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A Series of Sermon Studies for the Church Year

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 16:24-28

The Text and the Day.—The post-Trinity emphasis is chiefly on Christian living. The Introit for this Sunday indicates that all Christian living stands in relationship to the soul's salvation. It is very fitting that in the very midst of many considerations of Christian life a proper understanding and relationship be emphasized of the importance of the soul's position in "following Jesus," in establishing the value of a soul.

Notes on Meaning.—For proper background vv. 21 and 27 must be considered together. Peter: "Surely nothing could be more important, O Lord, than to save Your life" (things that be of man). Jesus: "My death will not be an inglorious end to Me and My work," v. 27 (the things of God).—V. 23: "offense"—temptation, stumbling block.—V. 24: "will come after Me"—wishes to; no compulsion.—Text is addressed to such as have expressed the wish to follow after.—V. 25: "lose"—forfeit. Cf. Chapter 10:39.—V. 26: "exchange"—even if it might be wished to break off the bargain, no *counter price* (counter offer) is possible, none is available.—V. 27: "work"—the total outward manifestation of the sincere love and faith or lack of them.—V. 28: See Pitfalls.

Preaching Pitfalls.—There is a natural danger that the "following of Jesus by taking up the cross" (humility under scorn, persecution, etc.) will be emphasized to a degree that will overshadow the great promise of v. 27.—It must be remembered that Jesus is preparing comfort for the disciples against the hour of His death.—Care must be exercised in the application of "reward according to works." Works cannot mean merit!—A specific application of v. 28 leads to multitudinous difficulties. It has been referred to the Transfiguration, the destruction of Jerusalem, as "figurative" of the Last Judgment, the eventual growth of the

Church, Pentecost, et al. Considering the purpose of the entire passage probably the best interpretation: The time is close at hand when your hearts will be set at ease by the manifestation of My glory (resurrection, ascension, etc.). Cf. v. 21b.

Problem and Goal. — The entire passage is designed by Jesus as a comfort to His disciples. That comfort will be given to a hearer when he is sure that in Christ his soul will live eternally. The believer who grasps this finds it easy to be a hero for Christ and to adjust the problems of life, even in its modern complexities, to a glorious hope.

Illustration. — Jesus' own: John 12:24.

Outline:

DYING TO LIVE

I. Meaning and Method.

- A. When self dies, Jesus lives.
- B. When Jesus lives, the soul cannot die.
- C. When Jesus lives, the things that be of men die.

II. Reward.

- A. A comfort for every circumstance.
- B. Eternal life.
- C. The glory of the Father.

H. B. ROEPE

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 21:12-22

The Text and the Day. — The Gospel of the present series set aside for this Sunday, like that of the more commonly known series prepared by Jerome and later revised by Luther, speaks of misuse of the house of God, destruction, persecution. While each of these three topics is sufficiently important to warrant a sermon, there exists an interrelationship between the three which is worthy of homiletical treatment. — The words of the Introit: "God shall hear and afflict them" apply also to the Church as an institution.

Notes on Meaning. — V. 12. *Kollybistoon*: "of the money-changers," related to *kollybos*, a small coin used as change money. While the function of the money-changers was in itself necessary,

those who did such work, like the publicans, were in disrepute, as is attested to also in extra-Biblical literature. Such "thieves" took advantage even of the poor, who could purchase only a dove for sacrificial purposes. — V. 13. "House of prayer": cf. Is. 56:7, a beautiful passage and a beautiful description of the Church; "den of thieves": thievery here opposed to prayer. "Jesus was the only person in Israel who could do such a thing. All others had become accustomed to the evil" (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, I, p. 263). — V. 14. Introit: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord." — V. 15. *Ta thaumasia*: "the wonderful things." This description in this passage only. Includes all that Jesus did for the people. — V. 16. Priests and scribes did not object to traffic of the money-changers, but did object strenuously when boys and girls sang the praises of Christ. So today many so-called spiritual leaders do not oppose moral corruption, but they do oppose Christian education. — Jesus clearly well acquainted with O. T. Scriptures; these we too often neglect. — V. 17. To Bethany, because not safe to remain in Jerusalem. — V. 18. "He hungered": Possible that event of previous day upset Jesus so that He could not eat heartily. — V. 19: "Fig tree with full leaf in early spring without fruit is a diseased tree" (*Expositor's Greek Testament*). We are in the springtime of life. Do we bear fruit, or are we covered only with tinsel? — V. 20. Fig tree not merely blighted, but dead, root, branches, and leaves. Did not die gradually like a diseased tree. Disciples marveled. — V. 21. What Jesus did to the fig tree is, according to this verse, a relatively small accomplishment when compared with what a Christian with a strong faith in God can really do. No obstacle will be permitted to stand between the believing Christian and God. — V. 22. Such faith should find expression in prayer.

Preaching Pitfalls. — The sermon, like the text, should be pithy, very much to the point, and forceful. The clergy of the Church are also the prophets of the Church. They are to preach and take action not so much against the money-changers, priests, and scribes of Jesus' day as of our own day, particularly against corruption which degrades the Church of our day. This is a hard and thankless task which forces us to look into our own hearts, give up all ego and selfishness, and to become sincerely humble. The prophets of today, like those of Old Testament times and like our Savior, should live

a life of faith and undaunted fortitude and be ready to suffer ostracism, persecution, even death.

Problem and Goal.— Three points are stressed in text: 1) Our loving and long-suffering Savior will not tolerate materialism, greed, and corruption, especially when these are linked with the religious life of people. He purged the Temple twice, first at the very beginning (John 2:14 ff.), later at the very end of His career (text). 2) Not only the blind and the lame, but even babes and sucklings receive the Savior and sing His praises more readily than "they that are well" (Matt. 9:21) and they who are treacherous and self-righteous spiritual leaders of the people. 3) Barrenness is as unsalutary and corrupt as ecclesiastical materialism and self-righteousness in high places.

Illustrations.— 1) John Tetzl and the sale of indulgences. Bingo parties conducted in parish houses. The materialistic spirit of those who do not give to the Church as the Lord has prospered them. 2) The opposition of *Christian* people to Christian education in all its phases, including the parish school. "Keep the people ignorant, and you can guide them better." 3) Heavily endowed churches of our day, whose pews are empty and whose parochial life is anemic.

Outline:

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH MUST DESTROY AS WELL AS BUILD

I. Her Greatest Foes Are Within the Church.

- A. "Christians" who commercialize and materialize the Church.
- B. "Christians" who thwart the spiritual growth and loyalty of the Church's youth.
- C. "Christians" whose religion bears no fruit.

II. The Attempts of All Such Foes Must Wither Away.

- A. God's Law must be preached with full force.
- B. God's displeasure must be announced and proclaimed without fear.
- C. Temporal and eternal punishment threaten particularly the nominal Christian who has not the spirit of Christ, but the spirit of corruption.

III. Great Will Be the Reward of the Righteous.

- A. Who have appropriated not self-righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ.
- B. Their faith in Christ knows no obstacles.
- C. Their prayers are the petitions and hosannas of redeemed children of God.

WALTER E. BUSZIN

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MARK 2:1-12

The Text and the Day.—The Propers for this Sunday place a unified emphasis on the value of our forgiveness of sins. In the Epistle, 1 Cor. 15:1-10, Paul expresses his grateful joy to be able to preach because his previous wicked conduct has been forgiven. In the Standard Gospel, Luke 18:9-14, we hear the publican pray: "God be merciful to me, a sinner," and see him go down to his house justified. The Collect is a jewel. Be sure to read it before preparing this sermon: "to give more than either we desire or deserve" . . . "forgiving" . . . "giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask." The Gradual: "My heart trusteth in God, and I am helped."

Notes on Meaning.—We must remember that the parallel passage to our text, Matt. 9:2-8, is the Standard Gospel for the 19th Sunday after Trinity. The other parallel is Luke 5:17-26.—"And again He entered into Capernaum": Jesus had been repudiated by the people of the Decapolis on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, so He came across the sea to the west side of Capernaum. This healing is His first recorded miracle after His return.—"*Their* faith" includes the faith of the afflicted man. Those that brought him had a chance to exhibit their faith by their helpfulness, resourcefulness, energy, and persistency. The cripple couldn't do this, but Jesus looked into his heart and saw the faith there.—The term "child," *teknon*, used here by Jesus, has the intimate connotation of most tender love like a mother's warm embrace. This term is used in our theme.—The word used for "forgiven," *aphientai*, is a mighty word of release. The sins are sent away from the sinner so completely that they shall never be found again, to the depth of the

sea (Micah 7:19), blotted out (Is. 43:25), removed as far as east from west (Ps. 103:12). — “Scribes reasoning”: the Greek word gives the picture of a dialog. — Jesus uses the term “the Son of Man” about Himself. It indicates His human nature, but the definite article and the generic singular “man” place Him above all other men and point to His deity (Dan. 7:13-14). — The healing from palsy is a visible act which verifies the authenticity of the forgiveness, which is invisible. — Power was restored to the paralyzed limbs, and peace to the troubled soul.

Preaching Pitfalls. — Too much time can easily be spent on the scribes and Pharisees, who are merely background here. — The details of getting the paralytic in front of Jesus are interesting but should be related with Biblical accuracy. — We must not say that this man’s illness was the direct result of some heinous sin (cf. Job 42:7). It may have been, but we have no evidence or implication in the Bible for such an assumption.

Problem and Goal. — The uses of affliction are many, but the most important is always to help lead the afflicted to Jesus for spiritual and physical blessings. Very clearly the Propers for this Sunday show us that we are to emphasize the forgiveness of sin as the greatest and only satisfying blessing man can receive from Jesus.

Illustrations. — Man may covet and get many temporal gifts, but they leave him dissatisfied and malcontent if he does not have forgiveness; e. g., Joseph’s brothers even after they got food in Egypt; David even after he had Bathsheba; Judas even after he had his thirty piece of silver.

Outline:

GOD’S GREATEST GIFT TO HIS CHILDREN

- I. This greatest gift is forgiveness of sins.
 - A. Many people never consider forgiveness the greatest gift, but rather food, health, success, or even pigs (Matt. 8:34, context).
 - B. God’s children demonstrate that they cherish forgiveness by their attitude and action.
 - C. Jesus emphasizes its importance.
 - D. When material gifts vanish — as in illness or approach of death — this spiritual gift of God becomes still more precious to the children of God.

II. Only God has power and authority to give it.

- A. Critics were right in stating that.
- B. They were wrong in refusing to believe Jesus was God and had such authority.
- C. By His divine omniscience Jesus saw and exposed their unbelief.
- D. By His divine omnipotence Jesus proved His authority as God to give the greater and invisible gift of forgiveness by giving the lesser but visible gift of health.
- E. Some were silenced, some were amazed; only God's children learned and believed what Jesus had demonstrated. How about you?

WALTER W. STUENKEL

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 9:27-34

Text and Day.—The text parallels the Gospel for the day, in respect to the Savior's injunction "to tell no man." The accent on faith links Introit, Collect, Gradual, and Epistle in the theme of the day: "The faith that lays hold on help from Christ."

Notes on Meaning.—Vv. 27-28. The faith of the blind men is described in radical terms through their words: "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us"—words indicating confidence that they were dealing with the promised Messiah. Noteworthy is the Savior's query: "Believe ye that I am able to do this?"—not: "Believe ye that I shall do this for you?" The blind men were challenged to review their estimate of Jesus Christ. Not even their need was to be their supreme concern, but this: Who is Jesus Christ?—V. 29: "According to your faith be it unto you." Again not: according to your request, or your need; but: according to your faith; in keeping with their conviction that Jesus Christ was the Son of David and the Messiah of the world.—Vv. 30-31: Often Jesus asked that His disciples, or those whom He had healed, say nothing of the miraculous occurrence; cf. Matt. 8:4; 12:16; 16:20; 17:9; Mark 3:12; 5:43; 8:30; Luke 5:14. St. John reported the miracles of Jesus "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and

that, believing, ye might have life through His name" (John 20:31). Yet the fleshly dispositions of the people of Jesus' day tended to pervert the miracles to purposes of curiosity and dispute; cf. Matt. 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:11. The Savior performed His miracles to reinforce the faith of believers; but for those who had no faith, He refused even to perform them. And the faith that the miracles were to reinforce was not a faith in miracles, but that faith in Christ by which men have life, namely, the life of God and the forgiveness of sins; cf. Matt. 9:1-6. In order to interpret that fact and function of miracles, St. Matthew here inserts the record of one of the miracles that met with unbelief on the part of the Pharisees; cf. a parallel in Matt. 12:22-45, in which the entire teaching of Jesus concerning miracles and unbelief is put together. — Vv. 33-34 indicate the unbelief of the Pharisees as linked with their continuous jealousy of Jesus and their refusal to recognize His teachings.

Preaching Pitfalls. — The preacher will avoid archaeological discussions of the origins of blindness or the nature of demoniac possession. The two stories are a swift and simple document of faith and unbelief.

Preaching Problem and Goal. — The goal of the sermon is to describe and evoke that faith in Jesus as Redeemer which lays hold on Him for help in every need. The problem is that also professing Christians are apt to construe the scope of their faith as concerning only their physical needs; or that a faith that props itself on the merely miraculous elements of Jesus' life becomes subject to doubt. Luther made the Gospel of Jesus Christ central as the tool for developing assurance of faith; Melancthon put the miracles uppermost (cf. *C. T. M.*, Vol. XVIII, 330). This sermon gives an opportunity to concentrate on the true goal and the centrality of the Gospel for achieving that goal, namely, faith in Christ as Redeemer.

Suggested Outline:

THE FAITH THAT JESUS WANTS US TO HAVE

I. What it is.

- A. Faith that He is Savior and Redeemer.
- B. Faith that turns to Him for help and consolation in every bodily need, being sure that He is God and He is Love.

II. How we can gain and increase it.

- A. Through the Gospel of His suffering and death and rising again.
- B. His miracles of love and mercy attest to His godhead and love.
- C. His answers to our prayers and response to our need will be His way of reminding us that our faith is valid; His tests of faith cannot shake our conviction, since it is founded upon His work on the Cross.
- D. The unbelief of those who reject Christ will not weaken our faith, since it reveals hearts that have rejected the Cross.

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