this is what he sees when men come before him with their shams

And his infallible vision determines his infallible judgment. Hear the solemn verily of Jesus: "Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." And again he repeats this judgment: "Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." Whoever does a single religious thing to have praise of men, by getting that praise is paid in full. That praise, since he sought it, is his re-

ceipt. Jesus means to say: Let him take what he wanted to get, and be gone! Does God owe you anything when what you do is not honestly, sincerely for him? I should say not! And though you carried your falseness that far, and tried to make a false claim even upon God, as you did upon men, God penetrates the falseness and will repudiate it as well as you who make it, utterly.

Think of the thing in the right light. We all need to be reminded of the all-seeing eyes of our Father in heaven. Remember the words of Moses: "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." And those of Jeremiah: "Mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes." And then add in repentance and sorrow the earnest prayer of David: "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

## **II. He Discerns All Sincere Devotion**

But thank God, he who seeth in secret, thus warning us to put away every sham, of him it is equally true that he discerns all sincere devotion.

The Savior's great purpose is to stimulate and strengthen our sincerity in all the exercises of our faith. It is for this reason that he points out to us how such sincerity may be greatly increased, enabling us to put away all falseness in our devotion to him. What is this way? It is this that we place ourselves again and again into a position where we are wholly apart from men and deal as it were with God alone. This is bound to make us more sincere and honest, and being thus aided, even in those cases where afterwards men must of necessity see us we will yet keep before our eyes that after all we are not dealing even then with men, but really always with God alone.

Jesus bids us to practice giving in secret. "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, that thine alms may be in secret." If we can hide the actions of one hand from the other hand, the good deed so done will certainly be done in secret. Only the all-seeing eyes of God will see a deed so done; and thus it will be done only and wholly for him. This is the exercise we need to help us in deepening our sincerity toward God. — It is the same with prayer. "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret." This exercise shuts out all considerations of men. The quiet room, the door locked behind

us, will give us the consciousness that we are really alone with God. Every sincere child of God will feel the need of doing exactly what the Savior here says. In this complete privacy what is really in our hearts will come out. If it be true faith, a real love, genuine dependence on God and Christ, a real desire in our souls to honor and worship him, such private contact with God will call it out and intensify it. — In addition we will learn to think of God and to speak to God as we really should. We will cast aside, as the Savior bids us, all vain repetitions, as though God would hear us for our much speaking. We will realize that he who seeth in secret knows what things we have need of better than we do ourselves. We will thus learn what intensity of prayer is, which is better than length of prayer. We will discover the secret of true prayer, which is to lay ourselves in the Father's arms with true sincerity and trust, leaving it to him to give us what we need. — Nor will we think afterwards of talking to others about our secret giving and secret communing with God. It will be too sacred for us to expose in any way, if it is really sincere. And as with these two good works so with many others. Our inward sincerity, our real inward connection with God through Christ, will induce us again and again to get away utterly from men and any disturbing influences, dealing directly with God alone who seeth in secret.

What the Savior's real intention is in giving us these directions we see when we remember his other injunctions. In this very Sermon on the Mount he bids us let our light shine among men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven. He himself has placed us among men, our brethren in the faith and the people of the world. He himself tells us to confess him before men. All this shows that in our present text he does not mean that we shall serve and honor God only in secret, and never in public. That would be a foolish perversion of his words. What he desires and commands is this, that we cultivate secret communion with God in such a way that our public acts of honor and devotion to God may be equally sincere and devoid of all sham, as will be our secret intercourse with him. By the genuineness of the secret deed we will be able to gauge and test the genuineness of the public. Coming frequently under the all-seeing eyes of our Father in secret and there feeling those eyes from heaven resting upon us, we will realize that in public, in every good work we do where men see it and may comment on it, those same all-seeing eyes are upon us. And so we will do in the face of men whatever we do in a religious way as though it is

done really to God alone, to meet and secure his approval, altogether irrespective of what men may think or say.

And now to encourage us mightily in this sincerity of faith and good works hear the Savior's promise. He repeats it twice, for it is so weighty and important: "Thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee." What a glorious promise! Have we deserved such remembrance of God, such a reward at his hands? Why, every one of us must confess that it is only our just due toward God to serve him with honesty and sincerity of heart. What can our good works be as regards God but a poor, inadequate thanks for what he has done for us when for Christ's sake he forgave us our sins and made us his children and heirs? Jesus himself says: "When ye shall have done all those things, which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which is our duty to do." Luke 17:10. — But here see the greatness of God's mercy towards us that though we have deserved nothing with our good works and sincere service he will nevertheless add a reward on his part. Do you ask what that reward may be? We can put it all into one glorious word — he will give us his blessing. And that will be precious to us in a thousand ways. We will meet and feel his blessing in our daily lives in the earthly things that concern us; we will meet it richly in all our spiritual life, in the comfort, strength, and hope that flow to us from his Word. And finally, the greatest and most glorious part of this reward — he who seeth in secret will at the last day reveal ail that we have done with sincere and honest hearts in his service. Then, when publicity will have no further temptation for us, our Father himself will make public declaration before men and angels, and in heaven we shall taste the fullest measure of his love.

What fools are men who sell their sincerity toward God for the cheap price of human praise. But to walk with a true heart under the all-seeing eyes of God, both in private and in public, this is true and abiding satisfaction.

"Go, labor on; 'tis not for naught;  
Thine earthly loss is heavenly gain;  
Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not;  
The Master praises — what are men?"

"Go, labor on; enough, while here,  
If he shall praise thee, if he deign  
Thy willing heart to mark and cheer:  
No toil for him shall be in vain."

Our Father seeth in secret, blessed are they who by his grace put away every sham, and let him fill their hearts with true faith and sincere devotion.

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## Outlines

It will not do to divide this text in a mechanical fashion, making the first part of the sermon deal with almsgiving, and the second with prayer. Far better is an analysis of the thought, even one as simple as this, that we take out firstly what Jesus warns us against, and secondly what he bids us do. So we may ask: How shall we do our righteousness? Like the hypocrites, before men? Or, like true children of God, before our Father which seeth in secret? Another analysis will give us three parts: Our Father seeth in secret: He penetrates every sham — He discerns all true sincerity — He rewards both according to what he sees.

The idea of secrecy may be taken out, since Jesus makes so much of it in this text: We need to meet God in secret: in order to make us more sincere — and in order to make us put away all shams. We, of course, may also take the other side: Religious display: it gains the empty praise of men — it loses the approval and reward of our Father. — Another point is that of the reward: What reward do you seek in serving God? The praise of men? — Or the commendation of your Father which seeth in secret?

### **Take Heed how ye do your Righteousness!**

1. They who seek the praise of men have their reward.
2. They who seek the honor of God shall also receive their reward.

### **Shams in the Christian Life.**

1. Jesus describes them.
2. Jesus warns against them.
3. Jesus shows us how to get rid of them.
4. Jesus promises us the Father's reward, if we do get rid of them.

## **Enter into thy Closet, and Shut thy Door!**

1. That you may meet God, and forget men.
2. That then you may meet men, and not forget God.

## **Your Sincerity with your Heavenly Father.**

1. Test is with the Father who seeth in secret.
2. Use it to honor to your Father before men.
3. Prize it, for the Father's reward is sure.

# 48. Three against Two, and Two against Three. The Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 12:49-57.

I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right? (Luke 12:49-57)

ONE OF THE REMARKABLE FEATURES of the Christian religion is that the introduction of it into this sinful world brought strife, contention, division, and separation. This thing started the moment Christ began his saving work among men. No sooner did he assume his holy office than the devil assailed him with a terrific threefold temptation. And at once this conflict was precipitated among men. Some began to follow Christ and cling to him in faith, but others opposed him and his followers, and day by day the conflict grew in intensity. In three short years we see how far the division went — Christ hung upon the cross, a few faithful souls huddled together in fear and dismay at the foot of his cross, and the jeering foes of Christ flattering themselves that they had overthrown him and rid themselves of him by his death. But the contest went on. Christ arose from the dead and sent his Gospel out

into the world. The heralds of the Gospel drew many to Christ, but others opposed them, even imprisoned them and put them to death. For 1900 years the battle has raged. We are in the midst of it now. The Savior's words are still true: "I am come to send fire on the earth. Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division. For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three."

This last statement may serve to summarize for us what we all must know and keep in mind concerning the divisive force of Christ and the Gospel he brings; ever and ever there shall be

### **Three against Two, and Two against Three.**

## **I. It Has To Be**

There is no escape from it — it has to be.

Really this division which arrays three against two, and two against three is the most natural thing in the world. The moment we look at it aright we will cease to be offended or perplexed by this division and the strife it involves; we will expect it and take it as a matter of course.

Think how the division is caused. The whole world lay in sin. Everybody sinned and thought nothing of it. Of course, in sinning and living on in sin one clashed against the other, one struck, wounded, trampled on the other. There was division and strife of that kind — and a terrible amount of it. And yet all were one in sinning. A deadly harmony enfolded all, they were all united and joined in one bond of wickedness, guilt, and damnation. — Then, however, there came into the world the great heavenly Savior from sin. Sinless himself he gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins, in order that we might be cleansed from sin and live in fellowship with him in a new life totally different from the old life of sin. Jesus tells us of this great saving act of his: "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" It is his blood baptism on Calvary, when he died for our sins. So severe was this baptism of death for our sins that the prospect of it made the heart of Jesus quail and tremble. But he never wavered, he accomplished our redemption by actually giving himself in death for us on the cross. — But see now what a change was wrought in the



world. Now there was a new force come to do battle with the old one. On the one side was sin and all who loved sin and meant to go on in sin — and on the other side now was the Savior from sin, fighting to free us from sin, and drawing men unto him to a new life of victory over sin. A tremendous division was caused: some on the one side with Christ — others on the other side against him. If he had not come, this division would never have occurred; but now that he did come, this division had to be, and has to be down to this very day — three against two and two against three.

In a way one might think that when the Savior from sin came to this world of sinners there would be no division. Is not sin a terrible, deadly, damnable thing? It surely is. Well, then, should we not expect that all men would be only too glad to find a Savior great and mighty enough to free them from this damnable power of sin? Should we not conclude that all these poor sinners with one accord would run to this blessed Savior, and thus, as they were one in their sin, now would be one in their deliverance from sin? Put away all such expectations! The terrible reality is that in spite of all the Savior does for men some prefer the curse and damnation of sin to his blessed deliverance from sin. To all their past sins and guilt they add this most fearful new guilt — they fight against their Savior, they trample upon his salvation. And so, in spite of all that one might expect, this division ensues: some on the one side, some on the other; three against two, and two against three.

Look at it from another angle. Christ and his salvation is brought to us by the Gospel. This Gospel is full of his saving power, taking hold of the souls of men in order to free and deliver them. But instead of submitting to this blessed power of the Gospel, letting it work its salvation upon them, the world is full of people who oppose it. Some do it at once, others after they have experienced some of its power. They are offended at the Gospel, and so start to fight against it. This is what Jesus means when he says, he has come “to send fire on the earth.” This fire is the offense of the Gospel when men refuse to yield to its saving help. The Gospel tells the truth about us, and men love the lies of the devil more than truth, and so try to silence the Gospel with their lies. They attempt to put it out like a fire, and yet it keeps on burning. And as they fight the Gospel, so they oppose those who are won by the Gospel. This is the division: three against two, and two against three; some for the Gospel, and some against it.

And even this is not all. The division goes still farther. The Gospel is a great complex of truth. It is composed of many doctrines or individual truths, all one great organism, and every part full of divine light, help, and power. Look at your Bibles, there are many books, many chapters, truth upon truth like a glorious temple of God. Here again sin shows its evil influence. Instead of accepting and using the Gospel in all its parts for their salvation, men begin to find fault with at least some of its parts. They want to tear the Gospel apart, to take out this or that, and to set aside the other; to change whole sections of it, and thus to alter the whole of it. With their miserable ignorance they want to correct the wisdom of God; with their blind and desperate delusion they want to improve on the truth of God. The result is still more division. You see it in the multiplication of different churches on earth. Some of them are in no sense churches, for they empty out the very heart of the Gospel, its cardinal truths, and put in their place their own perversions. Others change one part or several parts, and refuse to submit to these. So one division follows another in a hopeless tangle. And yet the grace of God always wins some to believe the whole Gospel or counsel of God for our salvation. Christ has his true church, and always will have it — the church which believes the Gospel, the whole Gospel, and nothing but the Gospel. But this church is compelled to stand alone with Christ. Not only the mass of unbelievers, but also the host of false and perverted believers oppose the true church. There is constant conflict and battle. It began in the days of the apostles, when some men opposed one divine truth or another; and it continues to this day — three against two, and two against three.

But the sum of it all is this: Christ, his Gospel, all the truths of his Gospel are here, and are bound to stay here. But sin, unbelief, and error of all kinds, some great, some less, rise against Christ and his Gospel. This causes the division. The guilt for it is always on unbelief, on error, on disobedience to Christ and his Word. As long as this persists, so long the division is here. We may deplore it, but we must reckon with it. With sin and its damnable working in the world the division has to be.

## **II. Thank God That It Is!**

It has to be; but in another view of it we may say: thank God that it is!

What a terrible thing it would have been, if Christ, foreseeing that so many would oppose him altogether, and so many more would oppose his saving Gospel at least in part, had determined not to come to us at all, not to endure for us the baptism of his blood, not to send his Gospel into our midst? Think of that, and you will take another view of all this division caused by Christ and the Gospel.

Christ knew that there was only one hope for us poor sinners, namely his own work of salvation. And he knew likewise that there was only one way of realizing this hope in you and me, namely by giving us the full truth of his saving Gospel. And so in his heavenly grace he went into death for us, and by that same grace brought all the salvation won by his death to us in his Word. He knew the reception all this would meet, how he and all his priceless gifts would be abused all through the centuries, and how countless errors would strike against his Word. And yet in the face of it all he went on with his work and plan for our salvation. If you had been in the Savior's place, you might have become disgusted and enraged at all this perversity of men. But the Savior's love was superior to it all. He looked not at those who would oppose and pervert, but at those who would joyfully, thankfully believe. Yes, there would be three against two, and two against three, but some would be his true followers, as such opposing the others, and as such opposed by them. At these he looked, and his love went on with its work. When we think of this shall we not do even as he did? He looked at us who believe and bow to his every word; shall we not look likewise at him and at his blessed Word, this heavenly treasure of ours? What if it did cause all this conflict and division — thank God that it has! Better a thousand times that this conflict came, than that the whole world should perish in sin.

And this is the way to face all this division, to endure the pain it may bring us, and to go on in spite of it holding fast what we have in Christ and his Word. It is no joy to be opposed even by those who are strangers to us. It is worse still when the opposition develops between us and those bound to us by natural ties. But even here, Christ says, in many an instance the strife will develop — three against two, two against three. That may mean father against son, and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. Here we must learn that Christ and every part of his saving truth is more precious to us than any earthly tie could possibly be. Christ and his doctrines is more than any father, mother, son,

daughter, or other relative. If for faithfulness to Christ's Word any of these or all of these should turn against us, let them do so. Jesus has well said: He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. His love and salvation make up a thousandfold for any loss or pain we may suffer by this division breaking into our family ties. Better to lose all earthly loves than the love of God and his Son, our Savior.

But let us beware lest these earthly loves and friendships tugging at our hearts turn us at least in part away from full loyalty and love of Christ. The danger is that by some sort of compromise we seek after all to press two to our bosom who are opposed, embracing Christ and his truth with one arm, and with the other those who are not true to him. This is the folly of unionism and unionistic combinations. To win and hold men it would yield at least some truth of Christ, using foolish arguments and dangerous pleas. — Instead of this let us remember that the more we prove faithful to Christ and his truth, the more will we be doing in love for those near and dear to us and yet divided from us by unbelief or error. We, with our hearts wholly given to Christ, are to be the means, if possible, to win them after all to a like faithfulness to Christ. Many a glorious victory has thus been won. But if we strengthen unbelief or error by ourselves yielding to it from earthly love and affection, or other motives centering in men, we ourselves will cause the greatest harm to those whom we think we are loving, and we will reward him who loved us above all human love, with the most shameful ingratitude and baseness.

And so again we sum it all up — when we look to Christ and his salvation, which are behind this division of three against two, and two against three, we put complaint aside, and utter a fervent thank God.

### **III. Where Do We Stand?**

But stop a moment. In all that we have said we have taken it for granted that in this division of three against one, and one against three we are on the right side, in fact wholly on the right side. But this is a thing we dare not merely assume — we must be wholly sure of it. The division has to be — thank God that it is — but then ask most carefully: Where do we stand?

A division as vital as the one caused by Christ and his Gospel admits of no compromise or neutrality on our part. With the mighty fact of the division before us, with its real significance constantly revealed to us by Christ, he must say to us also if we hesitate or act as if we were uncertain: “Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?” It is all-important that we should judge the right thing — in other words, take our stand on the right side in this opposition of three against two, and two against three.

When Jesus spoke of this to the multitudes that were following him he used a striking illustration namely two of the great weather signs in the country of Palestine. On the west this country borders on the great Mediterranean Sea. If then great clouds bank up in the west that means the coming of a cooling, refreshing shower. Everybody knew it well and prepared for it. But the southern borders of Palestine adjoin a great, hot, sandy desert territory. And that means that when a steady wind from the south sets in, there will be a simoon, a burning heat wave, like those that occur in Kansas and Nebraska, where in a few hours with such a hot wind all the beautiful corn-fields are literally burned up and destroyed. The people of Palestine in Jesus days knew this weather sign as well as they knew the other! Jesus says to them: “Ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth.” They were experts at that, and governed themselves accordingly.

But why did they stop at this? It was only the weather, and this affected only the earthly side of their lives. Had they no eyes to see the signs of God concerning their souls? no minds to judge the right thing concerning the great spiritual realities God at this time was sending them? Here God was pouring out upon them the most refreshing rains of his grace. John the Baptist had come to them preaching the baptism of repentance — and yet thousands and thousands would not understand what this meant, would not repent. Then came Jesus himself, God’s own Son, the Messiah. What wondrous words of grace he spoke, what astounding miracles of grace he wrought, and his very presence was the greatest miracle of all. They looked at him, they marveled at his deeds, they listened to his words, but that was all — thousands and thousands of them went no farther. They acted as if they could not understand what was going on, what God was doing for their souls. They knew what the clouds in the west meant, but would not know what all this grace of God meant. — And in the same way they were blind to the results of the unbelief and wickedness which was setting in among their nation. That meant that in a little while the fiery wind of God’s wrath

and judgment would strike them, blasting their land and nation with just punishment for spurning God's grace. Had they no eyes to see, no minds to comprehend? When they knew so well what the hot south wind meant for their country, why did they not know what the hotter blasts of God's wrath must mean when they persisted in scorning his grace? "Ye hypocrites," Christ exclaims, "ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?" Refusing to stand with Christ and his saving Gospel of grace, too late they would be overwhelmed by the blast of God's wrath.

In the same way the great question comes to us: Where do we stand? See the great division which Jesus and his Gospel are still causing among the men of our time — three against two, and two against three. It is Christ, his grace, his Word, his salvation at work in our day. He is gathering about him all that believe his Word and accept its saving truth. It is like a shower of grace, refreshing, vivifying, uplifting — coming without our doing, from on high. Shall we disregard it? Shall we think we have other more important things to attend to? Shall we murmur perhaps that the saving grace and truth of Christ is causing so much disturbance on earth? Then let us know that all this indifference and hostility to Christ, all this objection to him and his doctrine in whole or in part, are only so many signs of the coming judgments of God. Shall they descend upon us too? Look well where you stand. It makes a tremendous difference whether you listen to men's follies and their deceptive reasoning, or whether you abide in all simplicity with Christ and his Word. There is and ever will be a tremendous division. But it will not be only of three against two, and two against three, but of grace on the one side and of judgment on the other. Therefore be sure where you stand.

The division is here, grace is at work in a world of sin; thank God for this division, that grace is indeed saving many from sin. And by this very grace our stand shall ever be on the side of grace, of the Word of Grace, and of Christ, the blessed King of grace.

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## Outlines

When we remember that the "fire" signifies the offensive power of the cross, divisions like the following found in Langsdorff and Ostersee (Schaff

and Starbuck) will be rejected without question: “The fire which Christ kindles on earth: A fire which warms what is cold; Purifies what is impure; Consumes what is evil.” Any theme turning on the word “fire” must show in the division: that Christ and the Gospel are bound to offend many — how Christ and the Gospel operate in causing this offense — and what our attitude toward Christ and the Gospel must be when this offense is wrought. — A point of cleavage appears in what Christ says of division: The divisive power of the Gospel: It opposes sin and error — It wins men away from sin and error — It calls on every one of us to fight sin and error in ourselves and in others. — Another angle of approach lies in the closing verses of the text: The great separation which is going on in the world: The separating power, Christ and the Gospel — the separating work, some are drawn to Christ, others oppose him — the final separation wrought by this power and work, the triumph of grace and the culmination of judgment.

## **Christ Came, not to Bring Peace on Earth, but Division.**

That is 1) Inevitable — 2) Deeply painful — 3) Highly significant.

## **The Strife which Christ Brought on Earth.**

1. A strife better than any false peace.
2. Because true peace comes out of this strife.

## **The Discord which Christ Brought on Earth.**

1. At first it perplexes us, for Christ and the Gospel are really full of grace and peace.
2. On second thought this is entirely as it should be, for Christ and his Gospel are contrary to sin and error.
3. Moreover, our only hope is in this discord, for only by drawing us into it can Christ and his Gospel save us.

## **The Fire Christ Kindled on Earth.**

1. It burns in the Gospel.
2. Men vainly seek to put it out.

3. We must judge it aright.

### **God's Weather Signs.**

1. The refreshing showers of grace.
2. The hot blasts of judgment.



# **49. It is Impossible for a Christian to Go Through the World Unscathed. The Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity. John 15:17-27.**

These things I command you, that ye love one another.

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning. (John 15:17-27)

TRUE CHRISTIANS OUGHT to be loved, admired, praised, and emulated by all men. But nothing of the kind takes place. They are disliked, spoken of derisively, discriminated and combined against, made to suffer and persecuted in various ways.

But you may say: I am a Christian, and I have not found myself discriminated against in this fashion. That may indeed be true. But remember, there

are two kinds of Christians, such as are Christians through and through, who always speak out for Christ, who live Christ, who constantly work for Christ — and such as are Christians only part way, who know how to keep still about Christ, who take care not to offend people by being true to Christ, who find no trouble in accommodating themselves to the world quite contrary to Christ. The question is: Which kind of a Christian are you? The world has no special objection to the latter kind, but it has no use whatever for the former, and never will have.

Jesus himself tells us so in our text, and he certainly ought to know. He wants us to learn once for all that

### **It is Impossible for a Christian to Go Through the World Unscathed.**

## **I. Because of Christ**

It Is Impossible, In The First Place, Because Of Christ Himself.

Think for a moment who he is and what he has done in regard to the world, and you will see at once that all those who are true followers of Christ must be obnoxious to the world.

The whole world lay in sin. Then came the holy Son of God in the form of man to free the world from its sin. He came to the world as the Savior from sin. In the very nature of the case he could not condone the sin in which the world lies and which it loves; he could not excuse it, or let it pass, or count it a small and insignificant thing. He had to show up all its terribleness and damnableness, in order to make men realize what sin is, and to draw their souls unto the salvation he had brought. But the moment he began to do this, he met the opposition of the world which loves sin and is determined not to give its sin up. Men contradicted the Word which the Savior spoke; they refused to be impressed aright by the wonderful works he wrought. Their one thought was to get rid of this Christ, and when no other means offered they used the worst they could find, lies, false accusations, and the most cruel murder. The world had no use for the kind of Christ Jesus was. It was willing to have a Christ indeed, but one who would not attempt to free it from its sins. It might have left Jesus alone, and not crucified him, if he had left the world alone. But when he went right into

the world, directing his Word and works right against the world, the world blazed up in anger and hatred. It rejected Jesus, it carried him to the cross.

Now Jesus is the same to this day, only now he no longer walks among men, but works in the world through us whom he has saved from the world. But the situation as regards Christ is the same. The words he once spoke in the world in order to cut it loose from its sins still ring forth from the lips of his followers, who by word and deed carry the Gospel to the world. So also the deeds Jesus wrought to save the world, his miracles, and especially his great deeds of salvation, his death, resurrection, and glorification — when now his followers hold them up to the world, in order to turn the world from its sin, the world sees them anew and feels their saving effect. And the result, as far as the world is concerned which is determined to hold fast its sin, is the same. Jesus says: “The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.” If Jesus could not escape the hatred of the world, when he brought his saving Word and work to the world, how can we hope to escape it, when we do the same thing with the same Word and work of Jesus? Are we greater than Jesus? Will the world respect us more than it did him? Is it possible for us to succeed better than Jesus did?

There is only one way in which any of us can escape the hostility of the world — and alas, many have tried it! If you alter Jesus sufficiently, the world will not hate you, and will let you pass through it unscathed. Jesus condemns all sin; but if you will change that, and let sin pass, and say that Jesus did not mean to condemn it as he did, then the world will be satisfied with you. If you will join with the world in many of its sinful ways and associations, and simply ignore Jesus and what he said, the world will again find you agreeable and show you its love and favor. Jesus taught that his blood alone cleanses us from sin, and that we are saved by grace through faith in his blood. If you, however, will set that aside, the world will not show you its animosity. Speak and act as if any man who looks good to the world is sure to be saved, as if a little morality, charity, and philanthropy suffices for salvation, and you may even be applauded by the world. For this is the kind of Christ and Gospel it dearly loves. Jesus said that he chose his disciples out of the world, separated them from the world, making them different from the world. But if you will ignore that separation, and by word and deed fellowship the world, the world will like you, and may even praise you as the right kind of a Christian. This is how one can go through the

world unscathed. There are entire churches which follow a course like this. Just change Jesus sufficiently, and the world is satisfied.

But can we do a thing of this kind? Is not Jesus the same yesterday, today, and forever? Has he not said that heaven and earth would pass away, but his Word would not pass away? Ah, here is where it ought to be pain to us, that holding fast to the unchanged Jesus we cannot and must not hope to go unscathed through the world. All our salvation is bound up with Jesus. Do we want to jeopardize that? Not for one instant. Then let us bear the cross of the world's hate. It goes with Jesus and his salvation.

## II. Because of The World

It is impossible for a Christian to go through the world unscathed because of Christ himself. In the second place, however, because of the world.

What does Jesus mean by "the world" in our text? It is easy to see when he tells us what the world does. He tells, us the world hates him. And that means, after he has shown the world all he came to do for it. The world, then, includes all men who have seen the saving power and grace of Jesus, and yet have turned wickedly against it all, preferring their own sin and all that is connected therewith. Think of it: here on the one hand is sin and damnation, and on the other is Jesus and salvation, and in the latter there is a heavenly saving power all-sufficient to cut men loose from sin and to lift them up to Jesus. But in spite of all this saving power men determine to remain as they are. What new and fearful guilt is this by which, when they might be saved, they simply will not be saved? Jesus describes it: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin" — namely this final, damning sin of unbelief; "but now they have no cloak for their sin... If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin" — and Jesus means all those wonderful works of grace which showed him to be without question God's own Son and the true Savior from heaven whom all men ought at once to accept; but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled, that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause." Jesus is speaking especially of the Jews, but it is equally true of all who reject him that they do it, and can do it, only without a real cause. Those who belong to the world have every reason to thank God for sending

them Jesus and salvation; they have every reason for yielding themselves to the grace of Jesus and accepting the priceless salvation he brings them. In wickedly refusing to do this they stand self-condemned. And their condemnation comes out fully and clearly in hating Christ and venting this hatred upon Christ's followers.

With the world thus opposed to Christ, with this opposition as the great mark of the world and of all who belong to the world, can we hope to live and work in the midst of these men and yet escape their opposition and the hate from which it springs? It is simply impossible. Sooner would fire mingle with water than that the world should love what it hates. The very things which we find so lovable and adorable in Christ are the things which the world cannot tolerate. It makes no difference that the world ought to love them too, and that it has no real cause whatever for hating them — it hates them none the less. Now come before this world with the Christ it will not have, make him the sole hope and support of your life, let the world know it and feel it day by day — what result are you going to have? Jesus tells you: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." It is inevitable that we should not go unscathed through the world. If you know indeed what the world is you will not expect such a thing.

Only if the world would not be what Jesus says it is, and what we ourselves can see daily that it is, could we escape this its hatred. And there are always people who doubt the Word of Jesus, and who are blind to the real nature of the world. They thus set out to go through the world unscathed, and in their way they actually succeed. They are the people who think the world is not as bad as Jesus says. They see it placard its sins all along our streets; they read its hideous record of sin in the daily papers; they meet in a thousand ways and in a thousand places its wild and preposterous notions about God, religion, and salvation — yet they fail to realize what all this means. They will not understand that this is the world which has had Jesus and his Gospel all these years, and that this is its answer to him. And so they praise the world — and that is what the world likes; they accommodate themselves to the world — and that is what the world appreciates; and even its extravagant and superficial religious ideas are allowed to go unchallenged — and that suits the world especially. People who look at the world like that, and treat it accordingly, are entirely unobjectionable to the world; it finds little or no fault with them. Alas, that they should bear the Christian name, and pretend that they are following Christ in thinking and acting thus

in regard to the world. They may go unscathed through the world — what will Christ say to them at last? — But if we refuse to join in this false view of the world, if we truly follow Christ in his judgment of the world, then we will learn indeed that the world is just what Christ has said of it: as it hated him, so it will hate us; we will not pass through the world unscathed.

### **III. Because of Ourselves**

As this is impossible because of Christ himself, and because of the world and what it really is, so again it is impossible because of ourselves as true followers of Christ.

Jesus says of his disciples: “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” This statement of Jesus is true of all his followers. We no longer belong to the world. Jesus has cut our hearts loose from the world, and drawn them in faith and trust to himself. He has chosen us out of the world by making us children of God through faith in him; by giving us a new life full of love toward him. And the world is only too quick to recognize that. It sees and feels that we are different from the children of the world. It also feels that all this faith and new life in us is really a condemnation of its evil and perverted ways. And the world resents this. It has no use for us and the things for which we stand. And the more we assert our faith and show forth the new life we have from Christ, the more it comes out with its resentment.

Sometimes Christians persuade themselves that this is overdrawing the picture. Is it really as bad as Jesus says? A thousand instances prove it day by day. A worldly employer expects you to lie and cheat for him. Refuse to do it, and see what he will say to you. Here is a position you would like to have; it is intimated to you that in order to get it or to hold it you must join some secret order. Decline to do that, and see who gets that position. Here is a man who curses and damns in your presence. Object to this abuse of your Savior’s holy name, and very likely that profanity will be turned against you. Here is a young man or young woman who want to keep themselves pure and; unspotted from the world. Are they admired and praised for that? Quite the contrary — they are derided and mocked, and all kinds of spite is vented upon them. Let any one of us talk on religion with worldly people,

and tell those people the real truth as Jesus has taught us. Often we will not even be heard, but shown the door; and in many a case we will meet ridicule and scorn, either quite open or only slightly veiled. No, the world has not changed a bit from what Jesus said of it; it likes his true followers about as well as it liked him. When it meets what is in them it shows its hate, and will not let them go unscathed. Do not expect it. Jesus has said: "All these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me." Really it is an honor for us to be treated thus by the world. It shows that we indeed belong to Christ. If we suffer anything for his sake, happy are we, for Christ will mark it and give us his most gracious reward.

There is only one way in which you and I can escape this ill-will of the world, namely by hiding our Christianity, or by lowering it till it no longer displeases the world. Alas, there are many who are ready to do this sort of thing. I have seen Christian young people, and older people too for that matter, in worldly company, and by looking at how they acted and what they did you could never have discovered that they were different from their worldly companions. Some treat their Christianity like their hymn-books. They lay them up after church till they need them again when they decide to go to church once more. So they lay their Christianity up, and take it along only when they go to church. Perhaps it is even worse than that. They have no hymnbook of their own, they use one handed to them at church, leaving it there when through. So they leave their Christianity at the church, and do not take it as much as out of the pews. Well, that kind of Christians need fear nothing from the world. As long as you hide your faith in Christ, or deny it in silence or by worldly acts whenever it is challenged, the world is well satisfied. But can you do this kind of thing? are you satisfied to do it? You know what Christ has said of those who deny him before men. No true followers of his will thus try to please the world. He knows he cannot go unscathed when he meets the world. He is satisfied to have it so. Better a thousand times to be true to Christ and to suffer for his name's sake, than to please the world and thus escape its hate.

## **IV. Because of The Work**

Jesus points out one more reason why the Christian cannot go through the world unscathed. It is because of the work Christ, has assigned to us as his followers.

He has indeed chosen us out of the world, but he still leaves us in the world. It is his will that though inwardly separated from the world we are placed right in the midst of the world, and this in spite of its hostility against him and us. Why is this? Because of the work he has assigned to us. He tells us in our text: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me; and ye also shall bear witness." When he said this to his apostles he added, "because ye have been with me from the beginning." The apostles were the first great witnesses for Christ in the world. They had a special task to perform in establishing and spreading the Christian church in the beginning. But they were joined by all those who believed the Gospel which they preached. We too have thus joined them. And so the work of bearing witness for Christ in the world has come to be our work also.

Christ now works in the world through those who believe in him. He gives them his Holy Spirit. This is the Spirit of truth, who fills our hearts with the saving truth of the Gospel. All that you know about Christ and his salvation is from this Spirit sent to you by Christ; and all the Christian faith, life, and power that is in you is the gift of Christ's Spirit. He is your Comforter, your support and helper, in this world full of wickedness in which you are called to live and testify for Christ. He proceeds from the Father, and is thus true God, equal with the Father and the Son. And he uses you as his instruments in proclaiming Christ in the world. Thus the Holy Spirit testifies of Christ by making us his true witness bearers. He joins us together as a church, so that the Gospel is preached in our midst for all men to hear. He moves us to send this preaching out in all directions as far as we can in mission work. He unites us in the bond of love, even as Jesus says: "These things I command you, that ye love one another." Supporting each other, and holding to each other in love, the Holy Spirit also moves us individually, in whatever station of life we may be placed, to show men by word and deed that we belong to Christ, and that in him alone is there salvation for us and for them. — This is our great duty in the world. For in the world there are always people who may yet be won for Christ. While some turn obdurately against him, there are others who are conquered and won by his



heavenly grace. It is our task to bring them that grace and to show them that grace in our own living example. And so we are in the world, though not of the world,

It is easy to see how this very work assigned to us by Christ drives the world, namely those who are determined not to receive Christ, to turn against us in hate. They oppose us, not only because we have turned from them, but also because we are trying to turn others away from them. The Spirit that is in us is against the spirit that is in them, and the result is opposition from them. It is exactly like a war, only the world uses the foulest of weapons for its vicious ends, while we use nothing but Christ and his Spirit of truth. Is it any wonder, then, that we do not succeed in getting through the world unscathed? If we could leave the world alone, lock ourselves in, hide ourselves away from the world, then we might hope to escape unhurt and without scars. But now this is impossible. Every true Christian is stirred by the Holy Spirit to testify of Christ. He does it gladly and courageously. What if the world hates him for it? He takes it as a matter of course, happy if the testimony he is able to bear helps to win more souls away from the world, for Christ.

Perhaps someone will again think that this our work in the world can be done so as to avoid arousing the opposition of the world. There is a way in which to escape this opposition — cease testifying for Christ, or change your testimony from what the Spirit of truth would have you make it. This is exactly what many try to do. They call themselves progressive and modern and imagine their Christianity is up-to-date. Instead of preaching Christ's blood and righteousness, they preach nothing but the fine example of Christ. The world has no special objection to that. Instead of preaching the full truth of Christ and his Gospel, they select what they think men will like, and add of their own what their wisdom dictates. Many are attracted by this false testimony, especially when they are told that this is the real testimony Christ wants us to hear and to bear today. And so they accept it, and make their lives illustrations of it. They think they are doing the work of Christ while they remain popular with the world, or at least a good part of it. Alas, they are only deceiving themselves and others. Christ has warned us, crying woe upon us when all men speak well of us. He has told us that though we do many wonderful works in this way by using his name contrary to his Word and Spirit, he will disown us at last: "And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity"

Matt. 7:22-23. — Shall we disregard these warnings? No; let us be true to our calling in this wicked world. Let the Spirit of Christ make us true witnesses for him, and aid us in turning as many as possible to the full truth in Christ, which alone is able to save them and us. That will bring us much opposition. It did it for Christ; it will do it for us. Let us bear it all, only so the Spirit of truth keeps us true now and to the end. We will not remain unscathed, but our scars will bring us Christ's commendation, and that is sweeter than all the praises of the world.

It is indeed impossible for a true Christian to go unscathed through the world. Let us never think of making this impossible thing possible. We must bear the hatred of the world because of Christ, because of the world, because of ourselves, and because of our work in the world. Blessed are they who bear it as Christ bids them, bear it)with the help of his Spirit, and let his love comfort, strengthen, and rejoice their hearts. For any hurt we now suffer at the hands of the world for Christ's sake his love will more than make amends.

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## Outlines

The general subject of this text is quite plain, and we have a number of thoughts which unfold this subject. Two important portions of the text lie slightly to one side, namely the injunction that we love one another, and the closing statements on the witness-bearing of the Comforter and on that of the disciples; but these too pertain to our position in the world where the world's hatred is our lot. A simple method of handling the text will then be to treat it as a description of: Our position in a hostile world. It is a blessed position — for Christ has chosen us out of the world, and bound us to himself and to each other. It is a trying position — for the world hates us for Christ's sake, and makes us feel this hatred. It is a glorious position — for Christ makes us his witnesses to the world, and sends us the Comforter as our support. — Or we may use the summary; In the world, yet not of the world: that marks our position — that points to our trials — that outlines our work — that indicates our support. — We may also take up the general question which constantly clamors for an answer: Why has the world no use for the true Christian? The answer may be formulated in various ways from

what Jesus tells us. One reason is that the Christian no longer belongs to the world; and another, that the Christian is trying to change the world. Or we may point first to Christ and the Father, to whom we are joined by faith; secondly, to the words and deeds of Christ, which have drawn us away from the world and joined us to him and his Father; and finally, to the great purpose of Christ, which uses us as his witnesses in the world in order to join as many others as possible, like us, to him and his Father.

## **How does the Christian Bear the Hatred of the World?**

1. Without surprise, for this hatred is to be expected.
2. Without shame, for this hatred is a mark of true discipleship.
3. Without scorning, for this hatred is meant to test our faith.
4. Without retaliation, for this hatred is to exercise our love.

— GEROK.

## **Christians are Unpopular People.**

1. Do not let that surprise you.
2. Do not let that disturb you.
3. Do not let that change you.
4. Do not let that discourage you.

## **Remember the Word that I Said unto You:**

“The Servant is not Greater than his Lord.”

1. As servants of Christ we share his character and therefore also the treatment he received.
2. As servants of Christ we share his labors and therefore also the reward he received.

## **“When the World is Cold Let us to Thee Hold!”**

1. Thus to bear the world’s hate.
2. Thus to do thy will and work.

# **50. The Key to the Commandment: “Love your Enemies.”**

## **The Fifteenth Sunday After Trinity. Matthew 5:43-48.**

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)

THE WORLD IS FULL OF HATE, and the worst form of that hate appears in the world's treatment of Christ and of those who follow him. We have heard how we must bear that hate, and not let it turn us away from Christ. But there is more to be said. We must answer this hate with love. And since our own brethren are sometimes overcome by the spirit of the world and allow themselves like the world to give way to hate, we must answer their hate too with the same love. Jesus sums it all up for us in the old commandment of God: “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” Only he brings out most clearly for us what this old commandment really means as regards all those who in any way hate us. He puts it in this form: “Love your enemies.”

Now the danger is that we will look at this word of Jesus as a mere ideal, one quite unattainable for us; in this sinful world. The old interpretation which the rabbis of the Jews gave to God's commandment will sound far more reasonable to us, namely love your friends, and hate your enemies. Especially will this be the case when we actually have some mean enemy to harass and hurt us. A feeling of hate, and a desire to retaliate, will very

likely try to arise in our hearts, and in our blindness we may even think we are fully justified in thus answering hate with hate. What we need is to look at the inwardness of this commandment of Christ. This is exactly what our text enables us to do. Here the Lord himself gives us

### **The Key to the Commandment: “Love your Enemies.”**

What is this key? The goodness of our heavenly Father. The love of Jesus, our Savior. Our relation to the Father as his children in Jesus, our Savior. Take this key, and there will be no difficulty for you in this blessed commandment: “Love your enemies.”

## **I. The Goodness Of Our Heavenly Father.**

Think of the goodness of your heavenly Father, and at once you will realize how there could be no other commandment from him to us than this that we love our enemies.

In a beautiful way Jesus brings this goodness of our heavenly Father to mind for us. All of us are constantly dependent upon it, and this to such an extent that we could not exist if he were to withhold it. Only two proofs of it does Jesus mention, but they are enough — we see at once who this our heavenly Father is. Here are the proofs: “He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” Have you ever thought of it — every morning the sun rises anew for us to give us the light and the warmth we need; and from time to time the rains come to water the earth, and in combination with the sun and with the elements to furnish us our daily bread. This sun Jesus calls “his sun,” God’s sun — what if he should withhold its shining for a month or a year? Come with no superficial scientific talk, as though God could not do such a thing. He who made the sun and all the heavenly bodies and set them in their courses, he can do with any and all of them exactly as he thinks, best. So with the rain — suppose he should withhold that for a year or for several years. The fact is that at times God has so withheld the rain, just to remind us in our pride and ignorance that the great forces of nature are in his hands. And as Jesus here mentions the sun and the rain, so he might have gone on and mentioned many other gifts and blessings which God pours out upon us with a

lavish hand. Here is the earth that bears us all, the air we all breathe alike, the whole world of plants and animals given for man's use, hundreds of the forces of nature which we are able to put to our service for our comfort and enjoyment, the fire that cooks our food, the electric current which furnishes us light and power, the endless number of materials that our hands work up into useful things, to say nothing of the beauties and attractions with which God has decked out this wonderful world of his — all these from his hands, and all for us the creatures he has made.

But the point is that these gifts of our heavenly Father are dispensed with infinite goodness on his part. He showers them with a free hand upon the evil and the good alike, upon the just and the unjust in the same generous way. Who are the evil, who are the unjust? They are his enemies. Perhaps they mock at God and deny his very existence; at least they refuse to honor him, to heed his will, to appreciate what they receive at his hands, and to thank him for his gifts. And when we say they are enemies of God that means far more than when we speak of our enemies. If one whom we befriend turns against us in hate, or if a child after receiving countless gifts of love turns against its father and mother in wicked abuse, that is as nothing to the act of evil men who turn against the very God that made them and to this day continues to pour out his priceless gifts upon them. And yet this is the spectacle Jesus here holds up before our eyes — God's sun keeps on shining for the wicked, God's balmy rains nourish the fields of the ungodly and help to give them bread. Think not that God is blind, and does not see the wickedness and godlessness of those upon whom his gifts descend, or that God is obliged to send down these gifts. Take the true view — it is his unbounded goodness alone that you see in these manifestations day by day. Or better still, recognize fully and completely for once, that God loves even his enemies. This is the kind of God he is. Nor is his goodness only this that he delights to send even upon his enemies temporal blessings. Behind all these marvelous temporal gifts there is his grace and mercy for the souls of his enemies. St. Paul tells us, by this goodness in temporal things our heavenly Father would lead us all to repentance, to acknowledge our sins, to trust his grace, and thus to receive beside the temporal all his eternal blessings. All this God does for his enemies.

And now we are ready to see something of the inwardness of our heavenly Father's commandment when he bids us love our enemies. Could he who treats his enemies with infinite goodness and love give us any other

commandment? Could he, loving his enemies as he does, say that we need not love our enemies? — and this when any enmity against him is a thousand times worse than any enmity against us could ever be? No, my friends, our heavenly Father could never so contradict himself. The sun in the heavens would cry out against him, if he did; and the rains would lament that the goodness which sent them had turned into hate. When God bids us love our enemies, his very heart opens to us in that commandment — it is his own love for them which calls for our love toward them. And since he loves us, even as he loves them, it is his love for us too which calls for our love toward them. Do we want this love to cease? Do we want any of his love to stop when we forget our love toward him? Then change this commandment of love toward our enemies<sup>^</sup>. But no, you will not want it changed so. You want the sun to shine on, and the rains to fall in due season, and all the other gifts to come as you need them. Then thank God that he is goodness and love; open wide your heart to take his goodness and love in; and filled with gratitude and love toward him look with new eyes and a new heart at this commandment to love your enemies.

God's goodness is the key to it. Unlocked with that key what a blessed commandment it is! Oh that our hearts might rise up as they should to delight in it and to obey it!

## **II. The Love Of Jesus, Our Savior.**

The thought of our heavenly Father's goodness takes us only part way into this commandment of love for our enemies; add the love of Jesus our Savior and you will penetrate to the very heart of it.

The striking thing in our text is not merely that here we have this commandment of love for our enemies, but that it is Jesus himself, our heavenly Savior, who sets this commandment before us. Do you not see how these two belong together in the most wonderful way? He who loved his enemies so that he came to save them from their sins, and to give his very life for them in order thus to serve them, he it is who stands here in our text and takes up the great commandment of love from God's holy Law and shows us how God meant it to include love on our part for our enemies.

Beyond question this is a different thing than when the old Jewish rabbis took up God's commandment and tried to tell the people what God meant

by it. What did they know about God when they never knew even the significance of his sun shining on the evil and the good, nor the meaning of the rain falling on the fields of the just and the unjust? They never understood the goodness of God toward his enemies, how then could they understand this commandment? No wonder they cut the very heart out of it and made it mean only that we are to love our friends, and hate our enemies. And they never saw that such a perversion of God's commandment of love made it no more than the miserable principle which even the greediest and most wicked publican in their midst followed, and which even the blindest and most idolatrous heathen exercised in his life. Those miserable tax collectors among the Jews, whom they themselves condemned as renegades and traitors to their nation, certainly did this much that they loved those who still loved them. And the veriest heathen, who had no knowledge whatever of the true God and his love, certainly did this much that he saluted his own brethren who saluted him. But that is what the Jewish rabbis made of God's commandment when they tried to explain it without knowing the love of God which sent his own Son to die for us all while yet we were far from God and enemies of his. No wonder Jesus rose up against them and all their miserable teaching, and with all his divine authority declared: "But I say unto you," this is what the God of love means: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

And now when we hear these blessed words let us remember from whose lips they fell. They are the summary of the love which filled the heart and life of Jesus himself when he was in the midst of his work of saving us. He loved his enemies, for he died for the very men who condemned him to death and nailed him to the cross. He blessed them that cursed him, for his whole life and death was a benediction on those who reviled and mocked him. He did good to them that hated him, yea, the very greatest good, for he purchased salvation for them by, his own death. He prayed for them which despitefully used him and persecuted him, for on the cross itself when the nails were put through his hands and feet, he prayed that God might forgive them, for they knew not what they did. And when we think of all this let us remember that this wonderful, saving love of Jesus Christ went out thus not only to the sinners who directly brought him to his death, but in the same way to us all in our sins. And every one of our sins the Bible itself calls enmity against God. We were born in this enmity, and but



for the love of Jesus would be in it completely today. Alas, there is enough of it clinging to us still. Without him and his love, without him and his intercession, we would all be irrevocably lost. Take all this together and use it as the key for this commandment coming from Jesus' lips: "Love your enemies." What a revelation as thus its inwardness is unlocked for us!

Yes, there had to be such a commandment, because there is such a Savior. Thank God that he loved his enemies thus, even us also, and loves us with the same love still. It is this love of his which makes us understand his commandment; it is the Key which shows us all of God's heart and all of our Savior's heart in it. This great, saving love we enjoy, we who were enemies of God, we whose sin is still against him. How shall we ever thank him enough? But with this love resting upon us, we know indeed that from it there must be born in our own hearts a similar love — we indeed must learn of Jesus to love also our enemies.

### **III. Our Relation To The Father As His Children In Jesus, Our Savior.**

The key to the great commandment of love to our enemies is our heavenly Father's own goodness and our Savior's own saving love toward his enemies. But both of these include us, and that in the directest and most effectual way, through our relation to the Father as his children in Jesus, our Savior. Thus the key is complete. The great commandment is carried right into our own hearts, and we are glad and happy to have it there.

The Savior is speaking to his disciples when he here opens up to them the inwardness of the commandment to love their enemies. He is not calling on the children of this world to do such a thing. They would not understand him, nor would they in the least be able to obey such a commandment. All they know is to love their friends and to hate their enemies. But to his disciples he is able to say: "Love your enemies," for he is able to add in their case: "that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." Christ's disciples are indeed children of God. His saving love has entered their hearts, and that love has put a new life and a new power into their hearts. They now see all the goodness of God showered down upon them, though they deserve none of it, and their hearts rise up in gratitude toward God for it all. But most of all their hearts dwell upon the saving love of God

in Christ which actually delivered them from their sins and made them children of God and heirs of salvation, and this supreme gift again without their deserving it in the least; and more than ever their hearts are lifted up in gratitude to God for such love of his. When thus they hear the commandment: "Love your enemies," they think ever of what God has done for them, enemies of his though they were. Under the power of the love that came thus to them, the thought of hate vanishes from their hearts, and instead there begins to arise true love in their hearts for any enemies they may have.

How can it be otherwise? Can we rejoice in the love of God which we have in no way deserved, and yet harbor in our hearts hate toward our fellow men? One or the other must go — God's love in us must drive out the hate, or the hate will drive out God's love. When his love wins us and makes us his children it thereby makes us like our Father. That is the nature of all true children — they are like their Father. And most of all is this true of children like we are, with Christ and the love of Christ put into our very hearts by our Father. His love will be our love, and so hate will die, and love will triumph.

But is not this saying too much of us? Is there not much enmity still left in us? Are there no quarrels among us, or with those outside the church? Are there never any feelings of malice and spite, and words and deeds that come from anger and ill-will? Alas, this is true! The flesh still clings to us, and it constantly tries to make us let go of the love of God and Christ, and to drag us away from our connection with God and his children. But for this very reason the Lord comes to us here with a commandment. That commandment condemns every bit of hatred still left in us through the flesh. That commandment would drive us to daily repentance when we fall short of the love that should move and control us completely. Therefore too we are not told only to love our enemies and to show that love aright, but also: "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Nothing less is our goal. True children must be altogether like their Father. — But here is our comfort, that the God who loved us while we were wholly his enemies, and by his love has made us his children in Christ Jesus, now does not "abandon us when the old faults still cling to us, but in the same patient love works in us to overcome those faults, and thus finally to make us perfect even as he is perfect. So he sends us his Word, lets his own Son set it before us; so he shows us his love and lets us feel its sweetness and strength day by day. Thereby he makes us repent of the evil that is still in us, pardons the

guilt of it, and at the same time stirs up and strengthens the love that he has implanted within us, to make it rule our lives more and more completely.

Again we must say that we cannot thank him enough, both for thus having made us his children, and for now working to make us more and more what we ought to be as such children of his. That his blessed purposes may be realized let us keep before us the commandment to love our enemies, but always use the key to reach the true inwardness of this blessed word, namely the goodness of our heavenly Father as we taste it day by day, the love of Jesus, our Savior, as it comforts and blesses us without end, and our relation to the Father as his dear children through Jesus, our Savior, children made daily more like unto him.

“Love your enemies!” By the goodness of God, through the love of Christ, as the children of God — we will!

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## Outline

There are four points by anyone of which we may pick up the entire text. The most obvious is the command to love our enemies; another is the reference to us as the children of our heavenly Father; a third is the sunshine and the rain, these significant illustrations of how God treats his enemies; and the fourth is the command to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. — Picking up the text at the point first indicated we may discuss: How Jesus teaches us the commandment to love our enemies: He puts it squarely against the perversions of the Jewish rabbis — He connects it with the goodness of our heavenly Father — He shows that it must be a mark of the children of this Father. — A theme derived from the second point might be: Since we are children of our Father in heaven, how far must our love reach? We cannot let it reach only as far as that of publicans and Gentiles — Our Father shows us how far it must reach — And the Savior who made us children of this Father helps us to make our love reach as far as it should. — Starting from the third point we may think of: How Jesus wants us to look at the sunshine and the rain: As an illustration of how God loves his enemies — As an admonition how we are to love our enemies. — Finally: Our Savior’s command: Be ye therefore perfect! 1) As the children of God’s

love. 2) Through the love bestowed upon us as such children. 3) In the love which alone befits such children.

## **“Love Your Enemies!”**

A command

1. Which Christ gives.
2. Which Christ fulfills.
3. Which Christ helps us fulfill.

— FRIEDRICH.

## **Can we Love our Enemies?**

1. Some think we cannot do it.
2. God shows us how he does it.
3. Christ points out how we may indeed do it.
4. There is great blessing in doing it.

## **“Love your Enemies!” A Commandment which Divides the World.**

1. Who is on the one side? Those who do not even know our Father in heaven — those who reject our Father’s love — those who pervert his commandment of love. (The Gentiles — the publicans — the rabbis.)
2. Who is on the other side? Our heavenly Father with his goodness towards his enemies — our Savior with his redemptive love toward his enemies — we as the children of God with our humble love toward our enemies.

## **A New Way to Look at the Sunshine and the Rain.**

1. The love that sends them — see it; 2) Yield to it; 3) Learn to obey it.

# **51. Look at the Question of Merit in the Light of the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant. The Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 17:7-10.**

But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do. (Luke 17:7-10)

IT SEEMS EXCEEDINGLY HARD for the human heart to grasp properly the wonderful doctrine of God's grace in Christ Jesus. A secret Pharisee lurks within every bosom, and the strongest measures must be taken to drive him out and to prevent him from coming back. This explains why the Bible is full of warnings against men setting up any claims of theirs against God, and trusting in any merits of their own in dealing with God. Our Lord Jesus Christ has gone to great lengths to show us most fully and clearly just what God's grace is, all its richness, all its glories, all its comfort, and how utterly foolish, dangerous, and deadly it is to put our trust in anything but this grace. In the parable of the unprofitable servant he lets the light of truth shine on all our supposed merit before God. There is no such thing as merit on our part at all. It is a figment of the brain, a blind delusion of those who refuse to listen to God. Hear what the Savior tells us.

## **Look at the Question of Merit in the Light of the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant.**

There you will see what it means when men boast of great merit — when Christ speaks of no merit at all — when thus nothing is left us but unmerited grace.

### **I. When Men Boast of Great Merit**

Here is a picture from every day life. A man owns an estate to which many servants belong. We see one of these servants at his work, He plowed the fields all-day long. That, of course, was no easy work, as every farmer well knows. Or he spent the day taking the flocks out to pasture in the old way, when the shepherd led them out into the open country, guarded them carefully, and brought them safely back at night to their fold. With all this work done the servant comes in, but now new work awaits him. He is not told by his master to go and sit down to meat, He must first prepare the evening meal for his master. In the olden days this was the chief meal, and, of course, meant special preparation. With everything ready at last for his master to dine, the servant is obliged to add yet the world of waiting at table. He goes back and forth as he is bidden, and not till the master is through is this servant's work done, so that he himself can rest and eat, and enjoy a little relaxation before he retires to his bed to sleep.

Mark well what the point in this little picture really is. Here is a faithful, diligent, willing servant. He carries out every command of his master. He does not grumble at the hard work of plowing or tending sheep all day long. He is not sullen when still more work is asked of him at the day's end. With willing hands he waits on his master to the last. If you asked what more he could possibly do, you would have to admit that there is no more. The Lord himself points this out when he draws his application to us: "So likewise ye, when ye have done all those things commanded you." This, then, is a perfect servant, a picture of what we would be in our service to Christ, if we perfectly fulfilled every last command which he makes of us.

But now? what about the question of merit? Suppose for a moment that every one of us were actually like this servant, doing now and every day every last thing Jesus commands us, and doing it with a willing, ready, eager

heart, so that not one thing is omitted. What would we think and say of ourselves with such complete and perfect service standing to our credit? Well, some of us, perhaps a good many of us, would at once think that by such complete and excellent service we had attained great merit. Our hearts would swell in pride, our pride would begin to boast, and we would be quite sure that God ought to recognize such service, that by it we had earned this recognition, and that God ought to reward us accordingly. That is exactly what many would think, and the worst of it is that they would feel in their very hearts that such thoughts are right, and that God surely ought to act in accord with them.

Jesus purposely pictures an ideal, perfect servant to us. He wants to give us as much ground as possible to build our thoughts of merit on. In reality our case is never as favorable for claims of merit as the case of this servant in the parable. We always fall far below. Even the best saint among us has to confess: "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done." But even so the notion of merit keeps clinging to us. With the little that we actually do in God's service, and with the mistaken things which many imagine count in God's service, the idea possesses us that God must put a great price on this, that he is bound to do so, and that for what we thus do a great and mighty reward is awaiting us. Let us be honest about it. The world is full of such thoughts, and surely we too have had them, and in a way may have them yet.

That is what this parable wants. It is intended to call out our dreams of merit. Surely, a perfect servant like this one in the parable has correspondingly great merit with God! And if our obedience is not quite up to this man's mark, at least it is something, or at least our intentions have been good — at times; and so our merit with God ought certainly to be something, to say the least. Ah, if only Christ had stopped with the parable! If only he had added no explanation! Then, very likely, all those who are so bent on building up a merit of their own would have used this text as a proof passage for their dreams, like they try to use some other passages. But now, what does this parable of the perfect servant do? It only calls out our foolish claims of merit, and then it crushes them altogether.

## **II. Christ Speaks of No Merit At All**

Look again at this parable. There is an application to it, one which casts a new light altogether on this servant whose obedience was so perfect.

His work is all done at last. There was the arduous labor during the day, and on top of it this added labor in the evening. He has served his master's meal, and has diligently and devotedly waited on his master while he ate. Now what does the Lord say? Does he praise and exalt the servant? Does he tell us how the master of that servant is or ought to be beholden to him? Does he describe some great reward and honor bestowed upon that servant by his master? Well, if you think anything of the sort, you are going to be badly disappointed. This is what the Lord says of the master of that servant: "Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not." Does that surprise you? If it does, then that shows how wrong and mistaken are all your ideas about your service to God. And by the grace of God this parable of Christ is to correct them.

For mark well the point of Christ's question at the close of the parable. Here was a perfect servant, and he rendered a perfect obedience. But even by this perfectness he earned no merit at all from his master. He had done his part as a servant, and that is all. And what that means for you and me in our service to God Christ brings out still more clearly: "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." The Lord is right. When it comes to the question of merit the servant in the parable has none at all. His master knows that he has none, and he himself knows it, and we who are in the place of that servant now ought to know it likewise. Only blind people can see merit where there is none.

The man in the parable is a servant. What does that mean? This that his time and labor belong to his master. For this he was hired and bound to his master. For certain wages he had agreed to render certain service. When now his master asks for those services, must not the servant render them? Is it not so with all servants, with all employees? Their service and work belongs to their employers. When they perform it fully and completely, they are doing only what in common honesty they ought to do; they are giving to their employers nothing more than what belongs to them. If they did less they would be robbing their employers. Is there any claim beyond that? Why your employer would laugh at you, if after doing your work for the wages agreed on you would come to him claiming that he ought to do all sorts of other things besides for you, because you had worked the allotted



number of hours or performed the apportioned task. If you were an employer, what would you say to a workman who came with such claims to you? Who is there among us that does not take a servant's work, in fact insist on that work, and when it is done and paid for feel no further obligation whatever? Is there any obligation beyond, which the servant can urge? Nobody knows of any.

Perhaps you think that this does not cover our case with God, when we consider our service to him. You are right, it does not. Only instead of our case being more in our favor in our service of God, it is altogether and completely less so. We are not like the servant of a human master who can in most cases work for that master, or leave it alone. We literally belong to God. He made us. Every breath we draw, every minute we live, every power we have, every thing that we own, belongs to him, and is a gift from him to us. St. Paul reminds us: "What hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" We could not pay God for these his gifts if we tried. If we lived and labored a million years, we could not pay him. — More than this. When we talk of being servants of his, that means that he has made us such, taken us out of the devil's bondage, washed us clean from our sins through his Son's blood, and set us in his church as his servants. So all that enables us to render any true spiritual service to God is altogether and in the very first place a gift, of his to us. Now what about our service? Why, it all belongs to him. He has paid us for it in advance, paid us at an enormous rate. We cannot even estimate what all we have from him before we ever do a stroke of work for him. — Now think of us, after all this, standing up before him and declaring that he owes us still more! The thought is outrageous. He never owed us anything in the first place. But worse yet, to stand up thus before him when we have failed to render him complete service, claiming still more from him when our service has only been half of what it should have been! Thousands do even a more outrageous thing still. Instead of serving God as he demands, they do a few things which they in their own folly choose to do. He wants them to believe in Christ, but they refuse to do it; he wants them in his church, but they stay out of it; he directs them by his Word, but they will not even hear and read it. And yet they come with claims upon God! No man on earth would submit to anything of this sort, if any servant of his would do such a thing. It is only God whom men thus try to abuse.

No, my friends, there is no such thing as merit, either great merit or any merit at all in our relation to God. After all that he has given us he owes us absolutely nothing — we owe him everything, and with the longest and most perfect obedience could not pay even a fraction of it. Look thus at the question of merit in the light of this parable, and then no thought of merit great or small will ever rise again in your hearts.

### **III. Nothing Left Us But Unmerited Grace**

All this is meant to sober us by properly humbling us. But there is a blessed purpose behind it all, and we would not read this parable aright if we failed to detect it.

Remember it is the Lord Jesus who speaks this parable. He is the very embodiment of God's grace to us, and God's grace is the direct opposite of all human merit. This explains to us the real object of the parable — it is intended to sweep away all our false and foolish dreams of merit, to clear the ground properly, in order that we may realize fully just what God's grace is, and accepting it as grace may possess all its infinite blessings. The thing that we must learn first of all is what Jesus here says: "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."

The very presence of Christ, and his speaking a parable like this for our enlightenment, is evidence sufficient that God does not intend to do as the master does in this parable, and as we constantly do in the ordinary affairs of life, when we take the full measure of work from our employees for the stipulated wages and count the matter as ended there. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts," says the Lord. God plans to bestow upon us his unmerited grace. This is a thing no ordinary master or employer does as regards those whom they employ. They all stop short of grace. It would bankrupt them, or break up their business, if they should attempt to dispense with a free hand all sorts of unmerited grace. But God who is infinitely rich not only is able to bestow gifts of priceless value upon us, but also delights to do so — his wondrous grace is his highest glory. And this is grace — to receive from the hand of God what we have in no way earned or deserved; yea, when we have deserved his wrath and punishment, to receive

instead his love, his kindness, and his blessings in time and in eternity. Grace is when the criminal who ought to be hung is pardoned and set free; when the wicked son who repudiated his father and went into a far country is received back to his father's house; when the malefactor, receiving on the cross what his deeds are worth, instead of being cast into hell as he deserves, is taken into Paradise for the sake of Jesus Christ his Savior. Such grace is to be ours, and in the same way through Christ, God's fountain of grace.

Now the one thing that blocks this grace and bars it out from us is our refusal to recognize it as grace, our determination to make demands upon God as though he owed us heaven or any of his blessings because of our goodness or works, instead of recognizing that all demands on our part are an outrage towards God, since there is only one thing we can rightly demand of him, namely the just penalty for our sins and misdeeds. To come with such demands is to cast aside God's grace. To insist upon our supposed merit is to force God to give us our merit, and that means to throw us out of his kingdom forever. O the folly of men, when God desires to shower unmerited grace and gifts upon them, for them to stand on merit! when God owes them nothing, and they owe God everything, and can never pay him what they owe, to make it appear the reverse! Can God submit to such a thing? Will you submit when a man owes you, for him to declare that you owe him? And in this case God is on the one side, and you, a worm of the dust, on the other! No wonder Christ made such effort to save us from this deadly folly.

Oh, then, let us recognize the blessedness and glory of unmerited grace! It is twofold. First the grace that has made us servants of God. This we have already received. Miserable, damnable sinners that we were, God has sent us his Son, cleansed us through his blood, placed us in his kingdom and church, honored us by letting us work for him. In all eternity we cannot thank him for this part of his grace. The very thought of it ought to kill the least idea of our making claims upon God on the strength of anything we now may be able to do for him. Our one motive ought to be to serve him now with all our might, in the most perfect service we are able to render. Can we ever withhold anything from him who has bestowed so much upon us? — And the other part of his grace is similar. After saving us and honoring us by making us his servants God in his super-abounding grace intends to put his own undeserved estimate upon our poor, imperfect service. To

each one of our little works, which really is worth nothing to him, and for which his past grace has already paid a million-fold, he means to add another measure of his grace, and to give us for such works the most priceless blessings in time and in eternity. It is as if a man should do a poor day's work plowing, shepherding, or waiting at table, and instead of getting his proper wage of a couple of dollars a day should receive a million dollars for each single day. And even this estimate is too slight, for none of earth's millions could pay for one of these unmerited rewards which God bestows upon us. Hear what the Lord says: "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." And again: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." And Daniel, the prophet, declares: "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

Do we want to blot out these promises? Then let us talk of our merit instead of God's grace. But who that has the least conception of his own utter lack of merit, and of God's infinite richness of grace will ever hesitate as between the two?

Great merit? — Why, there is no merit at all! — But thank God through Christ Jesus, there is an infinite measure of unmerited grace! That and that alone shall be our heart's joy and hope.

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## Outlines

The heart of the text lies in the two words: "unprofitable servants," and every sermon on this text must penetrate to this heart. Now, of course, we may formulate the central thought in our own way, and that will distinguish the sermon. In addition we may approach that center from one or the other side, and that again will make the sermon distinctive. — Why does the Lord call us unprofitable servants? Because we like to deny it; because we ought to realize it; because so much is involved in our realizing it. — The servant who did all that was commanded him — are we like him? We are not, because we do less, and claim more. We ought to be like him, doing as much,

yet claiming nothing. — Langsdorff has this division and treatment: What does it mean to be servants of God? It means that we are bound to serve and obey him — that all our service is without merit before him — that by his grace alone are we justified and saved.

### **“We are Unprofitable Servants.”**

1. That sounds like a hard judgment.
2. That is a necessary confession.
3. That ought to be a fruitful admission.

### **How to Read the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant.**

1. Read it first with the idea of merit, in order that this idea may wholly vanish from your heart.
2. Read it secondly with the idea of grace, in order that this idea may wholly possess your heart.

### **The Parable of the Unprofitable Servant: Or: the Case of Merit versus Grace.**

1. Establish merit, and you lose grace.
2. Drop merit, and you find grace.

### **The Strange Thing about the Parable of the Unprofitable Servant.**

In most parables there is only a likeness between the picture and the thing pictured; here there is a likeness and an unlikeness combined.

1. We are like this servant, and yet altogether unlike him. He does all that is commanded; do we?
2. God is like this master, yet altogether unlike him. He has a right to take all our service without a word; does he?

# 52. Jesus Brings Us The Most Precious Liberty Of All. The Seventeenth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 13:10-17.

And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him. (Luke 13:10-17)

LIBERTY — WHAT A GLORIOUS WORD!

Men strive and strain to attain liberty; they bleed and die to secure and maintain it.

Tyranny, bondage, slavery — what terrible terms!

To destroy what they signify men are ready to pay almost any price. Their one effort is to be free from oppression, and to enjoy their rightful heritage of liberty.

But all this applies only to the lower forms of liberty, namely liberty from political oppression, from social and commercial tyranny, from the wretched bondage of the intellect and conscience. When it comes to the highest liberty of all, that of the soul, men are far less responsive and 'enthusiastic. This or that yoke of human contrivance they shake off, and then celebrate the deliverance with exuberant joy; but at the same time they will-

ingly wear the shackles of Satan's contrivance, and even resent the efforts of Christ, our divine Liberator, who would give us the highest freedom of all.

Shall we be content, like so many, to cast off the yoke of human bondage, while we go on wearing the yoke of Satan's tyranny? Nay, if the lesser liberty is precious also to us, and well worth the price men pay to attain it, then the supreme liberty is surely precious in proportion, and nothing should ever deter us from securing it and keeping it In our possession. Let us realize what this liberty is, and how we too may have and enjoy it all our life long. Our text displays it. Here we see the divine Liberator himself, and he is busy with his work of setting men free. A poor sufferer, held for eighteen years in the bondage of Satan, is loosed by the miraculous deliverance of Jesus. And by his saving word of truth he likewise seeks to loose the bonds of delusion and error which fetter the hearts and consciences of men.

### **Jesus Brings us the Most Precious Liberty of all.**

It is liberty from Satan's dominance — liberty from Satan's delusions.

## **I. Liberty From Satan's Dominance**

The worst tyrant of all is Satan. And the most terrible tyranny which the world has seen is that which emanates from him. His one desire is to lord it over men, to show that he is their master, and that they are his helpless slaves.

A true picture of this tyrant's work is given us in our text. Jesus was preaching on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, in one of the synagogues near the Holy Land. The place was full of people, who also were attentively listening to the Savior's words. In the midst of it all a poor woman comes slowly and painfully into the synagogue. She was bent double and absolutely unable to raise her body upright What a pitiful sight! But the worst of it was that she had been thus for eighteen years. During all this time she had been held as in a vise, and all the remedies she had tried had been unable to give her even partial relief. — What was the cause of her sad condition? St. Luke tells us — she had "a spirit of infirmity"; and Jesus tells us still more plainly — Satan had bound her body and locked it fast in this stooped

position. This was a sample of his tyrannous power, which with hellish delight he vents upon helpless men. In the days of Christ he often did this openly and directly, taking possession of some poor victim's faculties, making some of them dumb or deaf, rendering others violent and uncontrollable, and in the case of this woman keeping her body bent almost double. These were cases of demoniacal possession. One of the wicked spirits of hell, sometimes a number of them in unison, enslaved some poor human being, maltreating him in vicious and cruel spite.

Let us learn here what the devil's tyranny really is. His great power and cunning is used only for one damnable purpose — to bring misery and pain upon men. God who made us has given us a thousand blessings; and even when sin came into the world through man's own fault, a vast number of these blessings remained for us to remind us of the goodness of God, and to point us upward to him from whom these blessings flow. But sin enabled Satan to go on with his nefarious work among men. He wants to lord it over us and to show us that we are helpless in his power. Because of sin we are exposed to the attacks of his power. And this power of his lets loose a flood of evils of all kinds upon us. He stirs men to hate, murder, vice, and all manner of crimes; he kindles the fires of hellish passions in them and causes them to inflict all manner of suffering upon each other. Look at the fearful things that happen in the world, so many of them plainly beyond what men of themselves would do — the devil is behind them, they smell of hell itself. In cases like these demoniacal possessions Satan applies his tyrannous powers directly, dispensing with ordinary means and agencies. Jesus himself tells us that these are Satan's own deeds. — What folly for skeptics and unbelievers to scoff at the existence of the devil! Do they mean to tell us there is no devil? that all this hellish wickedness and the agony it causes are not due to the devil, but to man alone? That would make a very devil out of man himself — a fine compliment they would pay to man! It is as when they deny the Bible story of his wonderful creation by God — they, make him a descendant, or as the latest evolutionary science has it, a cousin of the ape. Once they make him a relative of the brute, and again they make him a very demon. But it is Christ, our Savior, and God's own Word of truth which tell us what the facts really are — Satan and his power, through the sin they have brought into the world, reign now among men, and this terrible reign is nothing but tyranny, bondage, oppression, and untold misery



and woe. The poor woman in our text is a sample of what this power has done, and would like to go on doing to the fullest limit.

Now imagine what the condition would be if there were no restraint to the devil's power, no Liberator from his thralldom, and no release from his abominable sway. Then the devil could wreck his spite upon us literally as he pleased. He could fill the whole world with measureless suffering and feast his eyes upon our writhing and torture. How many of God's blessings would he leave us? And what wretchedness that he is able to invent would he omit to send upon us? These are things we must never forget when God tells us of the vicious work of the devil, and how his one delight is in our suffering.

But see what happened in the synagogue when the poor sufferer came in. Not one moment did Jesus make her wait. At once he called her to him, and while all the people looked on he said to her: "Woman thou art loosed from thine infirmity." And suiting the action to the word, he laid his hands in benediction upon her head. In that very instant the power that held her was broken. A mightier power has come upon it and shattered it. She who had been held bent double these eighteen years was loosed in that instant, raised herself upright, and realizing what had happened to her praised God for her wonderful deliverance through Jesus Christ. Behold the liberty she had obtained — part of the most precious liberty of all — liberty from Satan's dominance. And this through Christ the divine, the heaven-sent Liberator himself. This is the thing for us to contemplate that we too may rejoice in the fullest possession of this most precious liberty of all.

Let me sum it up in one brief word: this liberty from Satan's dominance is ours when the devil no longer has power to harm us. You see at once what it means — one mightier than the devil must come to our rescue and take us into his power. There is only one mightier, namely God, and he sends his liberating power to us through his Son Jesus Christ, our Savior. The miracle wrought upon the woman in the synagogue is a vivid picture of how God's liberating power works through his Son in our behalf. There can be no doubt here as to who freed the poor woman — it was Christ with his divine power. For eighteen years she had been helpless, now she was loosed. There can be no doubt either as to the kind of Liberator who freed this poor woman — it was the Christ of infinite mercy and compassion. As Satan's delight is to bind and maltreat, so his delight is to set free and bless.

Now Jesus wrought this and many a similar deed to reveal to us all what his liberating power really is, so that in our bondage under sin and Satan, and from all the evils these bring upon us, we may flee to him, find freedom and remain free all the rest of our days. Jesus did not come, to earth for a brief day only, to liberate only a few sufferers from Satan's bondage of evil, and then leave again. He came to erect his kingdom on earth, to establish his sway of grace and mercy among men, and thus to open the door to us all that we all may escape the tyranny of the devil and find freedom and deliverance under his heavenly rule. Here is one mightier than the devil, who came to destroy the works of the devil, and to deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. All those who believe in Christ are his own; they are free from the devil's dominion; no longer is he able to wreck his spite upon them. The almighty hand of Christ is over us, and the moment we cry to him in prayer the devil must flee from us. O glorious liberty! Who can measure its value? Would that all men might possess and enjoy it!

But do not Christian people suffer all kinds of affliction here in this life? Do not evils of one kind or another come upon them? Some of them are painful bodily evils too, infirmities of all kinds. Is this deliverance after all what the Bible says of it, or does the devil still hurt and harm us as he wills? — Let no thoughts of this kind ever disturb your hearts. When Christians suffer it is a different thing from the suffering of other men. Hear St. Paul's word: "What shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" And again he says: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." This is the difference: the suffering of unbelievers is due to God's wrath, because they are determined to stay under the devil's power; so the devil is able to heap evils upon them for their destruction — but the sufferings of God's children and Christ's believers is due to God's love, working for their good, drawing them more closely to God; their sufferings are crosses, a sign that God is training and preparing them for heaven. "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked," as the Psalmist says, but note, no crosses; "but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about" Ps. 32:10. Therefore, while the wicked howl and cry under the bondage of Satan, God's children are comforted in all their afflictions. And while the evils which Satan heaps upon the ungodly shall increase until he drags them down to hell, the children of God shall be delivered from all evil. St. Paul

glories in this deliverance: “And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” 2 Tim. 4:18. Our deliverance here in time is the prelude to our perfect and most glorious deliverance in eternity.

## **II. Liberty From Satan’s Delusions**

But this most precious liberty which Jesus brings to us has another side. It is deliverance from Satan’s dominance, by which he brings evil upon men, and then also it is liberty from Satan’s delusions, by which he holds men’s souls in bondage.

That poor woman in our text was indeed a pitiful sight till Jesus loosed her from her bondage. But there was a man in that synagogue in bondage even worse than the woman’s. And think of it — he was the very ruler of the synagogue, the man at the head of it, who managed its affair and helped to conduct the services. His bondage was not some bodily evil, but the delusion of his mind. You see it when the ruler beheld the gracious deed of Jesus upon the woman. Did this ruler also praise God for what Jesus had done? Not he! He found fault with Jesus, and he did it in a kind of cowardly way. He was indignant at the act of Jesus, and ordered the people to come during the six work-days of the week to be healed, but not as that woman had done on the Jewish Sabbath. There was something vitally wrong with this man, and the worst of it was that he did not even realize it. The devil had his soul bound by the chain of a vicious error and delusion, and the bondage was so strong that even the sight of a glorious miracle like that wrought by Christ did not break it. In and by that miracle Christ was trying to help also this ruler’s soul; he was holding out deliverance to his soul. But this man preferred to stay in his miserable bondage.

There was only one thing, then, for Jesus to do, namely to expose the delusion which bound this ruler’s soul, in order that thus if possible he might yet be liberated, and in order that others might not like him remain in the same bondage. So Jesus faces the ruler who had struck at him through his word to the people: “Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox and his ass from the stall, and lead him away to the watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the

Sabbath day?” — God indeed had forbidden the Jews to work on Saturday, making this their Sabbath. And Jesus who had come to fulfill the law for us was the last person in the world to commandment. Who but a deluded Jew could dream of charging that Jesus had worked when he spoke the words of deliverance to the woman and laid his hands in blessing upon her head? Without any work as God’s law forbade it Jesus had loosed a poor sufferer from Satan’s bondage. But think of this ruler and others like him. They never hesitated to go into their barns and untie the ropes which fastened their cattle to the stalls, to lead them out to water, and then to tie them up again? That was loosing too and loosing with a little work at least. Yes, a brute beast they would loose, and merely to quench its thirst with water; but a human being, tied by Satan, they demanded should wait till the next day. An ox and an ass they untied even on the Sabbath, but a daughter of Abraham, one of their own chosen people, intended of God as an heir of heaven, they forbade to be loosed from the devil’s own rope, just because it was the Jewish Sabbath. What a delusion! God’s Sabbath, while it was never meant to deprive animals of water though they had to be untied and led out to get it, most assuredly was intended of God to bring help and blessing of all kinds to men. Therefore Jesus used his tongue in preaching on the Sabbath, and therefore he used both tongue and hand in loosing the woman from her bond. What a miserable delusion for this ruler to blame Jesus as if Jesus had worked on the Sabbath, when the ruler himself regularly did on every Sabbath what could be counted work in a sense far more real!

But this was not the worst part of his delusion. When this man found fault with Jesus regarding the Sabbath he blinded himself to the wonderful revelation Jesus was granting him. Here was almighty power, here was heavenly grace and mercy, here was the eternal Savior himself, and here was one poor sufferer freed by this Savior’s power and grace — and this ruler failed to realize what all this was and what it meant. He stickled about the Sabbath, when the great Lord of the Sabbath and Lord of salvation stood before him and revealed himself as such. That is what the devil wanted. That is why he had fastened these perverted notions about the Sabbath upon men like this ruler, when the whole law of God was utterly against such notions. He wanted to keep the souls of these men so tied and fettered that they would not accept Christ nor his saving help. The devil persuaded them that Jesus broke the Sabbath, in order to persuade them that

he was not the Savior sent of God. This is the worst part of the ruler's delusion.

Here think of the delusions with which Satan keeps men's souls bound to this very day. Some of them are just as trivial and hypocritical as the Jewish notions about the Sabbath. Some find fault with his person, some with his doctrine, some with his work, some with his church. They will not believe that he is the Son of God, though all his miracles attest it, and all the Scriptures declare it, and any Savior who is not God could not possibly remove our sin and deliver us from Satan's power. They reject this or that about his doctrine, especially that faith alone secures salvation; and yet how can a sinner be saved except he entrust himself wholly to Christ's saving power, and except he take Christ's Word just as he says it, knowing that he who saves us will surely never mislead us. Likewise this Savior's work, especially his atoning death on the cross; and yet the whole Bible attests that without the shedding of blood no sin can be removed from the sight of God, and this wondrous death of Christ in our stead is his highest glory. So with all the delusions invented by the devil to bind men's souls to himself. Why will men not see that their real purpose is to draw and keep us away from Christ, to make us think we can be saved without him, or so to misconceive him and his salvation that though we think we are saved we still remain bound fast to sin and Satan.

But thank God, here is our blessed Liberator who by the power of his Word and revelation shatters these Satanic delusions and sets men's souls free. Alas, the ruler in the synagogue would not be freed, even when the black bonds that held him were exposed. But liberty was there calling to him, trying to take the fetters from him, opening heaven itself to him. The people in the synagogue, however, realized what Jesus was bringing them. They disregarded the wicked folly of their own ruler and joined the woman in rejoicing "for the glorious things that were done by Jesus." That joy showed that Jesus' power was beginning to free their souls. Freedom, true freedom, as Jesus bestows it, always brings forth joy; and the more we enter that freedom, the deeper and happier will our joy be.

Away, then, with every delusion with which Satan would bind us! Let us give our hearts wholly to him, and his Word of truth shall make us free indeed. Above all let him make us true and sincere in learning from him, for hypocrisy is only another secret chain of Satan. Thus having obtained this precious liberty through the grace of our heavenly Liberator, let us follow

him in ever increasing joy. With Satan's power no longer hurting us, and with Satan's delusions no longer ensnaring us, we shall be free indeed, and all our liberty, priceless beyond measure, shall be to the praise of our Savior's glorious name.

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## Outlines

The distinguishing mark of this text appears in the word "loosed." Jesus uses the word twice, once when he frees the woman, and again when he rebukes the ruler. So this text deals with freedom and liberty. Moreover, there is no call whatever for us to allegorize either the miracle itself or any other portion of the text, as is done to such a deplorable extent in the outlines of Langsdorff, some of them from men of whom we certainly should have expected something better. But they are compelled to resort to allegory when they set out to use this text as a basis for the Christian doctrine of Sunday. It cannot properly be used in such a way, and we certainly ought to give up the attempt — We may divide the text horizontally, using as the first part Christ and the woman, and as the second Christ and the ruler. Thus: Christ delivers from the bondage of Satan: his power frees us from the evils with which Satan would bind us — and his word of truth frees us from the falsehoods with which Satan would fetter us. — The split may also be made perpendicularly, for the woman as well as the ruler are bound by Satan, and there is deliverance for both. Christ sets the captives free: consider their captivity — their freedom. — A division into three parts results when first the bondage is described, secondly the Liberator, and finally the freedom which he bestows.

### **Christ Breaks Satan's Bonds for us.**

1. We see it in the miracle he wrought on the woman with a spirit of infirmity.
2. We see it in the truth he brought for the men still held fast by error.

## **How Jesus Put His Adversaries to Shame on the Sabbath Day.**

1. They were willing to leave a poor daughter of Abraham bound by Satan — Jesus sets her free.
2. They themselves were bound by the bonds of error — Jesus labors to liberate also them.

## **The Ox and the Ass on the Sabbath Day.**

1. They are led out to water.
2. They expose hypocrisy.
3. They justify Christ's mercy.
4. They furnish us cause for joy.

## **The Bonds which Jesus Broke.**

1. They are the worst of all.
2. They required the greatest power to break.
3. They now help us to realize the preciousness of our deliverance.

# **53. What the Parable of the Talents Teaches us Concerning Good Works. The Eighteenth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 25:14-30.**

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 25:14-30)

EVERY CHRISTIAN ought to weigh carefully and take to heart fully what our Confessions tell us when they declare that “especially in these last times it



is no less needful to admonish men to Christian discipline and good works, and instruct them how necessary it is that they exercise themselves in good works as a declaration of their faith and gratitude to God, than that the works be not mingled with the article of justification; because men may be damned by an epicurean delusion concerning faith, as well as by papistic and pharisaic confidence in their own works and merits.” That means that there are two ways of losing eternal salvation. One is to put our trust in our own good works, instead of in the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Savior; and the other is to content ourselves with an empty faith, which fails to do good works. Both of these fatal errors we must avoid. And that is why the Lord spoke this parable concerning the talents.

Here is the instruction we need. Let us learn with the Lord’s help

### **What the Parable of the Talents Teaches us Concerning Good Works.**

The Lord’s instruction centers in three words. They are the keys to the parable itself and to what we most certainly ought to learn from it.

## **I. Servants**

Let us learn, first of all, what lies in the word servants. The entire parable hinges on this word. The man who traveled into a far country called *his own servants*. When he returned he commended the two faithful ones, saying to each: Well done, thou good and faithful servant! But the one who proved unfaithful he condemned, saying to him: Thou wicked and slothful servant. What has this word to say concerning the doctrine of good works?

That is very plain — only those who are servants of the Lord Jesus Christ are called by him to do good works.

Good works are by no means the business of everybody. How can men do good works, works really acceptable in the sight of Christ, when their very hearts are full of sin? Already in the days of Noah God declared: “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” In the book of Job we read: “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.” And Jesus himself has told us that a tree must itself be good before it is able to bring forth good fruit; a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruits. Men are in-

deed able to do works that seem good to them. These works are good by comparison with vicious and criminal works. But beyond that they cannot go. When a man is kind and helpful to others people call that good. It is good when compared with evil and criminal acts, as when men abuse others, rob them and inflict all manner of injury upon them. But all these kind and helpful deeds of worldly men lack the vital thing which makes a work good in the sight of God. He looks into the heart. And then he finds that the works of worldly men, even when praised by all the world as good, are done without love to him, without desire to please Christ, without gratitude for his grace and mercy, without the purpose to honor and obey him. How can he accept what is not done for his sake at all? How can he praise what men do without an effort even to secure his praise? No; the very first requisite in doing good works is that our hearts must be good. Our hearts must be filled with faith in Christ, with love to him, with the earnest desire to do his will alone. Then, and then alone, can any man begin to do works that Christ will call good.

That is what the word “servant” means in this parable. Christ calls his servants, and these alone he sends to do good works, namely to serve him and his kingdom. He first makes us his servants, converts and changes our hearts by his grace, takes away our sins by his blood, lifts us out of the kingdom of this world, and places us into his own kingdom of grace, the Christian church on earth; then he bids us go and serve him. Let us hold this fast. It will set us right in the very first and most essential thing regarding good works.

For here we see how our parable at the very threshold shuts out the idea, that any man by his good works is able to earn salvation from God. Why as servants of Christ salvation is already ours; Christ gives it to us when he makes us his servants. He earned it with his blood; no man could ever in the least earn it; and this priceless gift is ours when we are made his by faith in him and thus become his servants. And this we must ever hold fast, when we hear the call to do good works, else we will spoil all our efforts. For no worse thing can be done than this that we should try to earn over again what Christ alone could and did earn for us; that we should set aside his work and his gift, and substitute our poor works in their place.

But here we see also what the real motive must be when now we try to do good works. It lies in this word “servant.” Think of what it means to be a servant of Christ. That means that he has released you from the servitude of

the devil, that by his grace he has made you completely his own to live under him in his kingdom, that a new life, new spiritual powers, heavenly graces and blessings have been bestowed upon you by his love. That is what it means to be a servant of Christ. How can you or any other man be thus made a servant of Jesus without feeling towards him the deepest gratitude and the most fervent love? Surely, we must love him who thus first loved us; we must now seek to serve him, who thus first came and served us. And all our service — how can it ever repay him for this love and blessing he has made ours in lifting us up to be henceforth “his own servants”?

In addition we see here how it could not be otherwise than that we should now serve our Lord and Savior. The Scriptures often speak of us as children of God. “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” We are called the heirs of God, yea, joint-heirs with Christ. In all these expressions we are shown what we receive from and through Christ. And that is the chief and most essential thing — that Christ does for us and gives to us. Then, however, come these other expressions, when, as in this parable, we are called “servants” of Christ. And these names show what we owe to Christ who has done so much for us. Why, it is simply impossible for us to take so much from Christ, and not love and thank him for it all. It is not that he forces us now to serve him, drives us to the service like slaves; we ourselves rejoice to serve him and by our poor and humble service to show how we appreciate what he has done for us. It ought to be our meat and drink to do as much as we possibly can for Christ. Only one, like this wicked and slothful servant in the parable, a servant of Christ not in fact, but only in name, a mere false sham-servant, could refuse to serve Christ. Who of us wants to be a servant like that? No; this term “servant” is our honor title in the presence of Christ. Blessed are they who bear it as such. Our service shall be our good works; they shall proclaim day by day that we indeed believe in Christ and belong to him.

And finally, this word “servant” makes plain to us what good works, good in the sight of Christ, really are. A true servant always does what his lord tells him to do. And so we who are Christ’s servants. Never will we set up our own ideas of what we ought to do or leave undone, but always we will let Christ direct and control us. His Word is our law. Men may invent all kinds of works which they think will please Christ, and they may do these self-invented works with all their might. We know that Christ has said: “In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the command-

ments of men.” Nor will we deviate from Christ’s Word when in some things it bids us to put away what our sinful hearts may still love and desire. We will heed him, deny ourselves, take up our cross, crucify the flesh, give up the love of the world, and faithfully follow him. “For the love of Christ constraineth us; ...that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.” 2 Cor. 5:14-15.

## II. Talents

And now let us learn what the second great word in our parable teaches us concerning good works. It is the word talents, the word from which the entire parable takes its name: what lies in the word talents? The man who traveled into a far country gave to each of his servants certain talents; and when he returned he made a Reckoning regarding these talents; and to the faithful servants he turned over these talents plus the others which they had gained, that they should keep them forever. What does this word “talents” teach us concerning good works?

A talent is a sum of money, reckoned by weight. If we estimate it in silver, a talent will be about \$1,600 in our money. But this is a parable, and the sums of money mentioned here are used as illustrations of the gifts which Christ bestows upon those who belong to him as his servants and followers. And that makes plain to us what we need in order to do good works, such as Christ counts good — we need his spiritual gifts. The man in the parable did not simply call his servants and order them to go serve him; he himself fitted each one out for this service, he gave a certain sum into each servant’s hands. With that sum they were to go to work.

This shatters the idea, as if any man could just start out of himself to serve Christ. He has to be made a servant first, as we have seen. But more than this — even as a servant he must be given his talent or talents, his share of the Savior’s spiritual gifts before he can begin to serve him in doing works that will really please Christ. Good works are the fruit of the spiritual gifts which Christ bestows upon us. So again, without him we can do nothing. Let us mark that, for many forget it, and so fail in accomplishing good works, when, if they would let Christ enrich them they might indeed produce works to the praise of his name.

Christ calls these gifts “talents.” That means they are valuable. Of course, they are, for they come from him. He has bought all these gifts for us at a great price. And now when he enriches us with these blessings we ought certainly not to count them cheap, but prize them highly and use them accordingly. These talents are all the powers, virtues, and graces which Christ by his Holy Spirit adds to our faith. Among them is knowledge, a good understanding of his Word and doctrine. Surely, a precious talent! Next to knowledge is wisdom, the ability to use this knowledge in the Savior’s work. Then comes zeal and energy, a holy fervor to do what we can for Christ. Then we may think of patience, kindness, brotherly love, bravery in confessing Christ, strength to suffer for him and the brethren, humbleness, gentleness, temperance, and other Christian virtues, all given and wrought in us by Christ. We may add all kinds of ability and aptitude for service, both of body, mind, earthly property, position, and influence, but all these sanctified by faith and love to Christ and thus lifted up into a higher sphere. What a precious gift anyone of these is, to say nothing of a goodly number of them. How could anyone of us get what we have of them except through Christ? “What hast thou that thou didst not receive?” asks St. Paul, and then admonishes us: “Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”

In the parable we see that each servant receives his share of the gifts. No servant is left without his portion. That is significant. No servant of Christ is forgotten by him — he has some measure of gifts for even the humblest among us. Yet the gifts are not distributed in equal measure. We see one servant who receives five talents, one who gets two, and a third who gets one. And the Lord tells us why he makes this difference: “to every man according to his several ability.” How this is meant St. Paul has shown us most beautifully when he compares the members of Christ’s church to the members of the body. It would not do to have them all alike, there must be great diversity, and this for the benefit of the whole body. If all the members were hands how would the body walk? If all were eyes, how would the body hear? There are a thousand tasks to perform in the church on earth, and to have these tasks properly attended to there must be corresponding gifts and a distribution of them for the best interests of the church. The feet are as necessary as the hands, although the feet walk in the dust. The eyes indeed are placed in the head, but they see not for themselves alone, but for the whole body and every one of its members, even as the feet carry and move

forward the entire body. So all the talents are necessary. Even the humblest gift has its necessary and valuable part to perform. The Lord alone knows best what gift or gifts you can use, and so he has blessed you accordingly. Happy are we to have even one of his talents!

But let us not overlook the responsibility that goes with our measure of gifts. Often we think we ought to have more gifts, forgetting that “unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.” If you have received less, the Lord will not require of you what he will and must require of another to whom he has committed far more. The pastor of a church has a greater responsibility than one of its humbler members. God will not ask of a child what he will of a grown man. He who owns thousands as a child of God will have to give an account of thousands, but he who owns hundreds only an account of those hundreds. Let us be satisfied with the gifts we have, take what the Lord adds to us in his goodness, and use with all faithfulness the gifts he has placed in our keeping.

All his gifts, even the gift of one talent, is a trust which the Lord bestows upon us. In the parable the man gives the talents to his servants, and then takes a journey into a far country. You see how the servants now have the talents all in their own hands. Their master must have had great confidence in them thus to entrust his goods to them. It is indeed a high honor for Christ to entrust his precious gifts to us. He expects us to take care of these gifts, not to waste and abuse them, but to put them to the most faithful use in his service. Shall we prove recreant to his trust? Shall we abuse his confidence? Well, there is a servant of that kind in our parable. He utterly failed to appreciate the talent he had received, he buried it in the ground. That is how he rewarded the trust placed in him. Do you want to be like him?

The talents were given the servants in the parable in order that they might put them to use for their master. That is the real meaning and purpose of these, talents. St. Paul writes: “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10. Our gifts are really not our own, but the Lord’s, for us to use. We are to serve and honor him with them. They are not for our aggrandizement, that because of them we look down on others; nor for us to abuse, debasing them for our evil desires; nor for us to let lie idle, as the wicked servant in the parable treated his talent. Remember what our Confessions say: “Faith should bring forth good fruits, and that men ought to do the good works commanded of God, because it is God’s will” Every talent

we have is for Christ's service in faith and love. He who understands what the Lord means with this word "talent" will rejoice that he is so honored by him, and will strive to serve him faithfully to the full measure of his talent.

### **III. "Enter Into The Joy Of Thy Lord."**

And now we must learn what our parable teaches us concerning good works when it adds yet another highly significant word. What lies in the word: "Enter into, the joy of thy lord"?

That is what the master said to the two faithful servants when he returned and found that both had done what they could with his talents, the one with five bringing in other five, and the one with two, other two.

Did these two deserve such a reward? How can any man think of such a thing? Why, they were servants of their lord; all their time and strength belonged to him, and the talents were his. Then think what this joy of their lord is. This expression is no longer part of the picture of the parable, it is the reality itself, namely the joy and blessedness of Christ our Lord in the glory of heaven. Into that joy Christ says he will bid all his faithful servants enter. No, our little faithfulness here in this life cannot possibly merit such a reward. It is as if a child worked one hour for his father, and the father then should give it an inheritance of millions. We cannot talk of earning here; it is all love, generosity, grace, infinite goodness. Such a Lord is he whom we are called to serve. Oh, realize his true character! All the joys of heaven he holds in readiness for us, to give them to us all by grace; and so he asks us now to serve him faithfully in good works.

How miserably then that wicked and slothful servant slandered his lord when he called him a hard man who tried to get as much as possible out of others, using their labor of sowing that he might reap the harvest, and their labor of winnowing the grain that he might fill his granaries with it. Alas, that there are people who think the same of Christ today — as though he is after our work, our money, our service to enrich himself therewith. And so they count what they do for him as losing that much themselves. Away with all such follies and insults to Christ. Why, when he bids his faithful servants to enter into his eternal joy he tells them to keep not only the talents he entrusted to them, but besides all the talents they earned by their faithful work.

Earth never saw a master like that among men. Oh, How we ought to delight to do all we possibly can to please and honor him!

Only the faithful are admitted into the joy of the Lord. Not because their service is worth so much to Christ, or could possibly merit such a reward; but because our faithfulness shows indeed whether we are truly the servants of Christ. Faithful service is the test. Those first two were servants of their lord, they showed it. The third, however, who never turned a hand for his master, was he a servant of his? He did not act it. And see what his thoughts were — miserable insults to his gracious lord. Neither in act or in thought was this man a servant of his lord. The talent brought that out so that all could see and hear it. Why, the man did not even bank the talent for his lord, that thus, without any labor on this servant's part, it might have brought his lord at least some gain. So little did he care for his lord. — Could the Lord possibly say to a man with such a heart and such a life: “Enter into the joy of thy lord”? How would his scowl look in the bright joy of heaven? How would the black thoughts of his heart fit the happy songs of heaven? No; he belonged elsewhere. He himself had prepared himself for that other place: “Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” He loved the darkness here already in his wicked thoughts and ways; so the outer darkness, the darkness beyond, was his proper place. Unfaithfulness proves that a man will not accept Christ, his salvation, and his blessings; then there is only one other place left for him. Let us remember that when temptations come to us to misuse the gifts the Lord has given us, or at least to let them lie idle, like the buried talent in the parable.

A wonderful principle lies behind this word concerning the joy of our Lord, his wonderful gift of grace to the faithful. It is this, that “unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.” Unfaithfulness loses even what at first it has. And this is true even of the lesser unfaithfulness. You need not waste and abuse the Lord's gifts to lose them and to lose likewise the final joy he has prepared for you as his greatest gift. Even to bury the talent, and thus not to use it, is to lose it. O the pity, when one might be infinitely rich, to become a total beggar, and thus to be cast out forever! But faithfulness multiplies our gifts. See how the five talents grew in the hands of the faithful servant, and the two in the hands of the other. So the Lord gives to him who hath, who really hath in love and devotion to him. And



when the one talent was taken away from the wicked servant at last, who was best fitted to take charge of that? Why, without question he who had administered the five talents so as to gain other five. The Lord stands ready to enrich us more and more with his gifts, if only we show by our faithfulness that we will use aright these gifts of his. What an incentive to good works for us all! Such a wonderful, blessed Lord is ours. Let us look at all our gifts, at the increase the Lord delights to give us, and at the final joy he has awaiting us. Thus will our faithfulness grow day by day, and be full of joy even now, the pleasure of serving such a Lord, and the anticipation of the joy he has awaiting us.

Take to heart, then, what the parable of the talents teaches us concerning good works. We can sum it all up in one word — faithfulness. We are servants — let that make us faithful; we have precious talents — let that move us to use them faithfully; we shall hear at last that glorious word of grace: “Enter into the joy of thy Lord!” — let that make our faithfulness our highest delight.

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## Outlines

The parable of the Talents has three chapters, we may say, and these may serve as the parts of the sermon: the bestowal of the talents, the use made of the talents, the final reckoning in regard to the talents. The business of the theme will be properly to combine these three. — The parable has a climax, namely the final reckoning when the master returned from his journey. The sermon may be built around this climax. Theme: When the Lord of the talents returns: Will you meet him like those two faithful servants? — or will you meet him like the wicked and slothful servant? — Looking at the substance of the text we see that it is intended to urge us to faithfulness. Our theme, then, may be: The Parable of the Talents calls for faithfulness. The division will bring out how the parable does this. — Likewise, the parable urges us to do good works, but really good works, and in the way set for us by our Lord. So our theme may be: Christ’s servants must use their talents in doing good works: Look at the talents, and you will see what those good works are; look also at the reward of grace, and you will see how these good works are to be done.

## **Blessed are the Faithful!**

1. Theirs indeed is the work, while the unfaithful are at ease.
2. But theirs is also the reward of grace, while the unfaithful are cast out.

## **The Most Generous Master in the World.**

1. He equips his servants in the richest manner.
2. He trusts his servants with the highest work.
3. He rewards his servants with the most wonderful grace.

## **The Servant Who Would Not Use His Talent Like The Rest**

1. He vilified his Lord, where with the rest he should have loved and honored him.
2. He dreaded to serve his Lord, where like the rest he should have delighted to work for him.
3. He had himself cast out, where with the rest he should have entered into the joy of his Lord.

## **Are your Talents at Work?**

A reminder of your duty.

A call to what should be your delight.

An intimation of what surely is also your highest expectation.

# **54. Learn to Submit to the Will of the Lord. The Nineteenth Sunday After Trinity. Acts 21:8-14.**

And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done. (Acts 21:8-14)

ONE OF OUR DAILY PETITIONS in the Lord's Prayer is: "Thy will be done!" And certainly we must say that every Christian ought without question to submit to the will of his heavenly Father, and accept from his hands whatever he may resolve to send. But what seems quite self-evident when stated in a general way becomes an entirely different thing when put to the test of actual experience in our lives. Then we who pray so readily day by day: "Thy will be done!" may find that after all we are not so ready to abide by what that prayer implies, but would often like to choose and decide for ourselves what is to be our lot, to select a way different from the one determined by the Lord for the course of our lives, to obtain for ourselves what the Lord does not want us to have, and to avoid what he deems best to lay upon us. This is the case generally when we are called upon to face tribulations and trials. Then the test comes for us whether we really mean what we say when we pray this prayer about the will of the Lord.

We have an example of this situation in our text. When the dear friends of the apostle St. Paul heard that he was to be bound hand and foot in Jerusalem, and given over to imprisonment at the hands of the Roman authorities, they were completely upset. They tried to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem; they begged him to seek some place where his foes would not be able to reach him; in short, they urged him to try to defeat the will of the Lord, and to choose a course contrary to that will. We are happy to say that St. Paul was proof against all such solicitations, and by his noble faith and courage brought even these tearful friends of his to submit to the Lord's will. St. Luke writes: "And when he would not be persuaded we ceased, saying. The will of the Lord be done."

That is what we too must learn to do, even though it may' cost us a struggle. By the grace of God

## **Learn to Submit to the Will of the Lord,**

### **I. Give Up All Self-Will**

That means, first of all, that we give up all self-will.

What was the trouble with the Christians at Caesarea when St. Paul stopped there on his way to Jerusalem and heard from the Lord's own prophet what trials awaited him at the end of his journey? They clung to their own will. Their own will seemed better to them than this will of the Lord which held out suffering for St. Paul and sorrow for themselves. And this will of their own they had to give up. That is what it meant for them, as it still means for us, to submit to the will of the Lord.

Now by nature we are all set on our own will as over against the Lord. Men who are in their sins want to stay in those sins, and when God comes to change them they refuse to yield to his will. In their sinful blindness men see only the treasures and pleasures of earth, and when God takes these from them and holds out to them the treasures of heaven, for which his own Son shed his blood, and the pleasures of a heavenly life, which his own Son came to earth to bestow upon them, they oppose God, they resist his good and gracious will, they love their own will better. Many of them never let God's grace change their will, but harden themselves in rebellion against him. The only way these ever submit to his will is by sheer force, when the

Almighty lays his irresistible power upon them and crushes them in his righteous indignation. Even then their will is not changed. In hell itself we hear how the rich man, of whom Christ tells us in one of his parables, answered Abraham only by contradicting him. “Nay, father Abraham!” was his reply. “Nay!” is what he had said to God all along in his life, and he kept on saying it even in hell. Let us note well this old self-will of the human heart and its sin-born opposition to God and whatever God’s good and gracious will brings to us. It will help us to understand the self-will that still stirs in us now, who by the grace of God have been reborn, whose will by that blessed grace has been altered, and turned in a new, higher, and blessed direction.

When the people in our text gathered around the apostle St. Paul that day in Caesarea, when then the prophet Agabus stood up and delivered his message from God regarding St. Paul, when he took St. Paul’s girdle and with it bound his own hands and feet to show how St. Paul would be bound by the Jews in Jerusalem and given over to the Roman governor for imprisonment — what did these people say? Remember they were all true Christians. Some of them were even helpers and assistants of St. Paul in his great missionary work. One of them was St. Luke who wrote two books of the New Testament under divine inspiration. Did they at once submit to the will of the Lord? Did they say: “It is the Lord; let him do whatsoever seemeth good to him”? That is what they should have said. But instead they began to weep and lament; they surrounded St. Paul, and begged him not to go to Jerusalem, not to place himself where these tribulations could come upon him. St. Paul himself had to rebuke them: “What mean ye to weep and break mine heart?” What was the trouble with these Christians? What was wrong with this man St. Luke?, Their old self-will was reasserting itself. They were beginning to act once more as when they were no Christians, setting up their blind desires against the purposes of God, their foolish wills against his good and blessed will. That is the real situation here, and we must recognize it, in order that when we ourselves are put to the test we may not do again as these foolish Christians did at Caesarea.

Let none of us think that there is no danger for him in this respect. It is all very well as long as the Lord sends us sweet and delightful blessings. Then indeed, we may have little trouble to say: “The will of the Lord be done!” When he lets the sun shine for you, so that men are your friends; when he continues your life in health, happiness, and earthly prosperity;

when sorrow, suffering, persecution, loss, and trouble are kept far from you, and you feel the sweetness and richness of his favor, yes, then you will be glad to submit to his will. But has he not told you that through much tribulation you must enter his kingdom above? Have you forgotten that his will is for you .to deny yourself and take up your cross? Have you not heard that the world will hate you for his name's sake, and will vent this hate upon you in all sorts of painful ways? St. Paul had had abundant experience of that. The others there at Caesarea had also tasted of tribulation in greater or lesser degree. Yet such is often our weakness, that when a new trial is set for us by the will of the Lord, we may not be ready at once as we should to accept it in humble submission. That old self-will is not quite dead in us. An unexpected cross is liable to make it flare up again. Let us keep that in mind. The spirit indeed is willing, but? the flesh so often is weak. It likes to shrink from the burden, it flinches at the flash of pain, it tries to avoid the cross. The danger is there, and we must know it.

But it is worth something to know it. St. Luke records the weakness of himself and his fellow Christians there in Caesarea, not that we may blame them, not, of course, either that we may excuse them, but that we may think of ourselves and learn from them. And this is what we are to learn — to submit to the will of the Lord by giving up all self-will. Look at St. Paul when all those friends of his were going wrong. He was not moved by them; even their tears did not make him waver in his submission to the Lord. "I am ready/ said he,"not to be bound only but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." St. Paul had given up his self-will. And his fine, noble example of true submission to the Lord had its effect upon his wavering friends. They had given way a little, but now they recovered themselves. They too brought their wills into subjection to the Lord, and presently all of them joined with St. Paul, using these words full of the true spirit of childlike submission: "The will of the Lord be done!" So let all self-will in your heart die also. It is not of Christ, it is of the flesh. It is not faithfulness to Christ, but a bit of the old rebellion coming to light again. When you realize that you will the more readily put it away and return to full submission, which is your proper attitude toward your blessed Lord.

## **II. Put Your Full Trust In The Lord**

But there is another side to this matter. Learn to submit to the will of the Lord since this means to put your full trust in the Lord.

St. Paul was a beloved disciple and follower of Christ. It was Christ who had rescued him from his old blind and deadly Jewish folly. It was Christ who had made him a child of God by faith in his Savior's blood. Yea, it was Christ who had used St. Paul in building his kingdom among men. Christ had been with him in his three great missionary journeys and had crowned his labors with the most wonderful success. Do you think that now, after all this, 'Christ could will anything regarding St. Paul that would really be to his hurt? If now he sent St. Paul into prison and bonds, bade him cease his active labors and travels, and made him rest in chains under soldier guards, do you for one moment think the Lord's will concerning his beloved disciple and apostle had changed? It surely had not. Christ was using his instrument in a new way, that was all. Men who otherwise would never have heard the Gospel as they should would hear it now. The prisoner St. Paul would speak of Christ to the Roman governor himself, and by that very governor's direction to the Jewish king Agrippa, and then finally also to the ruler of the great Roman Empire, in the very capital of the world at that time, in the great city of Rome. These great men, together with their noble attendants and many of their servants, would hear of Christ from this follower of his who was ready to die for his Savior's sake. That was what the will of the Lord had in store for St. Paul.

Of course, it was all hidden as yet when Agabus came there in Caesarea and announced that St. Paul was to go into prison and bonds. St. Paul had no idea himself what the Lord's will really had in store for him. He, as well as his friends, saw only the dark side of what was impending — separation from each other, grief and sorrow for them all as a result, days of trial, of loneliness, inactivity, suffering of various kinds for the apostle. That is what upset St. Paul's friends at first. But St. Paul clung to his Lord. He knew the Lord's will was best, even though he could not see as yet what all that will meant. ( It was best for St. Paul as an individual follower of Christ, and it was best for these friends of his and the whole work of Christ. He alone sees all things; he alone is able to direct all things that the highest good may result. And that is what St. Paul meant when he said he was ready even to die for the Lord, if that should be his will. So to die, it being his will, could not but redound to the glory of Christ and to the best interests of his kingdom. St. Paul put his full trust in the Lord by thus submitting to him com-

pletely. He helped his friends to do the same, at least in some measure. And now that it is all over these many years, we see indeed that St Paul's trust was fully justified. By his very bonds and imprisonment St Paul was enabled to do great things for his Lord. The whole church of all future ages was blessed thereby.

Surely, here is a glorious example and admonition for us all! This Lord who made St. Paul a faithful disciple of his is our Lord today, and he has made us his own by the same heavenly grace. Just remember that he shed the same blood for us as for the apostle, and the same heaven too is to be ours.

Therefore, as it was impossible for Christ, after having brought St Paul so far to abandon him to his hurt, so it is impossible that the Lord's will, which has done so much for us too, should ever spoil it all by sending us what would be for our harm. The Lord knew what he was doing when he sent St. Paul into prison and bonds, and he knows what he is doing in every affliction he now sends to us. And if you think that because St. Paul was a great apostle the Lord's will regarding him was exercised with greater care and wisdom than it would be for us his ordinary followers today, you have the thing turned around — he who did the great and wonderful things in the life of St. Paul surely will have no difficulty to do the lesser things for us in our lesser lives. Remember how lovingly he speaks of the little ones in his church, calling them babes, as if he meant to give them special love and care. If anything is assured for us it is this that the Lord's will for us contains nothing but blessing and the highest benefaction.

Only this good and gracious will of the Lord works in our case just as it did in that of St. Paul — we cannot always see in advance just why the Lord does certain things with us. Why should he allot prison and bonds to St. Paul — he knew why. We too know now; but at the time even St. Paul did not know, and to his friends it seemed only a sad and dreadful thing. Why now does he send you affliction and pain, sorrow and loss, some difficult trial, some burdensome cross? In due time you will know, just as St. Paul afterwards knew, and his friends likewise. Think what he said to St. Paul: "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter" How foolish, then, to murmur and find fault, or to weep and lament like the friends of St. Paul, and to try to evade the Lord's will and run away from the path it marks out for us. The only right thing to do is what St. Paul did — submit to the Lord's will and trust it fully. Yes, that is the right thing —



trust! We who cannot see even into the next day and cannot control even one of the forces around us, how shall we think of setting up our will against the Lord's will, and trusting ourselves refuse to trust him? When he lays a cross upon us let us cling the closer to him.

“When we cannot see our way,  
Let us trust and still obey;  
He who bids us forward go  
Cannot fail to show the way.”

### **III. To Find In Him True Comfort And Support**

To submit to the will of the Lord by giving up our self-will and trusting him fully means to find in him true comfort and support.

What a pitiful figure those friends of St. Paul made when they broke down in tears and begged him not to go to Jerusalem. Suppose he had consented to do as they said, — they might -have dried their tears, but could they have had true comfort in going counter to the Lord's will? What a glorious figure in, contrast is this man St. Paul with his trustful, confident, brave" submission to the will of the Lord. He had the true comfort. Trying to run away from the Lord that Lord would have to forsake him; but submitting to his will that Lord would go with him, support and keep him, and crown him at last with happiness and joy. And those friends of the apostle, when finally they righted themselves and came to the same submission to the Lord, — how much, better they look. The tear-stains were yet on their faces, but true comfort was stealing into their hearts. They were beginning to feel again that the Lord's will would lead them all upon the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

It is always so: submission to the will of the Lord means comfort for our hearts and true support in our trials. For the Lord never lays a burden upon us but what he gives us strength to bear it. He asks no work of us except he lends us ability to perform it. He sends us into no battle without giving us the necessary weapons and fighting at our side. Only when we turn away from him and reject his will do we lose this support and the comfort it gives. And nothing is more pitiful than to. see men choosing a wrong course and struggling on alone. Their path may seem easier at first when they follow their own leading, it always ends in disaster at last. Only one hope re-

mains even for such, to hasten back to the Lord and to throw themselves in submission at his feet. Without the Lord we are able to do nothing, but yielding to his will, our path, though it go through clouds and shadows for a while, shall be as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day, Prov. 4:18. St. Paul reached that perfect day, and so did his friends when more and more they learned to submit to the blessed will of the Lord. We too shall reach it, if we follow the same course of trustful submission.

Take then this comfort of Christ and let it keep your hearts as you bow to his will. Say to your soul with the Psalmist: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance." Let Isaiah's words steady you in trial: "Say ye to the righteous that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat of the fruit of their doings." Then will our mouth be filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad. Ps. 126. From the abundance of this comfort Paul Gerhard sang that precious hymn, "Commit thy way confiding, when trials here arise, to him whose hand is guiding the tumult of the skies." Let this stanza cheer you especially:

"Hope on, then, weak believer,  
Hope on and falter not!  
He will thy soul deliver  
From deeps of troubled thought.

Thy graces he will nourish,  
With hope thy heart employ,  
Till faith and hope shall flourish  
And yield their fruit of joy"

A piece of beautiful embroidery looks ragged and disordered with its thread-ends and jumble of stitches on the under side. But the upper side — how lovely with its design and coloring! We see the under side now of the patterns the Lord's will is stitching now into our lives; anon, when the light of heaven is shed over us, we shall see the upper side. Then will our hearts be filled with rapture and with praise.

Learn thus to submit to the will of the Lord. Give up all self-will — put your full trust in him and his will — and thus find in him now and till the end true comfort and support.

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## Outlines

Two statements stand out distinctly in the text and invite us to use them as themes. The one: “The will of the Lord be done!” The other is: “I am ready!” But the former has more the note of resignation to the painful things the Lord may send us, the latter the note of confident submission, assured that what the Lord sends is best. We may combine the two: St. Paul facing prison and bonds: or, When trials here arise: — Submit at least with humble resignation — Better still, submit with confident readiness. — St. Paul, a shining example of submission to the Lord’s will: He submitted — he did it without hesitation (not so his friends) — he did it with a brave and confident heart. — Our theme might also be: “Commit thy way confiding, when trials here arise.” 1) Trials must come — the Lord sends them. 2) We need trials — the Lord has his purposes in them. 3) All trials require confident submission — the Lord is ready to work this in us.

### **St. Paul’s Noble Word: “I am Ready!”**

1. With this he faced the trials awaiting him.
2. With this he dried the tears of his friends.
3. With this he awaited the blessings in store for him.

When you say:

### **“The Will of the Lord be Done!”**

make this

1. The vow of an obedient heart;
2. The confession of a trustful soul;
3. The testimony of a sanctified life.

### **“The Will of the Lord be Done!”**

1. Have the right conception of this will.

2. Then put the right trust in this will.
3. And so find the right comfort in this trill.

### **St, Paul was Ready — Are You?**

1. Ready for what the Lord would send.
2. Ready with complete submission.
3. Ready with full confidence and trust.

# 55. “One is Your Master, even Christ.” The Twentieth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 23:1-12.

Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. (Matthew 23:1-12)

IN THE HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH there is only one authority, that of the divine Head of the Church, namely our Lord Jesus Christ. In the most emphatic way our Savior himself has told us so, and that not once but many times, and all his holy apostles have repeated this supreme truth, 'so that there ought to be no shadow of doubt about it for anyone who knows Christ and bears his holy name.

And yet like every other truth of our holy religion this too has been denied, set aside, perverted, and ignored, now in one way, now in another, to the great injury of vast numbers of Christians. All sorts of false authorities have been set up among Christian people, generally in the name of Christ himself, and yet no less false because contrary to Christ, in conflict with his authority, and thus harmful in the highest degree to those concerned.

One of the great duties of all Christ's followers, therefore, is to study his Word most carefully, in order that with one heart and mind they may repudiate and cast off the false bondage of human rule in the Christian Church

and bow to Christ alone, our one Lord and Master, besides whom there is none other. Let us weigh anew, then, the Lord's own word, when most solemnly he declares to us all:

**“One is Your Master, even Christ.”**

That puts down all false authority in the church. That elevates us all as brethren in the church. That leaves only the distinction of brotherly service in the church.

## **I. That Puts Down All False Authority In The Church**

When the Lord tells us so plainly that One alone is our Master, in the church, namely he, our Lord himself, we must realize how that puts down all false authority in the church.

The question for us to settle once for all is this: Who is to teach, lead, guide and control the Christian church? Is it Christ alone? or are there others beside him? It is a question which concerns each of us personally: What must you and I as a true Christian believe and what must we do? What Christ says, and he alone, or what someone else says? Really the answer ought to be easy. Christ himself has given it to us. We are to heed and follow him alone, and without question repudiate all other authority.

[1.] When the Lord came to earth he found the church of the old covenant full of false authority. The scribes and Pharisees sat in Moses' seat, but not to tell the people what the Lord had revealed to them through Moses, namely the Law of God to lead them all to true repentance, and the Gospel of God to bring them all to faith in the promised Redeemer. These false leaders of the people of Israel perverted the revelation made by God through Moses; they turned that revelation into a set of rules and regulations, and laid these as a heavy load upon men's shoulders. At the same time the Jewish leaders did not themselves, even as much as with a linger touch that load to bear it themselves. All they were concerned about for themselves was to maintain their own miserable authority over the people, to get power and honor for themselves at the expense of the people. They put on a show of holiness for themselves, without the least conception of

what true holiness was. They tied verses of Scripture, written on little pieces of parchment, to their foreheads and wrists, to make people admire them as holy men, and bow in submission to them, but the real Word of God they never put into their hearts. They were anxious always to get the uppermost places at feasts and in the synagogues and to have men bow low before them and address them with the honorary title of rabbi, especially in the public places, but true rabbis, true teachers who lead men to bow to God and his Word alone, none of them were.

Their falseness was fully revealed when the true Lord of the church, the Redeemer of whom Moses had written, came among them. The scribes and Pharisees with one accord turned against him. The more Jesus showed himself to be the true Redeemer by word and deed, the more they hated him. In every way they tried to prevent the people from following Jesus, for this meant that their false authority would be overthrown. And when no other means seemed to prove effective these wicked Jewish leaders, with their false show of holiness, set about to murder Jesus. You know the story of the Savior's betrayal and crucifixion. That was the climax of the false authority which would not have the true Lord of the church rule over his own.

Now this very opposition of the false Jewish authority, which Jesus met when he lived and labored on earth, led him to declare so emphatically to all his true followers, that for us there is only one Master, one Lord and Head to guide and direct our souls. Christ, and Christ alone must we follow, and turn forever from all others.

The false, hypocritical, self-seeking scribes and Pharisees of Christ's day are long dead and gone. But the church of the new covenant, in which we live now, has not been free from false leaders and masters. The chief among them is the pope at Rome, who claims to be the visible head of the Christian church on earth, and demands that all men bow to him accordingly. In fact, he arrogates to himself not only religious authority in the church, but also secular and worldly authority over the state.

The people in the church and the rulers of the state must all obey what he says. This authority he asserts Christ himself has given him, and no man dares to question it — if we do, he says we shall be anathema, that means damned. And boldly he orders men to believe and do all sorts of things which anyone with the Scriptures in his hands can see are as false and contrary to Christmas this papal usurpation of double power. Therefore we apply to him the words of St. Paul in the second chapter of Second Thessalo-

nians, and call the pope at Rome the Antichrist, the great foe and opponent of the true Christ.

Would to God that he were the only one who sets himself up as a master contrary to our One Master Christ. But there is a host of little antichrists, men who have set themselves up as leaders of Christ's people, and yet lead them away from Christ, not unto him. Some of them have drawn thousands after them, using the holy name of Christ, but contradicting and subverting his holy Word. — Beside them there are others who in a great variety of ways clash with the one and only authority of Christ. They take his Word and pervert it, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. They set up their own reason and wisdom and change the Word of Christ to make it agree with their own deductions. Some of them may mean well enough, and not actually realize that they are in conflict with the Master, — what of it, the conflict is there just the same. To set aside, or contradict one doctrine or word of Christ is to cast off his authority to that extent, and to follow some other.

And this is the very thing Christ warns us against. "One is your Master, even Christ!" Down with every other religious authority in the church! Away with all teachers, leaders, and rulers, who refuse to bow fully and completely to the one authority of Christ!

[2.] But how are we to know and to recognize this false authority, so that we may escape its hurtful bondage? That is really an essential question. Some think they are following Christ, when in fact they are doing nothing of the kind. Moreover, it is the constant practice, of all false religious leaders and teachers to mask their falseness behind the name and Word of Christ, thus to catch and hold the unwary. We must know how to distinguish their falseness, in order really to be true to Christ in all our faith and life. Here is the answer to this important question: Take the Word of Christ, and follow that alone.

When Jesus scored the scribes and Pharisees who sat in Moses' seat he told his hearers: "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works." What did he mean? This that when these false teachers read the words of Moses from the Old Testament to the people, the people were to observe and do those words of Moses, because they were the words of God himself, the very words which told of Christ and his salvation. But the works of these false leaders, by which they



set up their own authority contrary to God and opposed to Christ, all men were to reject and not for one instant to acknowledge as right.

The Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, they alone bring us the genuine authority of our heavenly Lord, and by that Word we are to overcome all the false authority which would bring us into bondage. It is not difficult to see how the Word becomes thus decisive. When Christ tells us that he alone is our Master, we must know that to this very day he personally rules in his church. He does it by his Holy Word. In that Word is his own blessed will towards us all. In that Word he personally speaks to us all and makes his will known to us. In that Word he tells every one of us just what to believe and trust, just what to do and to leave undone. And all that he thus tells us is everlastingly sure and certain, as if he stood face to face with us, as once he walked on earth, and addressed us with his own lips. In fact, heaven and earth shall pass away, but his Word shall stand forever. The only question is: Do we want him to be our one and only Master? or do we want to be our own masters, or have some one else control our souls? If we are sincere in desiring to follow him alone whose will is salvation and never-ending blessing for us, then hold fast to this Word of his. And then, when anyone comes to you speaking and acting contrary to that Word, you will know at once that you dare not follow him if you would be true to your only Master Christ. The Word decides it all — there is Christ and his authority, living, glorious, blessed to this very day; and before that Word all false authority falls.

And that is why the Word is given to us all. The very worst thing ever done in the church by false leaders was to take the Scriptures out of men's hands. Pontiffs and priests said: We will take charge of the Bible; we will tell you what you need of it; it is too hard a book for the common people, they cannot handle it; we will take the responsibility for you — leave the Bible to us. By that these false men took away from the people whom they misled the one means by which their deception could be exposed. Thank God, Christ's Word is again in our hands. But it is one thing to have it, and quite another to use it. The dust that lies on many a Bible shows that they who own it might as well be without it. How are you going to escape the treachery of false authority, if you do not use the precious Word by which Christ, your true Master, comes to you? Do not tell me you have not time. You have time, plenty of it, for infinitely lesser things. The real reason, why so many do not use the Word, is that they care too little whether Christ re-

ally is their only Master, or whether some of these false masters of today rule their souls. Often, too, to follow the One Master means loss of earthly advantages, the cross for his name's sake; and to let others rule us, or to go our own blind way in religion seems to bring us earthly advantage. So men as good as sell their very souls into bondage. Poor fools! Too late they will see what a bargain they have made.

Hear, then, once more, and let it reach deep down into your hearts: Your Savior Jesus Christ is your only Master; he comes to you by his Holy Word; by that Word he would bind us all to himself alone, blessed and happy in his salvation. And thus he delivers us from all false authority and its destructive power in the church here on earth.

## **II. That Elevates Us All As Brethren In The Church**

There is another side to the blessed truth that “One is our Master, even Christ.” In putting us all under Christ alone we are all alike lifted up. Think of it — only One Master: that elevates us all as brethren in the church.

[1.] The scribes and Pharisees in Christ's day climbed into Moses' seat in order to rule the church of their day. They hated Christ because he made it so plain that they were nothing but usurpers and rebels against their true Lord. They wanted to go on lording it over God's people; they burned with envy when they saw many of the people following Christ. Even heathen Pilate saw that for envy the Jewish rulers had delivered Christ unto him. To be nothing but brethren with the common people was too low for these prideful leaders. They wanted to be counted as more, to be honored as more — only the uppermost seats for them at feasts and in synagogues — only the highest titles for them, like rabbi, doctor, father, teacher, leader, to whom all others had to bow without question.

All such lordship of men Christ has abolished in his church, and only they who are false to Christ think of erecting it again. Christ tells us that in reality the whole church has only one teacher, he who came from heaven to teach us, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Every single one of us must sit at his feet and learn of him. But see what that does — it puts us all on one grand level beneath Christ; it makes us all brethren in him, the one no greater and higher than the other. All are alike high and great, for the high-

est honor we can possibly have is to be made disciples and pupils of Christ, to receive truth, life and salvation from him. — The thing is deeper still. Christ by his Word and teaching makes us children of God; we are begotten anew by the living power of his Word. So again we are all lifted up alike — One is our Father, namely he who is in heaven, and we all are his children. No man can possibly be more. If any man thinks he is more, and wants to be honored as more, he shows that he is less, and that, not being a child of God, he does not even know the height and blessedness of that position. In the true church of Christ all are alike brethren in Christ Jesus, because children of God. — The third step is like the first two: as pupils of Christ and children of God there is only One whom we will follow, only One to lead us. Who could lead and rule the children of God except our Lord and Savior himself? He alone is high and great enough; he alone has the power and the grace to bring us safely to our heavenly goal. We all — what can we do except follow him and cling to him? And again that puts us on the same blessed level — none greater, higher, lordlier than the other. Behold thus in the church the most wonderful democracy in the world: all of us disciples and pupils alike under one divine Teacher; all of us by that teaching made alike the children of one divine Father; and all of us as such children alike directed by one divine Master and Leader. All reason for pride, self-seeking, lordship is gone, for we are all through Christ in the highest position possible for us to obtain.

[2.] Yet — are we not mistaken in this? Are there not some in the Christian church higher than others? Do we not call some teachers and preachers, professors and doctors, presidents and leaders? We even speak of church-fathers; we call the great Reformer “father Luther,” and in our own midst we honor the old and venerable Christians as fathers. That seems to make a great difference among the members in the church.

We must even add that Christ said: “Be not ye called Rabbi,” that is teacher; “And call no man your father upon the earth”; and again: “Neither be ye called masters,” that means leaders. That sounds as if Christ himself forbade such titles as we still have in the Christian church. So the question becomes a double one: Did Christ forbid all such titles, and if he did not, do these titles not show that after all we are not all on the same level in the church?

The titles which Christ forbade and abolished in the church are all those which conflict with his authority or that of our Father in heaven. They are

the titles which go with a false authority, one setting itself up in the church contrary to Christ. Christ said: Be not called Rabbi, for I alone am your Rabbi or Teacher; call no man Father, for God alone is your Father; be not called masters or leaders for I alone lead and guide you. That makes it plain — any teacher, father, or leader who comes apart from the teaching, fatherhood, and leadership Christ has set up for us, must be thrown down and disowned. — But when now we as congregations rightly call ministers of the Gospel to teach us what Christ taught, these men are nothing but brethren of ours doing us, their brethren, the service which Christ himself appointed. When now we honor some of them by calling them church-father we only acknowledge, the excellent service these brethren have rendered us. So also when we call them presidents and leaders — they encourage us to go the way that Christ went, and they do it not as lords of the church, but as our beloved brethren in the Lord. — This is a totally different thing from the honor the scribes and Pharisees sought in Christ's day, or from the proud title of the pope at Rome, who claims to be the vicegerent of Christ on earth, The visible head of the church, and the Holy Father of all believers in this sense. It is a totally different thing from the lying titles of those who set aside Christ's Word, and yet claim to be doctors and leaders of God's people, condemning all who refuse to submit to them. A Dowie called himself Elijah, but he lied in doing so; Mrs. Eddy gave herself high honors and names, but she too lied and blasphemed Christ in doing so. St. Paul wrote: Christ "gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." These we have today, except the apostles whose work once done stands for all time, they still teaching us in the New Testament Scriptures. For these all we thank Christ, praying that he may keep them true in their teaching and leading, in fullest accord with his Word.

And again there is a simple way to test all the true teachers and leaders in the church, and to distinguish them from the false. Take the Word — if they are true to that, then we will gladly acknowledge them and profit by their service. If they on their part also invite that test and bow to it, they show that they are true, brethren of ours, and not self-installed lords over us. Especially if they submit to brotherly correction and advice on our part, thus showing that they acknowledge us as brethren, and together with us bow wholly to Christ, then we know that v they are true indeed and their

teaching and leading is none other than that of Christ himself, who said of all such: “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me.”

And the sum of it all is that One alone is our Lord and Master, and we all are brethren — brethren still, and nothing more, though some do one kind of work in the church under Christ’s direction, and some, other kinds of work. Thank God for this true spiritual brotherhood!: May no sinful pride and false authority ever disturb and hurt its holy bonds!

### **III. The Distinction Of Brotherly Service In The Church**

This brings us to the final truth in the great statement of Christ. He alone is our Master: that leaves for us only the distinction of brotherly service in the church.

Here is a secret the scribes and Pharisees had never penetrated. They longed for greatness, but in a way altogether unspiritual, and so they tried to obtain it by exalting themselves, building up an authority of their own and lifting themselves up in pride accordingly. Alas, that is the sure way of abasement. For one is indeed our Master, even Christ, and all who rise against his authority will be overwhelmed by that authority at last “Kiss the Son,” writes the Psalmist, “lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way.” And St. Paul adds: “When he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power; for he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet” Woe, then, to those who exalt themselves, refusing the authority of Christ and the blessed fellowship this gives us as brethren in Christ.

There is a better way for you and me. Under One Master, and all as brethren together, there is open a new way for each one of us to greatness in the church. Christ points it out: “He that shall humble himself shall be exalted.” And what this humbling is he also tells us: “He that is greatest among you shall be your servant.” This is the new way. It clashes neither with Christ as our One Master, nor with our mutual brotherhood under Christ. It is the way of brotherly service and help to each other. The more we do in aiding each other in following Christ, in keeping true to him, in putting away our sins and faults, in stirring up each other to do his bidding, the greater will we be in the sight of Christ. That is why we have the beauti-

ful name “minister” for the pastor of a congregation. In fact, all the offices and titles in the church are used with this idea behind them. For every officer, from the highest down to the lowest, is such only for the sake of ministry, which means service to the brethren. And the inner mark of that service, which makes it sweet and acceptable to Christ, is humility, the conviction and feeling that we are highly, honored by being permitted to serve our brethren for Christ’s sake. Nor need we have some special office in the church to obtain this distinction among our brethren. At every turn we all meet countless opportunities to serve each other in all humility. Alas, that so often we fail to see these opportunities, or seeing them and even having them pointed out to us, we let them pass by unused. Away with the old worldly pride which refuses to serve others, lest, we be looked upon as servants and not lords! Blessed are all they who truly serve — they alone are great in the church!

Thus Christ, our Master himself served; for he came to us, not to be ministered unto, but to minister to us, even giving his life for us in his redemptive ministry. The old prophecies speak of him as the great Servant of Jehovah. That service made him great — the greatest of all. So also his apostles served. They consumed themselves in their ministry and service, constrained by the love of Christ. None of them acted as a lord of the church; their greatness was in what they did for others, nearly all of them giving up their lives in their arduous work. And so it has ever been in the church. All of us are brethren; all of us are to serve in brotherly love; and the greatest will be the ones who delight most in such service and perform it with the greatest humility, counting it an honor for the Master’s sake.

Glory, honor, and praise, then, to Christ our heavenly Master! Him let us own and follow, and thus escape the wretched authority of men. Him let us trust and obey, and thus join hearts and hands as children of God and as brethren in Christ. Him let us make our model in love and service, and so find that greatness which shall not be abased, but shall receive the praise of Christ himself. Under this One Master among these our brethren through faith, and in this constant service of love we shall be blessed now and evermore.

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## Outlines

The second part of the text, verses 8-12, holds the real meat for the sermon. The first part, however, gives us the proper setting for what the second part contains, and so has a value of its own for the sermon. We may preach in general on: The church — how it ought to look with Christ alone as its Head: all of us ruled by his Word — all of us bound together as brethren — all of us vying with each other in service. — Or: Consider your wonderful position in the Christian church: only One is above you, Christ — all others are beside you, as brethren — and those alone are beneath you who exceed you in humility and love. — A variety of divisions may be found for the central word of the text, according to the angle from which it is viewed: “One is your Master, even Christ.” Taken as Christ’s word to us, it humbles us all alike, and it lifts us up alike. Adopted by us as our confession, it forms our answer to all false authority, our acknowledgment of each other as brethren, and our highest motive to serve each other for this One Master’s sake.

## **We are all Brethren in Christ Jesus.**

1. That settles the question of equality among us.
2. That determines the question of superiority and inferiority among us.

## **How does Christ View the Church?**

1. As a glorious autocracy, he alone the Head.
2. As the most blessed democracy — we all as brethren and servants of each other.

## **No Popes in the Church!**

1. Only children of God.
2. Only brethren in Christ.
3. Only servants of each other.

**“One is your Master, even Christ; and All Ye are Brethren.”**

1. This defines your exalted rights in the church.
2. This points out your glorious privileges in the church.
3. This holds up before you your coming reward in the church (shall be exalted).



# 56. The Great Question of Discipline in the Church. The Twenty-first Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 18:15-20.

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:15-20)

ONE IS OUR MASTER, even Christ; and all we are brethren. That is the great principle on which our entire church must be organized, down to every individual congregation. One Master alone directs what must be done in the church, and all of us as members of his church must bow to him and his directions, and carry them out to the best of our ability, appealing to him for guidance and help.

Take, as our text bids us today,

## **The Great Question of Discipline in the Church,**

If a member in our congregation should fall into open sin, what must be done? Neither the pastor with his wisdom or authority, nor the congregation with its united wisdom and the voice of its votes, nor some general body of the church like an assembled conference or synod, can give us answer. All of these must take their directions from Christ alone, and proceed only as he

bids them. And as Lord and Head of the church he has told us fully what to do. In this vital matter of church discipline, even as in other things necessary for the well-being of the church, following him we shall not go astray. For here, with great clearness and fulness, He shows us the right method; He gives us the proper authority; and He assures us of the necessary help.

## **I. He Shows Us The Right Method**

It is a sad fact, and one which the church must always reckon with, that one or the other of its members may fall into open sin and thereby cause intolerable offense to his brethren. The entire text shows that Christ is here speaking not of the faults and failings which cling more or less to all of us in our present imperfect state, but of graver matters. The personal failings of our brethren we are to bear with Christian patience and love, knowing that our brethren must bear ours in the same manner. But when it comes to words and actions openly against the faith, plainly violating the Word of our Master, maliciously harming a brother or flagrantly wronging a fellow man, then the case is different. Then we all see and feel at once that the question arises: Can such a person still be a brother of ours in the church? Can he, with a sin like that upon him, retain his high rights and privileges in the congregation of God's people, or must he be expelled from our midst? When a case like this arises, we ourselves see that something must be done. It is a case of discipline, and the Lord himself tells us what to do, he shows us the right method.

The Lord takes a case of such sin known at first only to one brother in the church: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee." That may be a case in which some ungodly act is committed by one church member against another, But it may also be such an act committed against another person, or against God directly, or against his Word and our faith, and as such causing grave offense to the one brother who witnesses that act. The point is that if only one brother is thus given unbearable offense, something must be done. It needs hardly to be said then, that if more than one witness such an evil deed on the part of a fellow member of the church, or if the deed be public from the start, like some open crime or shame, then too action must be taken, and not by just one, but by all who know the sin. What shall, that action be?

We may put it all into one summary statement — the most earnest effort must be made to save the brother's soul from the deadly consequences of his sin. That means that if possible he be brought to a realization of his sin and to true repentance, in order that thus he may be absolved from the guilt he has incurred. And right here let us learn the mighty love of Christ for us all. When one of our number commits an open sin we might be inclined to make short work of the case by at once expelling the offender from the church and thus getting rid of the offense. But that would mean, at least in most cases, the loss of the offender's soul. Yet Christ died for sinners, also for church members who are caught by the devil in open sin. The Lord's great purpose is to save the sinner — to remove his sin and guilt indeed, and to take from the church the offense committed, but to do both if possible by saving the sinner's soul. Oh, recognize this wondrous grace of his, and let it call forth in you too a corresponding love, willing to follow the Lord in the effort to save every member among us who may become lost through sin or be in danger of thus becoming lost.

Now these are the Lord's instructions when one of our members falls into grave sin and offense. Let him who knows of the sin go personally to the offender and confront him with what he has done. The one aim must be to have the offender acknowledge his sin and repent of it in true sorrow. That means that whoever goes to him do so in the spirit of Christ, with firmness and yet with love, without resentment and yet determined if possible to gain the great end. How often is he to go to the offender? The answer is easy — as long as he has hope by his own efforts to save the offender and remove the offense. And during this time he must keep the matter strictly to himself and not blurt it about, or tell of it secretly to others. That very thing might defeat the end Christ has in view. What a blessed thing when the brother who has sinned sees his fault, declares his sorrow, and longs for Christ's pardon and that of the brother he has offended! Then that brother's pleasant duty will be to assure the penitent offender of full and complete pardon. Christ says: "If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." No more blessed work can any Christian do for his brother — he has saved that brother's soul from spiritual death or the danger of such a death; he has defeated the devil, and done the work of Christ.

But this happy ending may not at once result; the offender may refuse to heed the admonition and warning of the brother against whom he has sinned. What then? Even then yet Christ wants the efforts of love contin-

ued. Let the brother get one or two others to go with him and help in the work. Where one failed, two or three may yet succeed. They too are to keep the matter to themselves, and are to continue their efforts till either they succeed, or till they see that their efforts are in vain. Many a man has thus been won and his soul saved for Christ, and they who render such service to an offender in the church are surely doing the highest and holiest work one man can do for another.

But if even they fail, the case is not yet lost. "Tell it unto the church," says the Lord. That does not mean to denounce the offender to the church, or to bring him to trial before the church; it means that now the congregation as such is to try to do with all love and earnestness what the one brother at first tried to do alone, and what the two or three also tried. A meeting of the congregation is to be called, more than one if necessary; the offending brother is to be especially called to that meeting, as one who is still counted a brother. At the meeting all the brethren are to join in showing him his fault and in pleading with him to acknowledge it with due repentance. It ought to be impossible for any church member who has fallen into open sin to resist the voice of all his brethren in the congregation. What a terrible thing that would be! Now the moment the offender, though he have held out this long, bows in repentance, that moment the congregation in Christ's name is to absolve him from the sin and by such absolution close the case. The struggle may have been long, but the victory is glorious. Think how the good Shepherd sought long and painfully till he found his lost sheep, and how Christ added the picture of the church doing the same thing in the woman sweeping the whole house and seeking the lost coin till she found it. Remember too what Christ added in both cases: "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance:" — Of course, the offender may also harden himself, refuse to come at all to the meeting of his brethren, or come with a brazen face determined to remain impenitent, yea, perhaps to continue on in his evil course, defending it as right, or at least allowable, no matter what' the offense to the church and the harm to his own soul. Then what? When all efforts of love are exhausted, only one thing remains. Christ puts it into these words: "If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Heathen men are outside of the church, publicans were renegades from the old Jewish church. The impenitent off-ender is finally to be expelled from the church. As a dead

branch, whose deadness has become apparent even to the congregation, he is cut off and removed. That may be very sad and painful, especially if the offender be a relative of yours or a companion whom you have loved. But Christ is more to us than father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, child, or friend. We must follow him and his Word, though it cost our very life.

Yet even this sad outcome has behind it the thought of love. When the impenitent man sees what the church at last found itself compelled to do, perhaps then he may find repentance through grace, and return to the fold. The door is open to him to return as long as God may grant him life. Thank God, some have thus returned! Even in the face of death a few have repented at last. With joy the congregation is to receive them back, for Christ himself receives them through even this belated repentance.

This is Christ's method of church discipline. It is altogether like Christ. May we always be animated by his spirit in following out his method.

Alas, there are congregations who refuse to do so. Some of them care little or nothing for open transgressions of the Master's Word. They let their members live on in strife and contention, in immoral acts and vices, in openly sinful and antichristian connections like the lodge, in flagrant denial of Christian doctrines, in open repudiation of plain Christian duties. In addition they are ready to take into their membership those whom faithful congregations are compelled to discipline, thus making mock of these congregations and their faithfulness, and of the Word of Christ himself. What shall we say to this? They make themselves partakers of other men's sins; they load themselves down with a responsibility they can never bear; they will meet the judgment of the great Head of the church at last. Woe to the world because of offenses! It must needs be that offenses come. But however shameful and painful they may be, let us abide by the Word of our Master, removing all offenses from our midst, and knowing this one thing, that no man's church membership will save him except he use it to live in repentance and a Christian life.

## **II. He Gives Us The Proper Authority**

The Lord shows us the right method for church discipline, and at the same time he gives us the proper authority for exercising it.

Someone might say: "What do I care for the church? It is composed of nothing but men as fallible as myself! He may even point to many an imperfection among us, and we on our part would not think of denying that we are by no means perfect. But all such thoughts are beside the mark. It is the Lord himself who has clothed his church with his own authority in dealing with the sins of men. Faulty though we all are, Christ is not faulty, his authority is not faulty, and when that authority is put into operation there is no fault or failure as to the result.

How this is the authority with which Christ has clothed his church. Solemnly he declares: "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Certainly, no man who knows Christ and his Word will for one moment think that this authority means, the church can do as it pleases in binding and loosing the souls of men. We all know that Christ means we are to bind and loose only according to his will and direction. They who would attempt to bind and loose contrary to Christ's Word, only call his judgment down upon themselves. But the church which follows Christ's Word, in using this mighty power and authority, will always find Christ himself behind it and making it good. We are but his humble agents; it is he who uses us. And so what the church binds here on earth according to his will is equally bound in heaven, in the eternal judgment of Christ himself. Who shall loose it? Woe to the fools who dream they can loose what the eternal Son of God himself has bound! The same is true of the loosing. Let no pardoned sinner ever doubt the authority of the church in this respect! The sins pardoned at Christ's command by his church on earth are pardoned in heaven itself, at the judgment seat of God's own Son. It is joy to read it in Christ's own words.

To bind means to retain the guilt of sin upon the sinner's soul, and to loose means to remit and remove that guilt from his soul. Instead of doing this only in secret, so that none could know certainly that it is really done, Christ in heaven has it done openly and audibly right here on earth through the agency of his church. Each one of us is to hear for himself what is thus done regarding his guilt by Christ. This is for the comfort and joy of all who receive the heavenly absolution, and it is for the warning and terror of those from whom that absolution is withheld. For this power to bind and to loose men's souls is by no means peculiar to the exercise of church discipline alone; it is nothing other than the power of the Gospel itself which Christ

has committed to us all. That Gospel absolves every penitent sinner and opens heaven for him, but the impenitent together with their sin and guilt it bars out. We may sum it up in Christ's own words: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." In every true Gospel sermon that is preached the binding and loosing power of Christ is exercised. We have it in the absolution in our morning service, in the special confessional service before the Holy Communion, in the two Sacraments themselves, and in every Gospel word spoken by one brother to another or to those without. And this same double power the church employs in every case of discipline when it tries with all love and patience to restore some fallen brother to the grace and pardon of Christ.

Let us hold fast the gift as Christ has bestowed it upon us — as the gift of the entire church down to the very least of its members. It is the old error of Rome to think that a certain order of men alone possess this authority from Christ to bind and to loose. No; not to the pope and the priests as his representatives, not to the pastors in our churches as a separate class, is this divine power given, but to the people of God one and all, to you and to me alike. There is only one difference — the pastors are the called ministers of the church, through whom the church acts ordinarily when it binds and looses. Christ bids us "tell it unto the church" when the final stage of discipline is reached, and only the church may exclude a fallen member from its fold. In this work of discipline, as in the entire work of preaching Gospel absolution and pronouncing this absolution, the church uses the pastor's voice to speak for it, but it is the church which does it; it is not the pastor alone who acts apart from the church. So also when one brother, or several brethren deal with another — without any pastor they are entitled to use the power of Christ. And when they find the sinner penitent theirs is the blessed privilege to give him the Gospel pardon in Christ's name. Oh, then recognize what Christ has done for his church! Hold fast and administer faithfully his great authority, and let no man rob you of your high and holy privilege!

### **III. He Assures Us Of The Necessary Help**

The right method of church discipline Christ has reenforced by bestowing the proper authority. But he has added still more, namely this that he assures

us of the necessary help.

Well might we shrink from handling a power which opens and shuts the door of salvation itself to immortal souls, which either saves them eternally or damns them eternally. Who is sufficient for these things? Well, in reality none of us is, not even all of us together. But Christ has not left us to act alone. Hear his blessed promise: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” In the smallest gathering, if it be truly in his name, he is present, he the God-man, the great Head of the church himself, with all his grace, help, and gifts — invisibly, yet none the less truly. He has promised that, he will not leave us alone, but will come to us. Only let us mark well the words: “gathered together in my name.” That means: believing and trusting the Word which reveals him, and therefore following that Word alone. Where men forsake that Word and follow their own wisdom, though they call themselves his church, and count their members by thousands, Christ departs from them, and all that they do without Christ is null and void before his throne. Look not, then, to other churches, but to Christ’s name and Word alone. They may even carry the glorious name “Evangelical Lutheran” — unless they, and we too, abide by the Word, Christ is not with them.

With Christ in our midst as a church ours is the blessed privilege of asking his help in administering the Gospel power committed to our trust. It is for this reason that the Lord has given us in this connection the special promise: “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.” Even two, gathered truly in Christ’s name, have this promise; surely, then also we all with greater numbers. Looking to Christ and his name only, we will never ask of him what is contrary to his Word and will, and in all things where his will is not clearly stated in his Word, we will end our petitions to him as he himself has taught us: “Father, not my will, but thine be done!” Especially as regards the Gospel, its administration in general for the church, and its particular application when cases of discipline arise, will move us to throw ourselves completely upon the Savior’s help. Let me tell you as your pastor, whom you have called especially to go after the wayward and erring, never could I think of going on such an errand without calling on my Savior to go with me, to help me speak the right word, and if it be possible by his grace to make that Word effective. So must we all do, singly, and two or three, seeking to save an offender, and the assembled



congregation when in its name the Gospel is preached, sins are absolved, or correction applied to one who has erred. Away with the idea that this is mere form! The great Lord himself is in our midst; blessings are in his hands — shall any of us ignore him, fail to realize his presence, because it is invisible, trust his own wisdom, and not lean on the Savior's help? Never! We need him and all he has in store for us. We need him as a congregation in all that we do, and as individual members in the congregation. And our joy is that he is with us, now and always, and that through his great name all our needs shall be abundantly supplied.

May the Lord keep us one and all as true members of his church, preserve us from sin and error, lift us up again by the ministration of our brethren when we fall, make us truly repentant for every sin, and -bless us now and ever by the heavenly absolution of his holy Gospel.

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## Outlines

The text contains Christ's most specific word on church discipline. The more this is ignored in some parts of the church, the more we should heed it and make it our own. We may preach on the subject of discipline, for instance on: Christ's instruction on church discipline — the course he lays down — and the aid he offers us in following that course. Or more detailed: The great things involved in the question of Christian discipline: the presence of Christ — the power of the Gospel — the authority of the church — the purpose of saving the fallen — the love and faithfulness with which we ought to follow his will. — The whole text may be entered by the gateway of its first word: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee" — then do what Christ tells you — and be assured that he is with you.

### **Christ Wants us to Keep the Church Clean.**

1. She must be clean — Christ would dwell in her.
2. She can be clean — Christ enables her.
3. She will be clean — when the presence of Christ is realized, and his help is used.

## **When a Member of the Church Falls into Sin —**

1. Christ is greatly concerned, and we must be likewise.
2. Christ bids us to our utmost to save, and we must follow his directions.
3. Christ promises us his help, and we must thankfully employ it.

## **The Duty of Discipline in the Church.**

1. Often neglected.
2. Sometimes perverted.
3. Never left merely to us.
4. Always full of blessing.

## **Our Confessions, and our church-constitution second Christ's Word on Church Discipline.**

1. The basis on which it rests.
2. The evangelical order we must follow.
3. The blessed result we may expect for the church.

# **57. Our Vital Relation to our Sister Congregations. The Twenty-second Sunday After Trinity. Acts 15:6-12.**

And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. (Acts 15:6-12)

ONCE EVERY YEAR our congregation is called upon to elect one of its members as a delegate to the synodical convention announced by our church papers to be held at some convenient place. This delegate and the pastor then proceed to attend the proposed convention. Our own congregation has itself had conventions of this kind in its midst, for we are united in the faith and in the work of the church with many Sister Congregations. Our congregation is a member of an evangelical Lutheran synod.

Still we have members among us who take little or no interest in these conventions and what they do, or in the sister congregations united with them by the synodical bond. They fail to realize that their own spiritual interests are here involved. They try to live for themselves only, and scarcely ever look beyond the bounds of their own local congregation. What a mistake they make we see by studying our text. Almost immediately after the Christian church began to spread beyond its original center in the city of

Jerusalem it was found necessary to have a general convention of the church. We may quite properly call it a synodical meeting. As the church grew in numbers and congregations a grave doctrinal question arose threatening to corrupt or to disrupt the early church, to blight its very beginnings. That question involved the spiritual welfare of every individual Christian living at that time, in fact the welfare also of the coming generations. Thank God, that under the guidance of his Spirit that first synodical convention was held, settling the disturbing question in the right manner, and thus safeguarding the spiritual interests of all the members in the church.

Our text invites us to attend in spirit the first synodical meeting in the Christian church, to see and hear what was done for the welfare of all. Here we are to learn something of the wider interests of the church, those which involve us all, whether at first we realize it as we should or not. Let us broaden our vision by the aid of our text and learn to understand aright

### **Our Vital Relation to our Sister Congregations, as displayed by The First Synodical Convention in Jerusalem.**

There is first of all the bond of faith and doctrine between us and our Sister Congregations.

There is secondly the obligation of love and duty between us and our Sister Congregations.

And there is finally the joint missionary task incumbent upon us and our Sister Congregations.

These three vital interests, coming to light already in the very first synodical convention, mark to this very day the relation of our own congregation to all those joined with her by synodical bonds. Surely they ought to be fully realized and appreciated by us all!

## **I. The Bond of Faith and Doctrine**

When the first synodical convention met in Jerusalem it found itself concerned in a most vital manner with the bond of faith and doctrine between the congregations as such as well as between the members composing them.

Following the Lord Jesus Christ the apostles had preached and taught one great faith and doctrine for the salvation of sinners. St. Peter had

summed it up on the day of Pentecost in one word: "Repent!" which means: Be contrite for your sins and believe in Jesus Christ and his atoning work! St. Paul had done the same thing: "By him (namely Jesus Christ) all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses." But what happened? In one of the congregations, the one at Antioch, men arose who claimed that faith in Christ alone was not enough for salvation, that every Christian had also to be circumcised and to keep the old Jewish regulations. This was a different faith and doctrine. Could it be allowed to stand? When the matter was presented in the old mother-congregation at Jerusalem the same innovation appeared. Christians who had formerly been Jews and Pharisees wanted to hold fast to the old Mosaic rules, and demanded that these be imposed also on the members who had come into the church from heathendom. Here was a vital issue on faith and doctrine for the entire church. It was necessary to settle it for the entire church.

This was done at the synod at Jerusalem. The church at Antioch sent its representatives, and at a grand meeting, composed of the apostles, pastors, and laymen, the question was thoroughly discussed. At first there were two sides. But then St. Peter addressed the assembly and told how God himself acknowledged Gentile believers as his children without their accepting any of the Jewish regulations. God giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to the Jewish believers on the day of Pentecost. St. Paul and his assistant Barnabas testified to the same thing as men who had preached the Gospel to the Gentiles by God's special call. This settled the whole matter. The entire assembly recognized the will and Word of God, and resolved to abide by that alone. The danger of division was past. The true faith and doctrine was fully established, and the error that had tried to creep in, put away. What a blessed result of that first synodical convention!

It is easy to make the application to ourselves. We today with our Sister Congregations stand where the congregations at Antioch and Jerusalem once stood. The precious truth of Jesus Christ has been committed also to our keeping. But all kinds of errors, false doctrines, or mistaken views of the true doctrines of salvation, beat at our doors and seek to enter. And the worst of it is that there are always some in one congregation or another ready to accept the wrong teaching. It is worse today than it was in the earliest times of the church. For while indeed we now have the entire Bible, both the Old and the New Testament, yet we are surrounded on all sides by

churches which have given way to error and are very active in promulgating their false and dangerous teachings. How are we and our Sister Congregations to keep the true doctrine pure and uncontaminated? How are we to bar out the false teaching and to help any who have given way, to right themselves again? There is one most excellent way — the formation of a synodical body and regular synodical meetings at which we may all come together, thoroughly discuss the questions of doctrine and church practice and compare them with the Word of God. Here all the best forces of the church may be brought together, here one congregation may aid another, here all together through their representatives may take counsel and join in maintaining the truth and eliminating the error. Here too men like St. Peter, St. Paul, and Barnabas, gifted to discern the spirits, equipped with the full knowledge of the Word, and rich in Christian experience, may aid the whole church by their gifts and knowledge. And this is what actually happens, and that again and again, at our present-day synodical meetings. They are a mighty force in keeping us and our sister congregation in the one true faith and doctrine.

Suppose that we had no such synodical connection, that each congregation and pastor stood alone and tried to go on indefinitely alone — you know there are congregations which refuse to join their sisters in the synodical connection. The result is not difficult to foresee. In many an instance wrong and dangerous doctrines would easily creep in; and those congregations which succeed in keeping their doctrine and practice pure would have a far more difficult time in doing it. Even as it is, with a strong synodical bond uniting us and our Sister Congregations, the task of maintaining all our teaching pure and clean, as it should be, is hard enough. Let us appreciate what we have in the support of our Sister Congregations, and work together with them faithfully that among us all error may ever be defeated, and the saving truth of Jesus Christ triumphantly maintained.

Let no man among us think that it is enough for our own congregation to be kept in the true faith. Thank God, that this has been done! But mark two things well. First, how has this been done? Absolutely not by our standing separate and by ourselves during all these past years, but by joining hearts and hands with other congregations of the true faith. Thus were we strengthened and kept in the true faith; thus were we as a congregation supplied with trustworthy ministers of the Gospel; thus was sound and wholesome literature, from the Catechism down to hymn-books, devotional

books, and the church papers richly provided for us. That is the first point — our connection with a confessionally sound synod has helped mightily to keep us doctrinally where today we are. — Secondly, thinking only of ourselves, what would happen, if all these aids were taken from our congregation? Where would we get the right kind of a pastor — if not from our synod? or the literature we need — if not from this source? And what if the whole synodical influence for integrity of doctrine, truth and soundness in faith, were taken away from us for good? We need not guess at the answer — it can actually be seen in congregations operating thus by themselves — all of them spiritually low and getting lower still, unless perchance they come into fraternal contact with some faithful synodical body.

Let us thankfully recognize what it means to be one of a band of faithful Sister Congregations, by such connection kept in the bond of true faith and sound doctrine. Ours is the great blessing. Prize it, and do what you can to retain it for all time to come!

## **II. The Obligation of Love and Duty**

When the first synodical convention met in Jerusalem its obvious concern was the bond of faith and doctrine. But, looking into that meeting a little more closely, we will see that its second concern was the obligation of love and duty between the congregations and the members composing them.

When the question of doctrine arose in the congregation at Antioch that congregation did more than think only of itself. The very men who voiced the false doctrine had come from Judea, the country of which Jerusalem was the great center. The members at Antioch at once thought of the mother-church in Jerusalem. They realized that the question at issue was one which concerned the whole church at that time, even also those yet to be gathered from among Jews and Gentiles. The members at Antioch looked beyond themselves and their own limited congregational interests. Their love went out to the whole church; they felt a duty towards the church at Jerusalem especially, since from that center the Gospel had been carried out to them and others. Thus the congregation at Antioch, instead of acting only for itself and by itself, sent a delegation to the mother-church, and acted in conjunction with the church at Jerusalem. The obligation of love and duty between these congregations helped to bring about the first synod-

ical convention. And the synod, itself was conducted in the same way, looking to the true spiritual interests of the whole church, of all who composed it, or would yet be brought into it.

What a beautiful picture of the spirit of the early church and its congregations! Here was none of the blindness and selfishness which we meet so often in the churches today. It is a bad sign when the members of a congregation think only of themselves, and care only for their own congregation. This is the spirit of separation and division. It does not help to build, but to tear down. Our great aim must ever be to hold and maintain the truth ourselves, and to do our part in faithful love that our Sister Congregations may do the same. We with them, and they with us — that must ever be our motto. And that is what our synodical connection is for. The great obligation of love and duty as between us and our brethren in the faith in all our congregations is to rule our synodical activity. Thus we ourselves will be benefited more than we could possibly be benefited by seeking our own good in separation from the rest; and our own benefit will at the same time be that of the rest.

The obligation of love and duty, however, will always hold second place, that of faith and doctrine coming first. If our sister congregations should violate the truth and turn from the pure doctrine of the Word, then our love should not prompt us to yield to them, and our duty would not be to follow them. Love and duty must then unite in doing their utmost to bring them back to the true basis of all church-work. So also if we should err as a congregation. The love and duty of our Sister Congregations in the synod would have to oppose our error, try their utmost to free us from it, and if this be in vain finally withdraw from us. Antioch and Jerusalem united and kept united in the truth of Christ; they did it by following the highest promptings of love and duty. May we and all our synodical brethren ever do the same!

Let no man of us, therefore, look away to those of other faiths and false confessions, and begin to love what he sees there and think it his duty to bring of their errors and wrong practices into our midst. Remember those of other churches have torn themselves away from us because they determined not to follow the Word of Christ in all things. Shall we say that they did right in violating the Word, and we did wrong in following it? Love and duty never point in this direction, but in the direction of opposing these errors and their fruits and keeping ourselves free from them. Suppose Antioch



had given way to the men who came with the old Jewish notions — should Jerusalem just because of love have followed? Or at the convention at Jerusalem, when the false views were voiced there, should the rest have consented to them? That would have been very popular in those days, especially in the Jewish country, for the Jews like no other people clung to their old legalistic ways — we see them to this very day keeping up parts of the old ritual of Moses. It is a mistaken, degraded love which yields to religious error because it is popular, because many people love and cling to it. Against this very perversion of love our synod calls on us to stand firm, and put in place of it the true love, which follows Christ's Word first, and then embraces those who stand with us. Woe to those, whether in our synod or not, who count the doctrine of the Word a cheap thing, forget the love and duty they owe to their faithful synodical brethren, and give way to the perverted influences of popular errors and the practices they produce! It is bad enough never to have had the truth and the fellowship of true churches, but what shall we say of those who have had it, but have come to count it as nothing, preferring error and its ways instead?

Let your eyes rest on Christ and his holy Word. Then let your heart go out to all your brethren in the congregation and the synod, with the one desire that they with you may ever be true and loyal to the Master. This is our obligation of love and duty toward our Sister Congregations and their members.

### **III. The Joint Missionary Task**

There is still another interest in the first synodical convention in Jerusalem. It pertains to the joint missionary task resting upon us and our Sister Congregations.

St. Paul and Barnabas, sent from Antioch to Jerusalem as delegates to the convention, were the most notable missionaries of the church. They worked especially among the Gentiles or heathen people of that day. But St. Peter himself, who made such a decisive speech at the convention, was no longer working at Jerusalem, but in other places, chiefly among the Jews, yet to an extent at least also among the heathen. There were still others, down to the ordinary members of the churches, helping to spread the Gospel. We see at a glance how important it was that all of them should do

this blessed missionary work just as Christ himself wanted it done, bringing Jews and Gentiles to observe all things whatsoever Christ had said unto them — that and nothing but that. What a calamity, if some had taught the heathen one thing, and some another? if some had preached that faith alone is enough to save, and others had preached that the old Jewish requirements of circumcision, the Sabbath, and other rules had to be observed in addition? This would have made a sad and deplorable division. There would have been two churches instead of one, a true and faithful church, and a false and erring church. Thank God, that this danger to the most important work of the early church, its great missionary activity, was obviated by the first synodical convention! That alone makes the first synod a glorious achievement for the early church.

But Christ's great missionary command holds to this very day. It rests on every one of our congregations. And we have long ago found that this great work, like many another one, can best be accomplished by joining all the efforts of our congregations. We put all our missionary contributions together, we fit out men in schools supported by us all, and we send out our missionaries by means of missionary boards established by our synod as a great body. Of course, we are free to exert our personal efforts in bringing people into the church, but the greatest part of our missionary work, that reaching out to other cities, to other races, and to other lands, our great Home Missionary Work, our Negro Missions, and our Foreign Missions, are of necessity joint enterprises in which we all jointly take part.

We see at once how vital it is that all of us engaged in this great work should be one in the Gospel we carry out to others. And not only one in a general way, but one in the divine truth itself as Christ has committed it to us. When we send our money to the mission treasuries we want the assurance that it shall not be spent to teach those without false doctrines contrary to the Word of the Savior. When we send our sons to be fitted for the office of the ministry and the work of missions we want to feel certain that they will be trained to preach only what Christ has taught us to believe. When new churches are formed in other cities and lands we want them all to believe and practice just what we do in full obedience to Christ. There is enough false and perverted missionary work done in the world already. Too many churches send out only half of the Gospel, or still less, adding things of their own like the errorists who made their appearance in Antioch and in

Jerusalem of old. All too few are the men who do their missionary work like St. Paul, St. Peter, and Barnabas, keeping wholly to the Word of Christ.

With whom are we going to stand in the work of missions? There ought never to be a question. We belong with all those congregations which put Christ's Word above everything else, no matter what other denominations and churches may do. It may be easier to bring people into the church by dropping some parts of the doctrine of Christ. Our missionaries might report thousands of new members where now they report hundreds. But our call is not to gain numbers, to build outwardly; our call is to bring the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth to those without. Christ is watching us and our Sister Congregations in the work we do in his name. Oh, then, let us keep our eyes on him, and let us do our part by prayer, by testimony, by every influence our faith is able to put forth, that all this work may be done by us and all joined with us, so as to meet the Master's approval. Let the spirit of the first synodical convention in Jerusalem fill us and our whole synod today. All of our congregations one in Christ and his Word, and therefore one in bringing him and his Word alone in our joint missionary work to those without.

Yes, the very greatest interests are involved in our relation to our Sister Congregations; those of faith and doctrine, of love and duty towards each other, and of united work for the Master's kingdom. Put away all narrow and selfish thoughts; they only stunt and starve our spiritual life. Thank God for the fellowship of true brethren in our own congregations, and in our own synod. Let us conserve, strengthen, and abide in that fellowship. May the Lord keep it pure alway, and make it fruitful to the welfare of many souls and to the glory of his own blessed name!

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## Outlines

The text might be used for a sermon on legalism in the church, using as a pivot the speech of Peter. Likewise the subject of the sermon might be the doctrine of grace and faith, using especially 5:11. Samtleben has a mission-sermon on the theme: "The Gentiles too are called to the kingdom." He has a Reformation sermon on this text: "On what does salvation depend?" But in our series we want the wider view of this text, if for no other reason than

at least for this that the wider interests of the church are all too seldom brought forward in the sermon. We want an outline like that of Apelt: The Importance of the First Church Convention: The question which was discussed — the spirit in which it was discussed—the principles in accordance with which the decision was made — the confession which was made on the basis of the resolution adopted by the convention (v. 11). — The sermon may be made descriptive by using a theme like this: Let us attend the synod at Jerusalem: And see who is there — listen to the debate — and observe the resolution adopted. — Or we may generalize from what we see in Jerusalem to what we ought to note for ourselves: The convention at Jerusalem a view of the wider interests of the church: The doctrinal interests — the practical interests.

### **The Synod at Jerusalem, and Our own Synod.**

For all synodical connection and work there, must be, as at Jerusalem so among us:

1. The right basis —
2. The true aim —
3. The proper method —
4. The divinely intended result.

### **The First Synodical Convention at Jerusalem a Model for all Succeeding Ages.**

1. Its occasion was a vital question of the church.
2. Its spirit was strictly evangelical.
3. Its results were a blessing for the church.

— GHAS. GEROK.

### **Our Synodical Connection in the Light of the First Synod at Jerusalem.**

1. It rests on our church fellowship — and this brings us many blessings.
2. It joins us in church work — and this enables us to accomplish much work.

## **The Right View of Church Fellowship.**

1. Oneness in faith and doctrine.
2. Oneness in love and concern for each other.
3. Oneness in work for the Lord's cause.

# 58. The church member and his Money. The Twenty-third Sunday After Trinity. Luke 16:10-17.

He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. (Luke 16:10-17)

THE SERMON TODAY deals with money, and not merely with money in general, but with your money and my money. And this for the simple reason that in our text the Lord Jesus himself speaks of our money.

There are church members who do not like to have anyone preach to them about money. They sometimes say: "Let the preacher preach the Gospel to us, and leave other things, such as money for instance, alone!" Some of them even raise the complaint, that we are always "after their money!" As far as the latter is concerned the case is really much worse. The Lord is not merely after your money, he is after you yourself, and therefore after all that belongs to you, money and everything else. He wants to sanctify you through and through, and this he cannot do unless he changes your heart completely also in regard to money. — And this answers also the demand that the preacher confine himself to the Gospel and leave the question of money alone: The preacher would like to comply with that command, but if he is true to his call and commission and really preaches the Gospel, he

will soon find that the Gospel itself reaches down into a man's heart and life till it penetrates even a man's pocket-book, invades his bank and savings-account, his ways of spending money or investing it in one way or another. The thing comes to this point, that if a preacher says nothing about your money, you may be sure he is not preaching the Gospel to you as he should. You can see it yourself when you read this text and the Lord's own words which it contains. There are other texts just like this, both in the Old Testament and in the New, both in the Gospels which give us Christ's own preaching, and in the Epistles which give us the preaching of his holy apostles.

Moreover, when church members dislike to hear this preaching about their money, it is a sure sign that they especially need such preaching; though in reality we all need it, since the danger connected with the unrighteous mammon touches us ever anew, and thus calls for the Lord's admonition and warning to keep us in the path of safety. Hear, then, what the Lord has to say on

### **The church member and his Money,**

We may sum it all up into two brief statements. In the first place, your money is to be an aid in your church membership. And in the second place, your money dare never become a detriment to your church membership.

## **I. Your Money Is To Aid Your Church Membership**

How will a man's money be an aid in his church membership?

Very likely somebody will at once jump to the conclusion — When the man hands out his money liberally to the various treasuries of the church! But our text says nothing at all about church-dues, church-collections, and the like. At best only a small amount of money would thus be involved, and our text speaks about all your money and mine, every last dollar of it. The Lord wants to reach not a few dollars of it only, but every last cent of it when he desires to make your money an aid to your church membership. So put away this narrow little thought of your church contributions, and mark what the Lord says about all your money.

[1.] As a member of his church and a true follower of his name you must estimate your money aright. Not as the world estimates it, but as Christ who gave it to you bids you estimate it. The moment you do that your money will no longer hinder, it will help you in your church membership and life as a child of God.

Mark, then, what the Lord says when he declares that your money is “that which is least” as compared with a far greater treasure he has ready for you, which he calls that which is “much.” Money, even a whole bank full of it, if it be yours, is the least of God’s gifts to you. What is money compared with your life? your health? that of your wife and children? your happiness? your conscience and peace of mind? Any one of these is more than money. — Money takes a lower place still when you look at your spiritual gifts. Who was richer, the beggar Lazarus lying at the rich man’s gate, eating the crumbs from the rich man’s table, or the rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen like a king and fared sumptuously every day? As for me, give me the lot of Lazarus and let who will take that of the rich man. God’s grace, Christ’s blood and righteousness, the forgiveness of sins, are simply priceless; money — why money cannot even measure the value of these spiritual things. — But in the Lord’s comparison in our text money is called “that which is least” when set against the eternal wealth of which we are made heirs by becoming true members of Christ’s church. What is the finest mansion money can buy here on earth as compared with the mansions which Christ has prepared for us in heaven? Can a millionaire, yea a billionaire buy himself one of these celestial mansions? But see this heavenly inheritance is given to you by him who bought it for you with his own blood. From his hand comes every dollar you own here and this infinitely glorious inheritance beyond the skies. But what a mistake, if now you should value your money more highly than your heavenly home! Only a blind fool would do such a thing. You and I must value things aright: your money is for this brief day of life alone, your heavenly inheritance is for all eternity. Keep that true valuation clearly before your eyes, then your money will stay in its proper place — all of it, in all your life, and your membership in the church will never lose by it, but only gain.

This right estimate of your money comes out again when the Lord calls your money “the unrighteous mammon,” and compares it with “the true riches.” You may indeed have gained your money in ways altogether honest, but the money that comes to your hands comes from other men; and



when you look-at the long line of those who have handled it you will see at once that many of them have used this money in all sorts of unrighteous ways. What did that dollar buy yesterday, last week, a year ago, that dollar which is now in your purse? Alas, it did not always buy what pleased God! It was often in the service of sin. See that it be taken out of that service now that it is yours. But the true riches are far above sin. There is no taint or stain connected with the golden mansions above. The crown there laid up for you has no jewels in it touched by sinful hands. So all money is the lowest of wealth, mired with the stains of sin; the true riches which you own are infinitely higher, awaiting you above in a sinless world. Keep that comparison vividly before your eyes, and your church membership will grow holier and higher the nearer you come to its heavenly goal.

Still another estimate the Lord makes for you, when he calls your money “that which is another man’s,” but says of your heavenly treasures that they are “your own.” When we come to think of it the Lord is right, our money is never really our own. It never becomes part of us. We have it in our pockets, stored in some safe place like a bank, or invested in property or business; it is never really a part of us. And we are constantly paying it out — always handing it over to some other person. We own it only for a little while, sometimes the briefest kind of a while. And at the last we do not own it at all. We die, and that very instant every dollar you had belongs even legally to somebody else. Even the richest millionaire in the world does not take one penny of his wealth over into the other world. Money — there is no money over there. And soon, oh, so soon, you will be there! — Now think of that other wealth which the Lord calls “your own.” It belongs so completely to you that it literally becomes part of yourself. It is the new life in Christ, which when you die will shine in heaven forever with unspeakable splendor. It is the joy and happiness, the glory and honor which is yours as a child of God, and which after death will be made eternally perfect. That is the true riches — money? why, it is literally nothing compared with it. The essential thing for you as a member of Christ’s church is to see this, to see it so clearly and truly that your whole life will thereby be lifted up and changed for the better.

Thus, by your constantly making the right estimate of your money, putting it way down where it really belongs, as compared with the true wealth, and putting the true wealth away up where it really does belong — your church membership will be made more and more what it ought to be.

For your membership in the church is to be for you the Lord's admission to all this true and eternal wealth.

[2.] This estimate, however, of which we have been speaking is not to be merely a theoretical thing with you and me; it is to be so genuine and real that we will also use our money aright. Again, not as the world uses it, but as Christ who gave it to us bids us, he who would commit also the wealth of heaven to our hands. And so indeed our money will be an aid in our church membership.

This right use is when ever and always we remain masters of our money, instead of letting it become our master, when we make money our slave, instead of letting it enslave us. One of the great delusions of men is that they think they are the masters of their money when they are not. Look at them — money literally buys them. They lie for money, cheat for money, break every commandment of God for money, violate their own consciences for money. So Judas sold his soul to the devil for thirty pieces of silver. The money consideration, earthly advantage, position and place — these are the things that count with men. When these call to them they no longer hear the voice of Jesus, the confession and doctrine of the church, the call of the true wealth from above. They are the slaves of mammon.

But some of them are very cunning — they think they can serve both God and mammon at the same time. Secretly they love money and earthly wealth, and yet they try at the same time to love God, Christ, and the church. They belong to church, but their heart is where the money is. Such were the old Pharisees, who when they heard what Christ said in our text scoffed at him. They were covetous, yet had the appearance of being the most sanctified people of their nation. But Christ tells us, the thing, tried so often, cannot possibly be done. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." It is either — or. Give your heart to God, and then use your money as he bids you; or go on and love your money, with God far from your soul. Your life tells the tale. Open it to God and his holy Word, even if it cost you all your money. Stay true to him and his teaching, no matter what you must lose in the way of money or what money stands for. Keep the distinction clearly before your soul, and by God's grace meet every test as it comes to you. Then will your membership in the church thrive, and you will get out of it more than any amount of money can possibly buy.

For remember that what the Lord here says is most certainly true: for every church member the way he uses his money and earthly wealth is a test.

God makes it such a test. He gives us money to see whether we will use it faithfully as he bids us. If we do, then he has ready for us the far higher wealth. If we do not, if we are unfaithful to him in the small money wealth he gives us, then it is plain he cannot use us for the heavenly treasures he has ready for us above. Did you know that you are being tested day by day through your money? Well, you are. How much are you ready to spend for your body, its comfort and its pleasure, and how much for your, soul? That tells the story. Does it hurt you when God shows you how you can build his kingdom on earth by the aid of your money, bringing men into it and keeping them there? would you rather keep your money and use it for other things? Well, that again tells the story. Now God indeed wants you and yours to live in this world, and therefore he is so generous to nearly all of us, giving us a rich abundance. But he gives us enough to do far more, to help the needy for his sake, to build and extend his church here at home and elsewhere. O what golden opportunities! Let us open our eyes and see them; let us hasten while we live to grasp them. They are our test. Faithful in doing God's will with our money in this poor life, we shall be advanced up yonder to have and to hold forever the true riches. Does your heart desire that advancement? See, the way is open. Your membership in the church opens it for you. Serve God with these his earthly gifts, serve him aright. He will do the rest: far beyond what you now are able even to think. And thus will your money be an aid in your church membership, one of the means by which you may make your membership here an apprenticeship for your membership in the church above.

## **II. Your Money Dare Not Be a Detriment To Your Church Membership**

By estimating our money aright and by using it accordingly we can make it an aid in our church membership. But there are church members who fail in this. Therefore we need the warning that our money never dare become a detriment to our church membership.

Some, of course, see no great loss when their membership in the church suffers. Throw a fortune into their lap, and they would gladly stay away from church for a whole year. You have read about the princesses ready to change their faith and religion in order to marry a king. Surely, you have

despised them for such an act Your membership in the church means your faith, your confession of Christ's saving truth, the true way to heaven open for you in that truth. It means your sure hope of heaven, and your comfort, peace, assurance, and joy as you wend your way to heaven. Shall "that which is least," this bit of earthly money, ever damage and hurt your membership in the church and all these supreme interests involved in it? Your one answer ought to be: Nothing on earth shall ever hurt it, and my little trifle of money — that least of all! Oh, that we could all live up to this the only true principle! Money gone, how little is gone? But my membership among God's saints — if that were gone, then indeed all would be gone!

[1.] Now the greatest detriment to any man's membership in the church of Christ, as far as money is concerned, is covetousness. St. Luke writes that the Pharisees were covetous; he really uses the word which means "loving money," and that shows at once what covetousness is. Of all sins this is the most insidious. A man may be in it and not even realize it A Catholic priest once stated that his people came to him and confessed all sorts of grave and terrible sins in the confessional, but in all the years of his experience never a member of his church confessed that he was covetous. We may well believe it, No wonder, then, that there is a special commandment: "Thou shalt not covet!" and that again and again both Christ and his apostles warn us against this sin. The love of money is the root of all evil. This sin belongs together with idolatry, adultery, and the worst of crimes. The world indeed does not put it there, nor did the Pharisees, but God does, and that shows us that the love of money and earthly wealth take all the spiritual life out of a man's membership in the church. To love money and to serve it means that at heart we no longer love and serve God.

How may we detect this sin and weed it out in time, if it should begin its secret work in our hearts? Only by the help of Christ and his Word. Here the Pharisees made their terrible mistake, and many others have followed them in it. When Jesus warned his disciples against the love of mammon the Pharisees scoffed at him. Then the Lord pointed out their folly: "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men." Lying in this deadly sin they paid no attention to what Christ said, they pronounced themselves clear and free, and accepted the verdict of men who were as blind as they were and never saw their covetousness and what it meant. And yet how clearly God spoke to them. He sent them John the Baptist, who preached so mightily against sin and called for repentance; he sent them his own Son who did the same

thing, only more effectively still. Many men listened; Christ tells us that they pressed into the kingdom. But these covetous Pharisees remained as they were. We have Christ and, all his Word today. Oh, let us heed him, examine our hearts in the light of his Word, and the moment we find that we think too much and make too much of money and earthly things, let us bow in repentance before the throne of grace, and instead of justifying ourselves, taking shelter behind some excuse, or satisfying ourselves with the good opinion men may have of us, let us not rest until the Lord himself absolves and justifies us in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When thus we clear our hearts of covetousness, then will our money, no matter how much of it we may have, cease to be a damage to our church membership, and we may rejoice in the promise of our heavenly inheritance in Christ.

[2.] All this may be said in another way, in one which brings out the positive side. Christ himself points us to those who press into his kingdom; they are the ones we must join. With them we must live in the light of God's eternal Word. That will keep us safe in the church in spite of our money and earthly wealth.

The mistake of men is that they look too much at this world, and too little at God and his Word. Men, and the ways of men, and the opinions of men seem very real to most people, God seems far away and his Word has a distant, unreal sound to them. They may hear it indeed, and yet let it slip off from their hearts, instead of making it a power in their lives. But hear what Christ says: "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the Law to fall." The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language, and the letters in that language have little projections which distinguish those letters from others. Now Christ says, so firm and solid is God's Word, that not even one little mark of one letter of that Word shall fall away, so that the word and thought it helps to express shall not be fulfilled. The heavens may fall, sun, moon and stars vanish, the earth disappear, but not one particle of God's Word.

Now draw the conclusion yourself in regard to men who like the Pharisees of old disregard that Word of God and shape their lives without it, yea contrary to it. The heavens indeed shall fall, and the earth pass away. And all who proudly, boldly lift themselves up now in their own thoughts and ways shall be brought to judgment at last. Here in God's Word that judgment is written. Do you know what the sentence is? It is in our text: "That

which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.” What do men esteem? Their own wisdom, and what it tells them in regard to earthly wealth and all it is able to offer. “Money talks,” they say, and many of them know the language of money best of all. They laugh at Christ and what his Word says to the contrary. Poor, blind fools! When now they go where no money can follow them, then what will be their support and stay? Eternal night will swallow them up. For what God abominates will be forever cast out from his sight.

If we know and believe this, really believe it, we will cease shaping our lives as so many around us do. Our one thought will be God, his ever-enduring Word, the way it directs that our lives should go. We may lose money by it, but we will gain heaven by such a loss. Moreover, we will be very particular, about that Word, just as Christ here teaches us. If God will not let one tittle of it fall, then we dare not ignore or set aside a single statement in it. Every word of God counts, and you must make it count for you. A supreme satisfaction goes with this living in accord with the Word. Then we know God is with us, his blessing is over us. Men may scoff at us, as they did at Christ, God’s commendation makes up for that. Our money will show that we are led by the Word. The God we love and his work, the Savior we follow and his church, the brethren we are associated with and their need — all these will receive our money. The world, its pleasures and frivolities, its sinful attractions and poisonous allurements, its vanities and displays, its deceptions and falsehoods — no, these will not get our money. As children of God and members of his church we know an investment that will bring us an incalculable rate of interest. Christ says that whatsoever we do unto one of the least of his brethren we do unto him, and he will acknowledge it as so done, on the great day of judgment.

Thus again our money, even if we have great wealth, will not be a detriment to us. We will rise above it and live not for money or anything merely earthly, but for God, for Christ, and for the eternal world which already beckons us.

This is the substance of Christ’s sermon on money for us the members of his church. Do we need it? We certainly do. May his Spirit help us to heed it.

# Outlines

The structure of the sermon will be governed largely by the analysis we make of the text and its thought. With that analysis before us the question will be, from what dominating point of view we desire to group and present the material secured. We may analyze into three parts: 5:10-12 sets over against each other in three statements money and the true wealth, and this by using the idea of faithfulness, and the idea of a test in the lower, in order to determine our admittance to the higher; 5:13 sets God and mammon over against each other, and uses the idea of serving the one or the other, it being impossible to serve both; 5:14-17 sets the opinion, word, and verdict of men over' against those of God expressed in his Word, and it does this so as to intimate the sure condemnation of the covetous Pharisees, while showing how repentant sinners are absolved. We may summarize all these elements under the theme: Christ's instruction regarding our money: He sets our money over against the true riches — He sets mammon over against God — He sets the judgment of men over against that of the Word. — The main features of the text are so closely related to each other that we may draw our theme from anyone of the chief parts of the text. Thus we may use the idea of faithfulness: Christian faithfulness in the use of money: It elevates God above mammon — It places the true riches above the transient — It puts the justification of God's Word above that of men. — "Ye cannot serve God and mammon": The two are contrary — So is their service — So is their ultimate reward.

## **A Man and his Money.**

That means:

1. A test as to his faithfulness.
2. An alternative to to his service.
3. A decision as to his final judgment.

## **"No Man can Serve Two Masters."**

1. Many try it, and always fail.

2. Let us cease trying, and serve God alone.

## **The Test to which our Money Puts Us.**

1. There is a test as to what we think of our money as compared with our heavenly wealth.
2. There is a test as to whether we really serve God or stoop to the service of money.
3. There is a test as to whether we bow to the verdict of men or to the judgment of the Word.

## **God's Word and our Money.**

1. It puts the right estimate upon it.
2. It shows us the right use to make of it.
3. It pronounces the right judgment in regard to it.



# **59. The Crowning Promise: “I will Raise him up at the Last Day.” The Twenty-fourth Sunday After Trinity. John 6:37-40.**

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:37-40)

WE ARE APPROACHING the end of the present church year. The mention of the approaching end, even though it be only that of another year of grace, might sound to some like a sad thing, but the end to which the grace of God is leading us is the very opposite of sadness. Even the old prophet Zechariah, looking ahead to the end of all things, declared: “It shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light.” In our text the Savior himself substantiates this prophecy, for he gives us the most wonderful promise concerning the end. It is full of light indeed, the light of eternal joy and happiness. This promise of his is to make the end of the church year a joyous thing for us all, joyous because it holds out for us at the end of our lives, and at the end of all things when the last great day arrives, the greatest and most glorious hope. What is this promise — this hope? It is the crowning feature of the entire revelation of God. Once, and then again a second time, the Lord declares concerning every one who comes to him and believes in him: “I will raise him up at the last day.” This is the glorious end which we are approaching, which we are especially to contemplate now as we draw near the end of the church year — our resurrection and glorification at the last great day. Indeed, this is

## **The Crowning Promise: “I will Raise him up at the Last Day.”**

For it crowns God’s whole plan of salvation — Christ’s entire work of grace in us — and thus it crowns us now with hope, and will crown us at last with eternal joy.

### **I. Connected With The Whole Plan of God**

The right way to think of the resurrection promised us by Christ is to connect it with the whole plan of God for our salvation. It is the crowning part of that plan, the last step which is to complete the whole glorious work. This is the way Christ speaks of it when most solemnly he assures us that he himself will raise us up at the last great day.

Skeptics and scoffers like to single out the resurrection promised us, and to attack it as an impossible thing. When you and I die what will become of our bodies? They will be turned to dust and ashes. Some perish in fire, their bodies are burned up, perhaps so completely that no trace of them can be found. Some are lost at sea. The monsters of the deep devour them. Even those laid in the grave, eventually as the centuries pass, disappear completely. What has become of the millions that have died in past ages? Their bodies have returned to the elements; they have vanished so utterly that no man on earth is able to find a trace of the vast majority of them. These are the things skeptics point to, and then draw the conclusion that a resurrection such as Jesus promises us is nothing but an empty dream. There can be no resurrection, they say.

The trouble with the skeptic is that he leaves out the main thing connected with our resurrection. He leaves out God and his whole plan of salvation. To be sure, if he is left out, if his saving purpose in Christ Jesus is annulled, then indeed to speak of a blessed resurrection at the last day would be folly. But now the folly is to leave him out, to deny his purpose and grace, to reject the promise made to us by him through his Son, our Savior. The moment these get the place in our hearts which they ought to have, not only will all denial of the resurrection, all doubt of it disappear, but this resurrection itself will appear as the crown and capstone of all God’s saving plan. And it is thus that the Savior tells us himself: “This is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I

should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.” The good and gracious will of our heavenly Father is our salvation, resurrection, and glorification at the end of time. That will of his will be triumphantly carried out. For a second time Jesus says: “This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.” Let those who will deny these mighty words and put a dark, hideous blank where Christ puts a glorious golden hope. The Father’s wondrous plan of salvation ending with the crowning promise of the resurrection is infinitely more satisfying than anything the dismal ignorance of unbelief and skepticism is able to offer us.

Ours is a blessed Father in heaven. By his omnipotent power he called all things into being and created us to be his children forever. When, however, we turned from him by sin he made his great plan to restore and save us. He would send his own Son to atone for our sin and guilt with his blood. He would call all men to believe and trust in that Son and his atoning blood. He would give to the Son, as the Son’s own, all who thus believe in him, that they may be his forever. Not one of them should he lose. And to make them completely and forever his own the Son himself is to lift them up to be with him where he is in eternal glory forever. That, in brief, is the great purpose and plan of God. We know from the Scriptures how much of it has already been carried out. God’s Son has died for us, salvation is won for us. We know too how the rest of this plan of God is being carried out now, for the Gospel of life and salvation resounds through the world, and every man who comes to Jesus is in no wise cast out.

Now in this great plan there shines at the very end of it the crowning promise of our blessed resurrection. Our salvation is not to be a partial thing, it is to be perfect and complete. The God who made us with body and soul has planned to save us soul and body. When death comes to us, separating soul and body, the soul cleansed by Christ’s blood is to be lifted at once into the blessedness of heaven. The body shall not be lost. It shall turn again, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, but only to sleep thus till the great hour of God comes. Then his own Son is to call these mortal bodies back into life, clothe them with immortality, and take them also into the heavenly joys prepared for us. Christ himself tells us the great plan: “that of all that which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.” “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming. Jesus declares,” in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall

come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." Then will the work of salvation be complete — body and soul reunited and restored to perfect holiness, made glorious like the body and soul of Jesus himself, dwelling thus with Jesus in heavenly blessedness forever.

What a wonderful plan! Every part of it divine. And not the least of it this crowning part, our resurrection.

As we contemplate it, how the foolish doubts of skepticism vanish! Shall not the great God who made heaven and earth out of nothing be able to re-make and restore one of his many creatures. We who believe in creation cannot for a moment doubt the promise of the resurrection. Shall not the God who sent his own Son into our flesh and made him man, be able to do this other thing, call us back to life and clothe us with glory and blessedness? And again, shall not the God who raised up his own Son and glorified him for our salvation do for us too what he has promised, give us, both body and soul, by the resurrection at the last day to his Son who bought us with his blood? Take all these mighty things together, and the crowning promise in which they end will appear as what it really is — the fitting conclusion to it all. Of course, it is all incomprehensible; no human mind can fathom it. But this last part no more than any other part. All that we can do is to open our poor hearts and let the blessedness which God has prepared for us enter in and fill us with its light and joy.

## **II. Connected With Christ's Entire Work of Grace In Us**

The first thing for us to do is to view our resurrection in connection with God's great plan of salvation. Then, however we must view it also in connection with Christ's entire work of grace in us. And again we will see that Christ's declaration: "I will raise him up at the last day," is the crown of all the promises he has left us.

The thing most necessary for us to understand here is the inwardness of Christ's saving work as it is now being done in our hearts. The Savior comes to us now by means of his Gospel. There, as Jesus himself tells us, we are to see him, to see him as he really is, as the eternal Son of God made flesh for our sakes, as the Lamb of God slain for our sins, as our eternal

King and Lord, in whose hands are the keys of hell and death. We are to see him thus in order to believe on him. And that means that we bow at his feet in complete confidence and trust, letting him take all our sins away by his heavenly pardon, letting him make us the children of God and heirs of salvation. But mark now what the Savior says — thus to see and believe in our Lord is to have everlasting life. “This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on him, may have everlasting life.” The work of Christ’s grace in us is to make us spiritually alive. It is only another way of saying the same thing, that by faith we become the children of God, that by faith we are regenerated, reborn, passed from death unto life. To lie in sin and guilt unforgiven is to be dead spiritually, shut out from the eternal fountain of life; to escape from sin and guilt by divine forgiveness is to be brought back to the heavenly fountain of life, and thus to have life. And this is the great work of Christ’s grace in us to give us spiritual life again.

Everlasting life is ours now by faith in Christ. The Savior’s word does not mean that we are to wait till the last day, or till we die, before we obtain everlasting life. Most solemnly Jesus assures us: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.” John 5:24. And we who have this life know that we have it. Of course, the spiritual life itself can be seen with our eyes no more than can the bodily life itself be seen. But all the evidences of its presence can be seen. A man’s heart beats, he breathes, he eats, walks, talks, works, does a thousand things — we know he has bodily life. Another lies cold and stiff, and decay begins to disintegrate his body — we know he is dead. So the life we now have by faith in Christ. A man loves to think of Christ, comes to hear his Word, inwardly clings to it and rejoices in it, tries earnestly to do what it says, prays to Christ, is strengthened by his Sacrament, and in a thousand ways shows that Christ is in his heart — that man is spiritually alive; he has everlasting life, he has it now. Another spurns the Word and Sacraments, neither prays to Christ nor regards what he says — that man is spiritually dead. Now the great work of Christ today is to bring us all to this spiritual life and to keep and strengthen us in it, thus delivering us from spiritual death and its dread results.

You will see now this blessed work of grace in us most naturally and fittingly culminates in our resurrection at the last day. We who live now by

faith shall live for evermore. All sin shall be swept out from our bodies and souls, every trace of the old death in which once we lay, and in a glorious sinless, heavenly world, made perfectly to fit that world, we shall dwell forever.

Think not that everlasting life is only for the soul. God made the body as well as the soul, and the soul to live in the body. And now he uses our body as well as our soul to give us spiritual life. With these bodily ears we hear Christ's Word, with these mouths of ours we receive his holy Sacrament, as also Baptism is applied to our bodies. These bodily eyes read the Word; these bodily tongues confess Christ's name and pray to him; these hands are folded in prayer, these knees bent low, these heads bowed, these feet running the way of his commandments. In fact all our members are enlisted to do the Savior's will, all of them drawn from sin to do the works of grace and righteousness. The love of Christ is to constrain them all. No wonder, then, that St. Paul calls our bodies the temple of God, he dwelling in them and using them for his gracious purpose. It is utterly false to think of the body God has so wonderfully made and endowed as a base thing, to be left in sin and death, while the soul alone is made pure and filled with life. Christ's salvation is complete, it includes our mortal bodies, bestowing upon them also a blessed immortality.

How this will be finally completed Jesus tells us in his promise of the resurrection. The day shall come when he will call our bodies from the dust of the grave, raise them in heavenly glory, reunite them with our souls, and thus make us to dwell with him in heaven. Let no man ask why the Lord has chosen this way to crown and complete his work, and not some other way. He alone knows how to do his work, and that is enough for every humble child of his. It pleased him to take the old patriarch Enoch bodily to heaven, and to carry the prophet Elijah up bodily in a fiery chariot. But for us there is the great promise of the resurrection. Christ's own body was raised, and we are to follow in the same path. In fact, the beginning has already been made, for certain of the Old Testament saints of God were raised from their graves at the time of Christ's own resurrection; they appeared unto many at Jerusalem to reveal the omnipotent power of Christ, and are now in the glory of heaven.

This, then, is how we are to think of our coming resurrection. It is the crowning promise of Christ, since it crowns and completes his work of grace in us.

### III. It Crowns Us Now With Hope, and At Last With Eternal Joy

But there follows a mighty conclusion from all this: This crowning promise of Christ crowns us now with hope, and will crown us at last with eternal joy.

Time flies, and we are all hastening to the end of our earthly lives. One by one we are laid in the grave; it is the house that awaits us all. But look at this promise of Christ — it writes the golden word HOPE over every believer's grave. We die indeed, but we shall rise again in glory. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? ...But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" We mourn indeed when we bury our loved ones, but not as they who have no hope. They only rest from their labors, they sleep in Jesus. That rest and sleep, untroubled and sweet, awaits us also when the Lord calls us at last. Oh, how many of God's faithful children have closed their eyes gladly when the hour came for them, even praying that the Lord would hasten it! This is what the Lord's crowning promise does for us. Who would not gladly lie down to this sleep when he knows the heavenly awakening that will follow it?

But here see what unbelief would do. It would cancel this promise of Christ, blot out the hope he gives us, put darkness and a black, impenetrable shadow over every Christian grave. What a despicable thing to do, what a damnable thing! The very thing God tries to save us from, the very thing he gave his Son to free us from, these apostles of unbelief would keep us in and fasten us in to all eternity. You and I must realize what is at stake. Let no man take thy crown! — this crown of heavenly hope in the Savior's final promise.

As he crowns us now with hope, so he will crown us at last with eternal joy. Who will describe that last great day when, the Lord will redeem his promise? Human imagination is all too weak. The holy apostle tells us that we shall be like unto the Savior? our glorious bodies like his most glorious body. The Lord himself says that we shall be like the angels of God. They

are bodiless indeed, but as they are fitted for the glories of heaven and endowed with most wonderful heavenly powers, so shall we be, including our glorified bodies. Such is the supreme joy that awaits us. Let it cast its radiance now already into your lives. All the glories of the sun in the heavens, the splendor of the clouds at sunset, the colors of the bow which God has set in the skies, will utterly be outdone when the saints of God rise to glory at the last great day.

"Arrayed in glorious grace,  
Shall these vile bodies shine;  
And every shape and every face  
Look heavenly and divine.

These lively hopes we owe  
To Jesus' dying love;  
We would adore his grace below,  
And sing his power above."

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## Outlines

The cardinal points in the text are life — the resurrection — and the grace that calls to both. The sermon may be built accordingly: Christ, and the hope of the resurrection: He calls us to himself — he gives us spiritual life — and thus he assures us of our blessed resurrection at the last day. — We may lift to prominence what Jesus says of believing on him, by making our theme: The way to a blessed resurrection: it is the way of Christ's redemption — of his gracious call in the Gospel — of the faith and life he makes ours — and thus the goal will be reached at last. — This is a text on the distinctive Christian hope, and it would be well to make the sermon turn on this pivot, contrasting our hope with the hopelessness of unbelief, and the false hopes which are used to cover this hopelessness. Theme: Our hope that Christ will raise us up at the last day: A glorious hope indeed — a sure and certain hope — a hope that satisfies and lifts us up.

**"I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body."**



Consider:

1. The substance of this article of faith.
2. The ground on which this article of faith rests.
3. The consolation and hope Which this article of faith affords.

## **The Comfort which Christ Offers us in the Promise of the Resurrection.**

1. His promise is glorious — and that fills us with comfort and joy.
2. His promise is sure — and that fills us with comfort and confidence.

Phil. 3:11: “If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”

## **Our Assurance of a Blessed Resurrection at the Last Day.**

1. It involves our coming to Christ by faith — he will cast no one out.
2. It involves our belonging to Christ — it is the Father’s will that he lose nothing of that which is given him.
3. It involves our possession of everlasting life — for this life has the promise that Jesus will raise us up at the last day.

## **Live in the Light of the Resurrection at the Last Day.**

1. Let the call to come draw you, that you may go toward this goal.
2. Let the grace to believe be effective in. you, that you may draw nearer day by day to this goal.
3. Let the life everlasting be your dearest treasure, that nothing may ever turn you from this goal.
4. Let the glorious promise of Christ fill you with joy t that its fulfillment may bring you beyond question to this goal.

# 60. When? The Twenty-fifth Sunday After Trinity. Mark 13:32-37.

But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch. (Mark 13:32-37)

WILL THE WORLD STAND FOREVER? Some may think so, some may say they do not know. The Christian knows. Just as the Lord has told us in his Word when and how the world came into existence, so also he has told us when and how it will come to an end. The world will not stand forever. It will end at the last day when the Lord will return from heaven in glory, raise all the dead, transform all the living, and judge both the living and dead.

But in connection with the end of the world so clearly and fully foretold in Scripture there is one thing we would all like to know - just when will the Lord come — just when will the last day arrive? Already the twelve disciples of Christ asked him this question, and they received an answer, but not the one they desired or perhaps expected. Men have asked the same question since; but every effort to learn more than Jesus first told the Twelve has been in vain. We have the answer we need, but it leaves unanswered the great question

## When?

When? When will the last day come? When will Christ return and judge the world? How long is it yet, since all these centuries have already passed?

## I. No Man Knows

Many indeed are altogether unconcerned about this question. They do not trouble themselves even about the end of their own lives — how then would they think of the end of the world? They think they have more necessary and profitable things to attend to. And so they live on, and never ask seriously: When?

But among Christian people the question concerning the end of all earthly things has often caused great concern. A morbid interest in it takes hold of some and carries them beyond the line of safety. They persuade themselves that in some way, if one studied the Bible minutely enough, the exact or at least approximate date for the end can indeed be found. And so they begin to combine various prophetic passages from the Bible, calculate the times and the seasons, build up more or less complex deductions, with the result that they finally think they know at least how many years it will yet be till the end. Of the many who have made these foolish attempts we may recall William Miller in our own country. This Adventist declared in 1831 that Christ would return and the earth be destroyed in the year 1843. When this date passed, still others were fixed, but all proved utterly false. Nearly all who make such attempts believe in the so-called millennium, the old Jewish dream that Christ will come a thousand years before the end to establish a great earthly kingdom here below, making his church reign in triumph and glory over all her opponents. But every time they have figured out when this millennium would begin, they too have failed. We know why. In the first place there will be no millennium; as the end draws nearer tribulations will increase, the forces of Antichrist will grow more haughty and blatant, till at last Christ comes and ends all by his great judgment on the last day. In the second place — Christ himself has most solemnly assured us that no man knows or can know the end.

Here in our text he declares: “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father,” Again he says: “Ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning.” Just before his ascension to heaven he told the disciples the same thing: “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.” Here, then, in the clearest and directest way is the answer of Christ

himself to the great question: When? The answer is: No man knows. There will be an end indeed, but the time of the end is absolutely hidden from us all.

Think of that a moment, and realize what it means. Ever since Christ walked on earth this has been the answer to the question: When will the end be? God has left us all alike in this regard. The apostles knew no more about the date of the end than we. Only one thing we know — up till the present day the end has not yet come. That the apostles could not know, since they all died in the first century. But as regards the future before them, it was exactly like the future before us — the end might come tomorrow. — This teaches us also in regard to the signs of the end. Christ himself has told us of these signs, how they all announce the coming of the end. But that is all they do — they tell us most positively that the end awaits us all. That is what must be kept before our eyes. If thus we walk in the light of the end, all is well.

As for the rest let us abide humbly by the Savior's Word. How can we know what even the angels in heaven cannot know? what even the Lord Jesus when he walked as man on earth was content not to know? God will send the end when the world is ready for it. Let us leave to his power and authority what he has reserved unto himself.

## **II. Watch Always**

The certainty of the coming end, together with the uncertainty of the day when that end shall come, mean much to us.

It would be a mistake for us to think, since no man can possibly know the date of the end therefore we need not concern ourselves about it. That would be dangerous indifference. Or, if we should think, because the end has not yet come in all these years, therefore most likely it will not come in any way soon now, at least not as long as we may yet live. That would be dangerous security. All such conclusions regarding the end are false, misleading, the suggestions of the devil, not the conclusions Christ would have us draw.

Since the end may come at any time, so many signs already having announced it, other signs still proclaiming it, the one right and proper conclusion for us to draw is that we must be in constant readiness for it. Jesus

makes it plain by means of a little parable. Here is a man who has gone from home, leaving each of his servants with work to do, and the keeper of his place to be ready to receive his master at any moment when he shall return. The master may come in the evening, from six to nine o'clock, which was called the first watch of the night; or during the second watch, from nine o'clock to twelve; or in the third, at the cock-crowing, from twelve o'clock till three; or later still, in the morning watch, from three o'clock till six. With absolutely no intimation at what hour the master would return, how foolish would that keeper be to put off his making ready for his master, to let the servants idle and leave their tasks undone, to sleep at ease thinking the master will not come yet for several hours, or to carouse and carry on wildly, expecting to make ready afterwards? You know the strange fatality about such blind security — almost invariably the unexpected happens in such cases — the master comes while they who ought to be ready to welcome him with everything beautifully done as he ordered, are least expecting him. In fact, the Lord has told us that his coming at the end of the world will be just like that for all the careless, indifferent, and secure. Suddenly he will come, in the very hour when they will think he could not possibly come as yet. What plainer warning do we want? Be ready, be ready always; then, no matter when he comes, all will be well with you.

And if you ask what is meant by such readiness on our part for the great end when the Lord shall return, Christ himself gives you the clearest kind of an answer. "Take heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is." Twice more in our brief text the Lord repeats the word "watch": "Watch ye therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh" — "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch!" Here is the second part of the Lord's answer to the great question: When? No man knows — therefore watch always. Never fail to note this second part, for this part we really need most of all.

To watch means to look for the Lord so as to be ready instantly to receive him at his coming. That, of course, means to look for him in faith and trust, for only they who constantly cling to him as their Savior are really ready for his coming. Faith is the essential thing. But this must be real faith, not one which names his blood and righteousness with the lips, and then goes and denies that blood and righteousness by sinful practices, sinful associations, sinful neglect. Watch in true faith, that in all your life you may ever be ready to meet the Lord, no matter what the moment may be. — If

your heart grows heavy at this word, as you recall your imperfections and sins, then remember that the Lord himself added another word to the watching he enjoins upon us — watch and pray. Turn your heart to God and your Savior, and he will help and bless you. Jesus himself said, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak, and then again he said: Watch and pray! He who prays is drawn away from sin, joined inwardly to his Lord and Master, and thus aided most mightily in making ready to receive him.

All are to watch thus, prayer aiding them, but there is a difference. Some are like the apostles, whom the Lord in his little parable pictures to us by the porter or doorkeeper of his house; others are like the servants in that house, each with his task assigned. That means that some are pastors, teachers, and guides for others in the church. Their responsibility is especially great. St. Paul calls them overseers, whose duty it is to nourish the faith of those committed to their care. They are watchmen on Zion's walls. Oh, that all might be watchmen indeed, none of them dumb dogs — calling out and warning God's people against every danger, rousing the sleeping and careless, shaking up the indifferent and secure! Woe unto the pastor who sleeps at his post, but blessed he who watches faithfully and keeps himself and all his flock in readiness for the Lord! — But all are to watch, every believer called as a servant in the household of his church. This responsibility of watching we cannot shift even upon our pastors. You must believe and keep your heart turned toward heaven — no man can do it for you. You must exercise your faith in good works doing your Lord's will at home in your family, in your business and labor, among your associates in the world and among your brethren in the church. No man can do these works for you. Use your pastor to aid you thus in faith and Christian living, but if ever he should fail you, you have your Lord still and your Lord's Word. By his help watch and thus be ever ready for his coming.

### **III. Lest The Lord Find Us Sleeping**

One more part of the Lord's answer to the great question: When? remains. In addition to the admonition to watch always, we need it as the final warning.

The Lord uses two different words when he calls to us to “watch,” although in our English translation the difference is not brought out. To watch

means to be without sleep, and it means likewise to be wide awake. You will note also how the Lord speaks of his coming as occurring in one of the watches of the night. He pictures to us this whole time of waiting for his coming as so many long hours of the night. What is the danger thus implied? It is that we who are called to watch and thus be ready for the Lord's coming grow drowsy and fall asleep. In fact the Lord himself names this danger: "Watch — lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping." So we take this as the last part of the answer Christ makes to our question: When? No man knows — therefore watch always — lest the Lord find us sleeping. Spiritual sleep is the great hindrance to our readiness. It is a danger which besets even those who were at one time full awake. Even if now your faith is bright and strong, be on your guard, lest after all you be lulled to sleep, and the Lord find you so.

If Christ should come at this moment to wind up the affairs of men, if in this hour the sign of the Son of man should appear in the heavens, his countless angel hosts burst from the sky, his great white throne of judgment shine above us brighter and more effulgent than a thousand suns — how would he find many who are called Christians and who even call themselves so — how would he find them in this hour? Alas, not in the churches, praising God's grace, worshiping the Savior's name, receiving the heavenly impulses of his Spirit! Some are idling coldly and indifferently at home; some are chasing pleasure far from the church and its worship; some are dreaming, planning, working earthly things, thinking that the heavenly may be safely put off. All these are sleeping spiritually. If found thus by the Lord at last, they will be cast out, as he tells us, with the hypocrites, where there is howling and gnashing of teeth. Thank God, you are here now in his house! But your mere presence here, even if it be very regular, is not enough. Your heart must be here, your soul anchored in Christ, your faith resting on him and his Word. And that not only while you are here, but always, whether you work or play, whether you rest or wake, whether you are at home or away.

"Wake, arise!" the voice is calling;  
The watchman's voice on quick ear falling:  
> "Jerusalem awake, arise!  
For the midnight hour is fleeting!"

Sometimes men lull themselves asleep with the notion that the end will most likely not come during their lives anymore. Things move so regularly from day to day that they feel perfectly at ease on this account, and this preaching and telling them that the end may come at any time leaves them without making much impression. The result, then, is spiritual carelessness and indifference, if not actual false security; in a word, they are sleeping. Let all such note two things. In the first place, the end will come when even those most earnestly looking for it are not expecting it; it will come as a tremendous, overwhelming surprise. In the second place, even if the end should not come till after your death, your death may come any day. Many a man starts a day as he has perhaps started a thousand others, and that day proves his last. That means, as he was that day, that day when unexpectedly death caught him, so will the Lord find him at the last great day. If you die before the last great day, then as you die so you will be on that day. Ah, how many would be found different then, if now they really believed this simple truth!

Away then with this deadening, deadly slumber of the soul! Hear the Lord's call: "Watch... lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping."

"Up, my soul, gird thee with power!  
Watch! to prayer betake thee;  
Lest the sudden evil hour  
Unawares overtake thee.  
Satan's prey  
Soon are they,  
Who, with best endeavor,  
Watch not, pray not ever."

Always will men ask this question concerning the end — when? There is only one true answer. It is that no man knows, that therefore we must watch always, lest we be found asleep. Impress that answer aright upon your hearts and lives, then will you be ready for the end.

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## Outlines



Some texts have one grand avenue leading into them, and all who enter must go that way. Others are crossed by many thoroughfares, anyone of which takes us through. Ours is a text of the latter kind. We may take the word “Watch!” standing out so prominently; or the fuller admonition: “Take ye heed, watch and pray!” or the allied thought: Will the Lord find you sleeping? or the assurance: No man knoweth! or the expressive clause: “When the Master of the house cometh,” and still other themes will be left. If we single out the second: “Take ye heed, watch and pray!” we may divide as follows: Watch with prayer for the Lord’s return — Pray with watching that you may ever be ready. — Or the last: “When the Master of the house cometh”: What an hour of consternation for those who sleep! — What a day of joy for those who watch and pray!

### **“Watchman, what of the Night? Watchman, what of the Night?” (Is. 21:11.)**

1. It is wearing on.
2. Our duty is ever the same.
3. Our hope shall be fulfilled.

### **The Porter and the Other Servants of the Lord.**

1. They must wait.
2. They must watch.
3. They must put away sleep.
4. They will rejoice at last.

### **“But of that Day and that Hour Knoweth no Man”**

1. The fact.
2. The danger connected with the fact.
3. The duty arising from that danger.
4. The blessedness resulting from that duty rightly done.

### **Will the Lord Find You Sleeping?**

1. Wearied by his delay?
2. Yielding to your weakness?
3. Deaf to his warning?
4. Unready for his reception?

# 61. The Door that Will be Shut. The Twenty-sixth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 13:23-30.

Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last. (Luke 13:23-30)

THE END OF THE CHURCH YEAR always reminds us of the approaching end of the world and of the mighty judgment with which it shall close. The world is full of people who have no time to think of these things. The trouble, however, is that they do not want to think of them — it is thus that they find no time. Every one of them will find time at last, namely when the end and the great judgment to come overtake them; then they will indeed think of these things — but we do not envy their thoughts — for then it will be too late. Moses of old prayed in the 90th Psalm: “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” The answer to that prayer Christ would grant us today.

Here in our text he shows us the end and the judgment to come. He weaves into his words a parable, a simple yet a striking illustration, one intended to make us realize the grace we have now, to bring home to us the judgment coming at last, and thus to impress upon us the warning contained in both. The center of the illustration, on which turns all that Christ here

tells us in warning, is the door. The kingdom of God is like a house to which entrance may be gained by one door alone, and that door is narrow. And the great judgment to come is like the moment when the master of the house rises, and shuts the door to, not to open it again. On that door, then, we must fix our attention — it is

## **The Door that Will be Shut.**

### **I. The Grace We Have Now**

Once it was open, for only so can the Lord say that when the great hour comes he himself will rise up and shut it forever. This very day the door is still open, the door that will be shut. In that door the Lord pictures first of all the grace we now have. Oh, that we might heed what he says, make use of the grace we now have, enter the door ere it is shut, and thus meet the great coming judgment with confidence and joy!

One of the many people listening long to the teaching of Jesus, and noting what he said of the unbelief of so many, finally took courage to ask him the question: “Lord, are there few that be saved?” The man had heard aright: “Many are called, but few are chosen.” The people of God are “a little flock” as compared with the many who travel the broad way that leads to destruction. But questions like this must be asked in the right way, namely so that we do not speculate about other people, those who will be saved in the end and those who will be lost, but take careful heed to ourselves. Few indeed there are that are being saved; let us be sure that we use the grace of God now in the time of grace and while the door of his kingdom is open, that we may be among those few. Did the man who asked the question of Jesus think of that? Whether he did or not, that is what Jesus impressed upon him in his answer, that is what today he impresses anew upon you and me.

The door that will be shut is open now. Strive to enter in now before it is shut and the time is too late!

Think of the grace that is pictured to us in that still open door. The blessed kingdom of God has come down to us poor sinners. God’s Son himself brought it down when he came to earth as our Savior. And there is an entrance-way to that kingdom, made especially for you and me. It is the

grace and pardon of Christ through his atonement for our sins on the cross. Jesus himself is the door, Jesus slain for our sins, raised again for our justification. Here he is in his Holy Word, like an open door to admit us into the favor of God and thus into eternal joy and blessedness. For poor sinners lost in sin and far from God what unspeakable grace to have the very door of heaven set right in their path, opened to receive them, yea to take them in!

But look at this grace again and the door by which it is pictured here. That door is narrow, and therefore Jesus bids us strive to enter in. It had to be narrow, for there are many things it must shut out since they are unfit for the pure house of Christ's kingdom. You cannot cart your sins through this door, they would defile the kingdom. The proud works which men set up to earn their own salvation cannot pass this door — it is too narrow for them, they would be nothing but a mass of rubbish and filthy rags in the beautiful house of the kingdom. Your own wisdom is too high to push through this low and narrow portal, and in the presence of God it would be nothing but folly and foolishness, unfit for his kingdom. None of your excuses for careless living, your love of money and worldly pleasure, your desire to stand well with worldly men, your compromises of truth and righteousness, your unwillingness to let loose of secret sins — none of all these and other things like them will pass that door of grace. They would outrage God, his anger would consume them and the men that brought them — but they are all barred out. For this very reason the door is narrow — God wants it so.

See now why so many people come and look at the door, and then pass by on the other side. That door — no, they think they can find a wider one! In fact, there are preachers who tell them there are wider doors. Yes, there are wider doors — only the place they lead to is not the kingdom and heaven. Broad is the gate, and wide is the way, Jesus himself says; but while others persuade themselves that it leads to God, Jesus tells us the truth, it leads to destruction. Be not misled by those who scorn the narrow door of God's grace in Christ Jesus; only such a door can save us. Therefore strive to enter in!

This shows us the other part of the grace that is ours now — we are able to enter this still open door. This is the assurance that lies in the Lord's call to strive. In all the world he would be the last one to say to us: Strive! when such striving would not take us in. What does he mean when he says: Strive! He has told us again and again, and so have his holy prophets and apostles. Strive means repent; strive means to be sorry for our sins and be-

lieve in Jesus Christ. He that believeth shall be saved. Therefore also let us note well that strive does not mean strive with your own strength, but even as Jesus does in this text of ours, so always where he sets the door of the kingdom before us, he himself with his Word, light, power, grace, and help comes to enable us to strive. No man can say he cannot repent when Jesus shows him his sins; no man can say he cannot believe when Jesus is there to lead him to faith. That is the very grace vouchsafed to us in this open door that by Christ's power we may strive to enter and quickly succeed. Our flesh indeed, our old sinful nature, our habit of careless indifference, our old worldly associations — these indeed would hold us back. Against these Christ calls on us to strive, by his call enabling us to conquer. Thank God for all this grace! Instead of leaving us to our fate, here is the door, and here is the ability to enter.

Thousands have entered. Jesus points us to the patriarchs of old, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets. These have led the way, and who will count all those from the four corners of the earth, from the east and west, from the north and south, all during these glorious New Testament times, who made that open door their refuge and are now safe within its narrow portal? If the former seem great and wonderful people to you, and you might think you could not equal them, remember that after all they were nothing but poor sinners like yourself: and then there are these others from all over the earth — thousands of them benighted heathen at first, worshippers of idols, dupes of superstition, slaves of lust. Yet they repented when the open door came to them, continued in repentance, attained eternal glory at last. Join their ranks, and having joined remain. God's grace, ample for them, is ample also for you.

## **II. The Judgment Coming At Last**

But mark, the door of grace open now will be shut in the end. That shutting of the door brings home to us the judgment coming at last. It calls to us to enter now, for the day will come when it will be too late.

Jesus describes that day to us: “for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able, when once the master of the house is risen up and hath shut the door to, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us! and he shall answer and say unto

you, I know you not whence ye are” That is a picture of the great day of judgment to come.

On that day many things will have a different look from what they have to thousands today. Heaven? — why people think it is far away, so faint and dim they really cannot see it. Make sure of heaven? — why that seems to bring nothing, they would rather make sure of a few real things in this life. The door to heaven in Christ and repentance? — that seems so unattractive, especially to let go so many sins they love, to crucify the flesh and its lusts, to take up the cross and follow Christ; in some way they think they will be able to reach heaven without all that. But lo, the change on the last great day! What then when the life here on earth has faded like a vapor, when the world with all its lusts has passed away like a phantom, when the only realities left will be the shining bulwarks of heaven, the yawning pit of hell, and the poor soul naked before its eternal Judge to receive its final sentence? And the door of grace will be shut shut for evermore! Then, yes then, many, only too many, will cry for heaven, beg for one moment’s opening of the door, implore the Christ who then is their Judge. Heaven — oh, how real, how delightful, how entrancing it will look then! Getting into heaven — then it will be absolutely the one and only thing that counts. And hell — the hell they once mocked at, swore by perhaps, heeded as little as they heeded heaven — when then its terrors reach out at them, how will they fight to escape it, but, alas, too late. That is what the door shut at last means. He who will shut it knows. Take to heart what he says of the terrible day of judgment!

He means us especially, who now bear the Christian name, who have the Bible and the church and know what is in them, or can easily know. When the door is shut and the judgment comes Jesus pictures the impenitent and unbelieving Jews to us, how they shall say to the Lord who tells them he knows them not. “We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.” Do you see why the Lord adds this in us picture of judgment? Yes indeed, he himself sat at table with some of these Jews when he dwelt as our Savior on earth, and they stood around him day after day when he did his gracious teaching in their streets. But see, this is all they are able to say on the day of judgment. They dare not say: “Lord, we believed thee; we took to heart thy words, we became thy disciples. That would be a lie, and no lies will be told on the day of judgment. Who will stand beside these Jews when they confess the grace they have had, but will be unable

to say that they used it? Why, all those Christians of today who have the Bible, but do not read it; who have the church, but do not attend it; who know about Christ, and do not believe and follow him. And all those who for a few cents could buy the Bible, but spend those pennies for something else; who walk by the church, but never join it and use it; who let their ears hear that precious name Christ, but make sure that it does not get into their hearts. From the lips of the great Judge all these will hear his sentence confirmed: "I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity!" When Christ graciously called and invited them they spurned him as a stranger; how can they claim to be his now? When he came to save them, they ordered him to depart; how can they expect to be received by him now? Iniquity? — what greater iniquity can there be than to reject God's Son, insult his love and grace by scorning it, and then in the end demand of him as a reward of this abominable treatment that he once more open the door he has closed to let them in! No, my friends, there is only one place for those who have Christ and yet will not have him; it is where there "shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Once the door is shut, no man more may enter. When Christ shuts it, then the judgment begins. They who have entered with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the prophets of old, and all Christ's saints, will be within. Angels will deck the heavenly feast for them. They will eat of the fruit of the tree of life and drink of the fountain of eternal joy. The rest will be cast out forever. Between the two the door then will be shut. On which side of that door will you be? On that side where now you place yourself.

### **III. The Warning Contained In Both**

Thus the door that will be shut, pointing to the grace we now have, and to the judgment coming at last, holds up before you today the warning contained in both. Christ sums it up for you in one striking sentence: "And behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last."

Thank God, there are last which shall be first — thousands of poor souls in the night of heathen darkness, but the grace of God is brought to them, and they are saved. What a glorious work for us to help send out now the Gospel and earnest mission workers to make these last first, that coming



from afar they too may be of those who sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God at the great feast of joy. Some of these lost are in our own cities, slaves of sin and vice, perhaps born in depraved surroundings and reared away from every holy influence. What a blessed work to reach out with the Gospel also to these, that though they are last they too may become first!

But while we say these things let us think of ourselves. Compared with people like this we surely belong to those who must be called first. Perhaps from our very infancy on the grace of God in his church, in his Word and Sacrament, in holy, Christian influence, has been over us like the very benediction of heaven. Not late in life only, or for a brief hour merely, but always we have known the door of salvation in Christ Jesus. Yes, we are first. But let this word of the Savior sink into your hearts: "There are first which shall be last!" To have God's grace so near constantly may make us think that already is enough. To have all these riches of salvation spread out before us may make us feel that this already makes us rich. A man may live next door to the church; that will not save him. He may see thousands who live miles away come and be saved, and even be very glad of it, but even that will not save him. A secret danger goes with great spiritual advantages because of our deceptive hearts. We glory in these advantages, and fail to use them aright, while men with far less to glory in zealously use what they have, and thus attain what more easily we could and should have attained, but after all allowed to slip from us. The Jews, once favored by grace above all nations, were cast out in judgment in the end. Gentiles, heathen people, came to take their place. Take the warning home to yourself.

Remember the door that will be shut! Woe to those who are then without! Even if they sat long on its threshold, they will be lost. Blessed are they who enter while its portal is open in grace! Behold, grace and judgment thus once more set before you. God keep you in that grace, and deliver you from judgment.

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## Outlines

The order of thought in the text is such that it maybe followed in the outline of the sermon. Theme: How the Lord answers the question about few being

saved: He gives his answer a personal turn — He adds a warning from those not saved — He intensifies that warning (v. 26-28a) — He draws us by showing us the company of the saved. We may use the question itself: “Are there few that be saved?” and in answer point to those who are saved; those who might and should be, yet are not; and to our own selves. — The substance of the text may serve in formulating the theme; Jesus is picturing to us the day of judgment and its tragic features. Theme: Let the day of judgment warn you! (1) Then the door of grace, open so long, will be shut forever. (2) Those who did not enter will knock and call in vain. (3) Do you want to be among them? — The final word of the text is suggestive: Christ’s word concerning the first and the last: those first and those last now — those last and those first then — and how we should take warning now, that we may not be disappointed then.

### **“Strive to Enter in at the Strait Gate!”**

1. While it is open.
2. Ere it be closed.
3. And you be barred out.

### **The Portal which Leads into the Kingdom.**

1. It is open for all, therefore enter!
2. It is narrow, therefore strive!
3. It is found of few, therefore look to thyself!
4. It will be closed, therefore hasten!

— NAUMANN.

### **The Right Answer to the Question whether Few will be Saved.**

1. Rejoice, for the portal is open to all!
2. Strive, for the portal is narrow!
3. Hasten, for the portal will presently be closed!

## **“Lord, Lord, Open unto Us!”**

1. A vain cry.
2. A self-condemning cry.
3. A cry recorded in advance for our warning.

# **62. We shall be Like the Angels of God. The Twenty-seventh Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 22:23-33.**

The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine. (Matthew 22:23-33)

FOR THE LAST SUNDAY in the church year we want a text that gives us a glimpse of heaven. As the year ends, so life will end, time will end — then what shall there be for us? Nothing, says unbelief. We cannot be certain, says doubt. Do not ask, says fear. Who cares? say thousands in the world, what we want is this life. But our Lord Jesus Christ says: Ye shall be “as the angels of God in heaven” A glorious revelation — let it fill us with light; a golden hope — let it support us in life and death: a wondrous cause for gratitude and joy — we can ask and think of no more.

Look then beyond this narrow mortal veil. What is the vision the Savior opens for us?

**We shall be Like the Angels of God.**

# I. A Glorious Revelation

All through the Scriptures there is a shining procession of God's holy angels. They are the morning stars that sang together when God formed the earth and set the heavenly bodies in array. One of them with flaming sword guarded the gates of paradise when man fell into sin and had to leave his blissful home. But lo, they accompanied Jehovah when he came to Abraham with the promise of blessing for all the nations of the world. They passed up and down the golden ladder Jacob saw in his dream as a picture of Christ, the way, the truth, and the life. Mighty and wonderful are the deeds we are told they did all through those ages of preparation for the coming of our redemption. "Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his Word!" Thus David praised God for the work of his angels. And then when the Son of God finally came to reopen the heavenly paradise for us, how they sang in multitudes from the open sky over Bethlehem's fields that wondrous night, how they ministered unto Jesus after the first battle with the Tempter, how they opened the empty tomb after the Lord's resurrection and announced his victory to men, and again at the Lord's ascension made known the coming of his glorious return. It is all our salvation, not theirs, for they never fell, but from beginning to end they delight, they aid in it, for it glorified God. Even now invisibly as ministering spirits they come to minister unto us who are the heirs of salvation. Their hands bear aloft God's saints to Abraham's bosom, and when the end of all things comes, and the great day of judgment, all the angels of God shall be there to place us at Christ's right hand and lead us into the golden city above. Wondrous indeed is what the Scriptures tell us of the angels of God.

There were skeptics among the Jews who did not believe in angels. The Sadducees, a Jewish party of rich, worldly, haughty men, put themselves above God's holy Word. As they denied the existence of these heavenly beings, so also they denied that there would be a resurrection of the dead. They mocked at the very idea.. They built up arguments against it. So sure were they in their unbelief that they tried one of their arguments against Jesus. Then it was that the Savior for a brief moment drew the curtain aside and gave us a glimpse of heaven and of how we shall be when we reach heaven at last. He who came from heaven, and knows all that is in heaven

made this revelation to us of our future state in heaven: Ye shall be “as the angels of God in heaven.” That means our resurrection and glorification. Christ himself declares it; yea, he shows us that God himself promises it, for he is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. Long dead are these ancient patriarchs with whom God made the covenant he fulfilled in Christ and Christ’s work. But God is not the God of the dead, he is the God of the living. Those dead shall rise again, shall be made like the angels in heaven, and with them all who died as they did, believing and trusting in God’s salvation.

What a glorious revelation — let it fill us with light. God’s angels are deathless. Never a touch of weakness or decay in them, never the least change as when we grow old. Eternal youth is theirs, perfection of strength and beauty. The light and life of God is in them, wholly and completely in them. So are the angels in heaven; and so says Christ shall we be in the resurrection. All the imperfections which now drag us down shall be swept away forever, what is mortal in us now shall put on immortality, death shall be swallowed up in everlasting victory.

The angels of God are in a heavenly existence, far transcending all that we know on earth. Here there is heat and cold, hunger and thirst, weariness and pain — the angels are infinitely above all these, and we shall be like them. Here there are earthly relations and conditions, among them marriage, homes for the rearing of children, and all that goes with our common physical life, its various functions and temporal needs. The angels are in a vastly higher state, where none of these earthly ways of life could possibly apply, and that higher state with its absolute purity, excellence, and joy we shall reach at last when this our flesh is made like unto Christ’s own body through the resurrection of the dead.

The angels of God are in heavenly bliss. Faintly we see this happiness of theirs when we read how they shout for joy, how they delight to do God’s will, and how they stand in the light of his presence. That beatific bliss shall be ours. We too will sing in those heavenly harmonies, we too respond in every fiber to all those nameless beauties and pleasures that God has in store for us. He who dreams that there he will miss something he now loves, only shows that he is failing to grasp what Christ here reveals when he says, we shall be as the angels of God. Away with these earthly thoughts! Come into the light of Christ’s revelation, and you too will sing with the holy hymnist:

“Jerusalem the golden!  
With milk and honey blest,  
Beneath thy contemplation  
Sink heart and voice oppressed.  
I know not, O I know not  
What joys await us there,  
What radiancy of glory,  
What bliss beyond compare!”

## II. The Golden Hope

The revelation which Jesus makes of our future state, telling us that we shall be “as the angels of God,” carries with it a blessed purpose.

Sad enough is our state in this present life, anything but angel-like. A thousand limitations hedge us in. Even though inventions and new discoveries have extended human power, how narrow is the extension. The old burdens are left, the old sorrows depress, the old pains and griefs remain. And time carries us toward the end. On earth everything ends, must end. A year may seem long, a life, an age — but end it must and pass utterly away. Thoughtless, brainless indifference may care nothing about it all, but Christian hearts feel the burden of it. Hear it from the lips of Moses: “Thou earnest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down and withereth... We spend our years as a tale that is told.” Ps. 90.

How men can live on from day to day with nothing but this prospect before them, passes my understanding. What? — only strength growing less, burdens growing greater, and then a fading out altogether — the end — a handful of dust and ashes — and the soul, who knows, perhaps it fades out too like this its shell, the body? Can man with a rational mind really sit down to such blank hopelessness?

No; at least most men cannot and do not. They must have hope, and so they proceed to invent some sort of hope for themselves. They paint for themselves an hereafter such as they would fancy, and then tell themselves this will be their lot in eternity. No question about it — they just feel sure it will be thus. Like Mohammed who thought of heaven mostly as a beautiful harem; or the American Indians who dreamed of the long hereafter as a great happy hunting ground; or wise old Socrates among the ancient Greeks

who thought of Elysium as a place where he could meet the worthies of past days and go on philosophizing with them like he once did on earth. Yes these are hopes; but like nuts without meat, like gaudy flowers that never turn to fruit. Like the painted clouds at evening — when the night comes they are gone, all is black. Hope may spring eternal in the breast, but fulfillment, a hope that comes true, with never a doubt about it — that is quite another thing.

It is indeed. But Jesus Christ here opens it for us, plants it into our hearts, the golden hope he himself will fulfill. He who created the angels, and the heavens, their abode, who made us likewise, to be the companions of angels, and God's own children, he who came to earth to rectify our sin, lift us out of our death, he declares that we shall at last be "as the angels of God in heaven," for he himself will make us so. How? By the resurrection from the dead; by the omnipotent power of God which shall work that resurrection, unite again soul and body sundered by death, and lift them both glorified into glory and deathless, blissful heavenly life. Here is a hope different from all the hopes that are man-made. God, Christ, all the angels and powers of God are behind it. There is no possibility for it to fail.

But when we reach out to it, a hand is laid upon us, a voice cries: Stay! The same folly that sets up dreams in men's brains, dreams of a hope that is no hope, challenges God himself and his eternal promise hope, and declares that this must be a dream, that it cannot be true. Double is the deception — the false is called true, the true, the eternally true, false. Angels? why, these Sadducees never saw one — how can we be made like them? Their grand procession through the Scriptures, where the eyes of faith can see them daily, they wipe out as so much myth and fable. And the resurrection? why, who ever saw the dust of death become alive again? Science never heard of such a thing, and these Sadducees old and new are great on science. They even go farther. With their thick eyes of flesh they look into the Bible, they find a passage here and there, put their own ideas on top of it, and lo, again they prove, at least to their satisfaction, that the very idea of a resurrection is nothing but a hoax. See what they did in our text. They found a case where seven brothers had married the same woman as one after another died. Whose wife would she be in the other world, if there should be such a thing as a resurrection? Those seven successive husbands of one wife made them smile at the idea of a resurrection. Men put their own blind suppositions, reasons, and deductions into God's everlasting Word, and thus they



kill the hope they might have, they pervert and falsify it, and try to rob us in the same way.

But no, they shall not rob us. This hope of Christ that reaches up to heaven, the angels of God, and the blessed presence of God himself, we will press to our bosoms, hold in our hearts, make our support in life and death. Others may want their heaven for a day and a year in this life; we want a heaven like that of the angels that lasts forever. Others may want a heaven of flesh and fleshly joys, sin-stained, curse-laden; ours shall be the heaven of the white purity of the angels, and of the inexpressible joys that radiate from God. As earthly days fade like grass and the shadows of the end grow longer before the night of death, this hope shall grow brighter and brighter within us, until God's own angels come to carry us away, those angels whom we shall be made like unto at last.

### **III. Cause For Gratitude and Joy**

This wondrous revelation of Jesus, this golden hope to light us upward must be one thing more.

Jesus had skeptic Sadducees before him when he told of the saints being made like the angels of God. They would not believe the Son, even as they had not believed the Father. But surely the apostles were also there, and they believed. Many of the guests at the Jewish feast in Jerusalem at this time also heard, and Matthew tells us they were greatly astonished. Any man who lets Jesus plant this hope of the resurrection and an angel-like heavenly existence in all eternity into his heart, will certainly be a changed man. Not only that his life will grow constantly brighter — the more he realizes what the hope is that he has, the more will he give way to gratitude and joy.

We poor mortals to be lifted so high! We miserable sinners to be cleansed thus body and soul, made the very companions of angels, and set into the presence of God! How can it possibly be? It is the infinite love and mercy of God. It is the boundless compassion of Jesus Christ who died himself and rose again, that we dying might be raised by the power of his redemption. Oh, that we all might think of these things aright, take in all their immensity and heavenliness, and let it lift our hearts to God! Here is cause for gratitude and joy so great we can ask and think of no more, it will last to

all eternity. Let us not wait till the last trumpet sounds and all these glories of the resurrection begin, before we raise our hearts in happy thanks to God — as if we doubted at first, and had to wait and see to be sure. That is dishonor to him whose love and gifts exceed all that we can think. No; every day and hour of our present lives must shine with joyful gratitude — the gratitude of love and confession, of loyalty and obedience, of happy anticipation and sure and certain hope. How would a poor beggar feel, what would he say and do if he learned from the court itself that he had fallen heir to millions, and at a specified time would enter on the inheritance? What are transient, fleeting, fading millions to the treasures and glories that God himself holds for us when we shall be “as the angels in heaven”? True heirs of this heavenly heritage are bound to show they are such, and the sum of their showing it will be this holy gratitude and joy.

In heaven itself, when we have attained the resurrection and stand angel-like in glory with the angels of God before his wondrous throne, gratitude and joy will be the substance of all our praise. What sweeter and more delightful sensations could there possibly be? St. John was granted a vision of it: “A throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone; and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats; and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold... And the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created... . And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.” Rev. ch. 4 and 5. That heavenly host we are to join, their gratitude and joy shall be ours.

"And when within that lovely Paradise  
At last I safely dwell,  
From out my soul what songs of bliss shall rise,  
What joy my lips shall tell,  
While holy saints are singing  
Hosannas o'er and o'er,  
Pure hallelujahs ringing  
Around me evermore.

Innumerable choirs before the shining throne  
With harp and trumpet raise  
Glad notes, till heaven's vast halls vibrate the tone  
Of their melodious praise.  
And all its host rejoices,  
And all its blessed throng  
Unite their myriad voices  
In one eternal song!"

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## Outlines

We want this text for the glory that is in it. The Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity promises the resurrection and connects it with all God's saving plan, our present text proves the resurrection and shows what a heavenly existence it will bring us to. The argument of the Sadducees is but a very minor thing for the sermon, the chief stress must be on the words of Jesus and the vision they open for us. We may, therefore, build the sermon on anyone of these three words: "as touching the resurrection of the dead" — "as the angels of God in heaven" — "not the God off the dead, but of the living." Enter which gate you prefer, you will be in the heart of the text. Theme: How Jesus describes the resurrection life to us: It transcends everything earthly — it is angel-like in glory and exaltation — it is the final gift of God's grace and power in us. — The sermon given above is pivoted on the statement regarding the angels. — On the third word we might have a theme like this: Hold fast your hope in the God of the living! See what that hope is — think how it is assailed — weigh what it means to have it — then cling to it for the help of God's grace.

## **The Seven Men who Kept the Sadducees out of Heaven.**

1. How they darkened the Scriptures for the Sadducees.
2. How Christ upsets them and drives the darkness away.

## **Christ and the Sadducees on the Doctrine of the Resurrection.**

1. The folly of the Sadducees who deny the resurrection. Their pride of knowledge — their perversion of Scripture — their dismal unbelief — their low, worldly lives.
2. The heavenly revelation of Christ who himself-is the resurrection. The truth he reveals — the light of Scripture he makes shine out for us — the hope and glory he sets before us — the faith and praise we owe him.

## **Do You Hope in the God of the Living?**

1. What it means to drop that hope. You see it in the Sadducees, true children of this world: Earth is their only home — the pleasures and vanities of this life their only desire — eternity is set aside — death and the resurrection are met with a scoff — the Bible is turned up-side down.
2. What it means to have it and live in the light of it. This is what Christ shows us. Heaven is our true home — the glory of the angels our gift to come — the God of the living our support and stay.

## **We shall be as the Angels in Heaven.**

1. What shall then fall away?
2. What shall then begin?

— Oostersee.

**Soli Deo Gloria!**

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Originally published 1919 by Lutheran Book Concern, Columbus, Ohio as “New Gospel Selections”. The additional helps to pastors from the 1919 edition are not included in this volume.

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ISBN: 9798623458476 (paperback)

# How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

Read your Bible steadily. God works His power in human beings through His Word. Where the Word is, God the Holy Spirit is always present.

Suggested Reading: [New Testament Conversions](#) by Pastor George Gerberding

## Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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