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ARCHIVES

Outlines on Hannover Epistles

(See previous issue, September, 1953, p. 688, for listing of the entire series)

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

ROM. 2:12-24

A new church year begins today. The church calendar provides for a complete, systematic coverage of those divine truths which we need for our salvation and sanctification. Christ remains in the center. Let us never become weary of repeated presentation but rather strive to grow in the knowledge of, and faith in, Christ and His Word. Whether ignorant of Him or intimately acquainted with Him, it still remains true:

EVERYONE NEEDS CHRIST

I

The Ignorant Heathen Needs Christ

A. *He is the man without the written Law.* He is the Gentile, who is ignorant of God's written Law (v. 12 a). He is the man without a Bible or a Catechism listing and explaining the Ten Commandments. He is the man who lives in the African jungles, and he may be the man who lives next door. A Gentile may be a woman, a child, or one of the millions of unchurched and spiritually unschooled in a civilized and highly educated nation.

B. *The heathen is a sinner,* one of the many (v. 12 a), one of the "all" (Rom. 3:23). His sins may receive no notice in the papers or go unnoticed among his associates, though God knows. Ignorant of the written Law, he remains condemned by that Law. Unless he finds the one way of escape, he will perish.

C. *He cannot plead ignorance* on Judgment Day. God's Law is in his heart (at least a partial knowledge), and he has a conscience (vv. 14, 15). Evidence of this fact are an inner compulsion to live right, however superficially, and conflicting thoughts that run through his mind, either excusing (minimizing the guilt, blaming it on others, on environment, ignorance, etc.) or accusing

(feeling of guilt, despair, etc.) him. The divine Judge will point an accusing finger at him and say, "You are without excuse." This is Paul's clear answer to the much-asked question: "Will the ignorant heathen be saved without Christ?"

D. He needs Christ *for God to forgive him*. There is no other way (Acts 4:12). The decisive question on Judgment Day will be: "Did you accept Christ as the Bearer of your sin and guilt, as your Redeemer?" The knowledge of salvation in Christ is not in the natural heart and conscience (Rom. 10:14). The good news, proclaimed by Paul and others, must be brought to the unregenerate sinner.

E. *The Christians must reveal the Gospel of Christ to him*. If he steps into this church on any given Sunday during this year of grace, I promise that he will hear about Christ. You can help. You can urgently invite him to sit with you in the pew. Also you can invite him to any adult class conducted here. You can talk to him personally. Spiritual ignorance abounds everywhere; therefore support the mission program of your church.

The ignorant heathen is not the only one who needs Christ.

II

The Professing Christian Needs Christ

A. *He is acquainted with God's written Law*. Many a one boasts of his knowledge as did the Jews (vv. 17, 18). They had reason to boast. They were well indoctrinated. It is the privilege of the professing Christian to be able to recite the Ten Commandments and their meaning. He has the printed Bible to complete and clarify God's Law in his mind, which is but imperfect in his natural heart and conscience. But a mere knowledge of God's written Law will not save a man on Judgment Day. Has he kept what he knows?

B. *He is a sinner*, just as much as the man without the Law (v. 12 b) and stands in the same condemnation. At this point, however, we must make a distinction between the hypocrite and the genuine Christian.

1. *The hypocrite*, who professes to be a Christian, does not acknowledge his sins and bemoan them. He is like the Jews, whom Paul exposed (vv. 17-24) as thieves, adulterers, perpetrators

of sacrilege, blasphemous offenders. They were good at telling others how the Law read and easily exposed the sins of others. But their own sins they did not recognize. Hence they felt no need of a Savior.

2. *The genuine Christian* also sins. He may be guilty of any or all sins committed by the hypocrite. But the Law convicts him in his conscience. He pleads guilty and expresses his sorrow.

C. He, too, needs Christ, *because he continues to sin even after his conversion.*

1. To know Christ, of course, is essential. He must know who Christ is, why He was born, how He lived on earth and why. He must be acquainted with His vicarious suffering, death, and resurrection. To know Him merely intellectually, however, is not enough.

2. He must know Him in his heart, or believe in Him. And this faith must grow; else it will die. Faith grows by the hearing of God's Word (Rom. 10:17; the Parable of the Sower) and the devout use of the Sacraments. As the Christian grows in faith, his life becomes purer and brighter, he being willingly guided by the revealed will of God. Do not neglect the means of grace if you would grow in Christ.

This year of grace is not different from the past. Everyone will need Christ. The heathen will need Him; let us help him find His Savior. I shall need Him, because I am a weak sinner. I shall need His daily forgiveness, His power to make me strong in faith and love.

St. Louis, Mo.

ALVIN C. MACK

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

ROM. 3:1-18

The Second Sunday in Advent concludes the thought of the First Sunday. On the First Sunday the thought of the day was our Lord's first coming in humility. Today the thought is His second coming in glory, when He shall stand in His bare terribleness to judge the quick and the dead. The words of our text remind us that the Law condemns all and that none can be saved by the Law. The Law makes the impending and inescapable Judgment terrible.

Only faith in Jesus Christ as the Crucified Savior can rescue us from the terrors of the Judgment. Those who do know Christ by faith look toward Judgment Day with joyful anticipation. "The Lord will cause His glorious voice to be heard, and ye shall have gladness of heart" (Introit). The Collect bids us to stir up our hearts to make ready His way. We stir up our hearts this day by considering that

THE TRUE GOD COMES TO JUDGE

I

God Was True in Giving the Law

- A. (V.4) God is the God of Truth (Titus 1:2; Ps. 116:11; 51:4; 62:9).
- B. (V.2) God gave His truth in the Law (Deut. 4:7, 8).
- C. (V.3) God's true Law cannot be changed by unbelief (Matt. 5:18, 19).

II

God Is True in Condemning Failure to Keep the Law

- A. (Vv. 9-18) Both Jew and Gentile fail to keep the Law (Ps. 14:1-3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; Is. 59:7, 8; Ps. 36:1; Rom. 3:28).
- B. (V.4) God's truthfulness stands out clearly in contrast to man's failure to keep the Law (Ps. 51:4).
- C. (Vv. 5-8) God is true in condemning all who fail to keep the Law (Rom. 7:7; 8:31; 6:19; Gal. 3:15).

III

God Is True in Giving the Way of Faith to Escape Condemnation in the Judgment (Matt. 18:10-14; 1 Tim. 2:4)

- A. Christ the True God fulfilled the Law for us (Matt. 5:17).
- B. Christ the Truth redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13; Rom. 3:24, 25; 1 John 1:9; John 14, 1 ff.).
- C. Christ the True God judges.
 - 1. He carries out the condemnation of those who have failed to keep the Law (Matthew 24).
 - 2. He gives salvation to those who look to Him by faith (Rom. 3:22).

Each year everyone is happy to see Christmas come. The Christian and non-Christian celebrate. But when Christ comes again only the Christian will have reason to celebrate. The non-Christian will be terrified because the true God comes to judge.

We see ourselves condemned by the Law. Take Christ by faith. By faith we look forward to Judgment Day happily in anticipation of the joys of heaven.

Suggested hymns: 68, 610, 72.

Mascoutah, Ill.

WILLIAM E. GOERSS

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

ROM. 10:11-18

Christmas preparations and gifts occupy us. What are you going to receive? There's a present for you under God's tree, the best you will receive, both for this life and the next.

His gift will transform your life into something beautiful. Kinsey's recent report on *Sexual Behavior of the Human Female* called religion the greatest deterrent to immorality. The power of God for good is also everywhere evident in lives of God's people. Charities, kindnesses, at Christmas.

Hope stemming from sonship will be yours in trials. The standard Gospel for the day: John's faith sustained by considering how Christ's life verified His Messiahship.

The bliss of heaven after this life the greatest blessing of this gift.

WILL THIS GREAT GIFT OF GOD BE YOURS?

It will:

- I. *If You Believe*
- II. *And You Will Believe, if You Hear*
- III. *And You Will Hear, if the Word Is Preached*
- IV. *Unless You Willfully Refuse It*

I

Faith Alone

A. It makes no difference who you are. No difference between Jew or Greek. Earthly distinctions are valueless. Not "blood and

soil" of Hitler, "party" of Communism, social register of high society; not family, not political power, not wealth, not race; not degrees, high school diploma, union card; not character, not avoidance of sin, not good works.

B. Whosoever shall call! Anyone may. Nothing more required. But to "call" you must realize your own helplessness. "We thought we heard the angels sing." Eddie Rickenbacker's story of men who learned to believe on the Pacific.

C. You can trust God to answer. His promises are true. Recall fulfilled prophecies of Christmas: Virgin Birth, Is. 7:14 (how); Bethlehem, Micah 5:2 (where); Shiloh, Gen. 49:10 (when).

D. Trust — What God? — The Lord (Joel 2:32). Paul equates Jesus and Jehovah. Jesus is Jehovah's greatest self-revelation. When you know what Jesus has done for you (Incarnation, Death, Resurrection, vv. 6, 7, 9), then you will trust Him enough to call on Him, viz., "believe in," "worship," "pray to." Faith worked by faithful performance of promises. A grocer will trust a good customer because of previous good performance. So you can trust God. This belief, that God who sent Jesus, His Son, to save you, will never disappoint or fail you (v. 11).

II

The Word Works Faith

A. You want to believe that, but you say you can't?

B. Nature witnesses to such a God (Might, Wisdom, Love), v. 18. Still true today.

C. Word penetrated then to remotest areas through Jews (v. 18 b). Radio, TV, missionaries today.

D. Word of God gives us full truth. Tells us truth about ourselves and about God. Pictures love for sinners possible through Christ.

E. Whole Bible and only Bible, no amending (Modernists), no adding (R. C. C., Eddyites, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses).

F. Holy Spirit uses Word to penetrate our hard hearts and work faith (v. 17; Rom. 1:16; 1 Peter 1:22 ff.) Thus God constantly

brought men to Himself. Paul a wonderful example. The jailer at Philippi. You, too, have become a believer by hearing the Word. The Word must be spread to win others.

III

The Word Must Be Preached

A. Hear it means to listen to it (v.17). Studying the Word ourselves, church, private reading, family altar, Bible distribution, tracts — good but not enough.

B. Hearing also means to obey (v.16), to apply, to practice, the Gospel.

C. But teaching and preaching are necessary to insure right Scripture to each individual, reach unlearned, to emphasize Law and Gospel (vv.14, 15 b). Should be heard Sunday morning, evening, and weekday.

D. Commissioning important (v.15 a). God wants no unauthorized preachers and teachers. Trained men are best. Hence joining congregations and sending missionaries are requisite. This is the great work of the Church, the real reason for the existence of congregation and Synod. Have you joined?

IV

It Can Be Refused

A. The parable of the brick. A loose brick a danger, but in a wall it has a function. So individual in relation to church; congregation to Synod. A loose brick must be cast away.

B. God compels no one to take His gift. Can hear without believing. Like the men of Ulysses whose ears were stopped with wax so as not to hear the song of the Sirens. We can stop our ears with wax of selfish indulgence and indifference.

C. But without gift we are lost. How tragic (v.21).

The Christ who gained forgiveness for you by coming, dying, rising, who is presented in the Gospel, is God's great Gift. By believing you have peace here and eternal life beyond.

Take this Gift, and make it yours always.

San Francisco, Calif.

ARTHUR C. NITZ

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

ROM. 11:16-32

The Hannover Epistle for the Fourth Sunday in Advent is taken from Paul's Epistle to the Romans, that masterpiece of the New Testament which Luther says "deserves not only to be known word for word by every Christian but to be the subject of his meditation day by day, the daily bread of his soul."

The text itself does not mention the Savior as directly as do most of the lessons for the day, but if we relate it properly to Rom. 3:21-26, the center of the epistle, we have what we need. This relationship will then also come forth in the treatment of the text.

The lessons for the day stress humility in approaching Christ and the urgent need of accepting Him. Cp. the Baptist's testimony (John 1 and 3), Mary's in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46 ff.), Paul's assurance that God would have all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:1-6), and his plea that we show moderation to all men (Phil. 4:4-7), and John's reference to the fellowship in the Gospel (1 John 1:1-4). A reading of these lessons will help to give the necessary background for the proper treatment of the text.

The text is lengthy but so closely woven together that there is no difficulty in keeping to a unit thought. The exegetical difficulties are more apparent than real. A few brief remarks may, however, be in place. The mystery referred to in v. 25 is this, that among the proud, haughty Jews whose hardness of heart rules out salvation, there are still those who, in every age to the end of the world, can and will be won for Christ. These are meant by Paul when he speaks of all Israel being saved. All Israelites whom God in eternity included among the elect, from Abraham to the last Jew to be saved, all will be saved. The rejection of the nation does not rule out God's mercy to these elect. They may for a time appear as enemies of the Gospel (v. 28), but, like Paul himself, they will be converted by the grace of God.

God does not even let the rejection of Christ by the Jews remain without its blessed results. Their rejection ushers in a special time of grace for the Gentiles (vv. 28, 30). God did not cause their unbelief. He, however, turned their evil into good for the Gentiles,

showing them mercy and not withholding it from repentant Israelites.

Now a brief suggestion as to the treatment of the text. To keep the picture of the text we could speak of

GRAFTED BRANCHES IN THE TREE OF LIFE

- I. *We draw the same nourishment as the original branches, vv. 17, 18.* (Patriarchs, prophets, Apostles, shepherds, all were Israelites, as was Jesus Himself; but we share their blessings in fullest measure. No difference here.)
- II. *We face the same danger of being pruned out, vv. 20, 21.* (If even the Israelitish kings and leaders were rejected. . . .)
- III. *We have the privilege of growing with the tree as branches are added in abundance, vv. 25 ff.* (No need to remove branches to make room for others. A glorious growing together in Christ regardless of where we came from.)

In view of the season of the church year it may be better to drop the figure of the text and simply develop the thought that

GOD GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE

- I. *Fully, Whether to Jew or Gentile*
- II. *Only the Proud Have No Place with Jesus*
- III. *Constantly, Even to the Fallen if They Repent; e. g., Paul himself*

A fitting conclusion is Paul's own doxology, which follows immediately upon the text.

Springfield, Ill.

MARK J. STEEGE

CHRISTMAS

1 Tim. 3:14-16

A woman member of the community Christmas Tree Lighting Committee called her pastor for suggestions for the musical portion of the program, complaining that traditional songs and carols are "so distressingly theological." She was reminded that the first Christmas was, after all, a rather theological affair. Our text includes a portion of an early Christian song, a very theological song, containing a summary statement of what Christmas is all about.

"GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH" * — THE MYSTERY OF
CHRISTMAS AND WHAT THAT MYSTERY REVEALS

I

"God Was Manifest in the Flesh" — a Great Mystery

A. The mystery of Christmas does not consist of some mysterious mood. — Festival has become cluttered. Even the heart of the Christmas story garlanded with irrelevant details, while meaning of story has been generalized into the least common denominator of vague belief. Little more than sentimental feeling of good will.

B. The mystery of Christmas lies in the birth at Bethlehem.

1. A child is born. — Here the Christmas story may be told, but the sermon should go on to show that mystery of Christmas is not just the magic of babyhood. Many love the Babe of Bethlehem simply as a baby, a cuddly plaything, awakening feelings of tenderness mingled with dreams of a lost childhood. This called religion. A purely Christmas religion, a religion of sentiment. "The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head." Sweet He is and little, but to play idly with this Baby is to play with fire, for

2. This Child is Christ, our God and Lord.

a. The mystery in this. — Greek mystery religions celebrated deification of man, Christmas celebrates incarnation of God. This is the mystery, "seen of angels" (text), heralded by them, yet a source of wonder even to them (1 Peter. 1:12). The Lord of heaven made even a "little lower" than they (Heb. 2:7).

b. The depths of the mystery. — "This shall be a sign, etc." (Luke 2:12). Strange contradiction: "Christ the Lord," but swaddling clothes and a manger for a sign. Christian piety has done much to soften contradiction. Animals stand about in mute admiration (which is faith's recognition that Child is King of Crea-

* The correct reading is very likely not *theos* but the masculine relative pronoun *hos*. The substitution, however, in no way alters the sense, for He who was manifested in the Incarnation was clearly present in the bosom of the Father before that manifestation. The whole tenor of New Testament theology demands this interpretation. A supplemental use of the R. S. V. is, at any rate, desirable for this passage. The phrase "mystery of godliness" is ambiguous, to say the least, and the translation of the second line of the hymn is difficult to interpret as it stands in the A. V.

tion, but in unadorned fact animals were probably annoyed that the little Stranger interfered with their feeding). Christ himself is pictured with halo around head and with all of wonder and wisdom of eternity in His face. Faith's recognition that He is eternal Son of the Father. But in unadorned fact, again, He was six or seven pounds of hungry, weak, and needy humanity. "Wrapped in swaddling clothes," diapers, perfect symbol of human weakness. "And was made man."

c. The *unsearchable* depths of the mystery. — The mystery of Christmas, prepared by God (1 Cor. 2:7) and hidden in His eternal will (Eph. 3:9), has become a fact of history in the Incarnation. St. Paul uses the word "mystery" to designate "a hidden thing now revealed." Yet for us it must remain a "confessedly great" mystery. It is like this: The sun, shining in full splendor, is hardly more accessible to sight than when hidden by a cloud. But we know the sun is there, for we can see clearly everything else. And so —

II

"God Was Manifest in the Flesh" — a Wondrous Revelation

A. Christmas reveals the love of God. — Note only the condescension of God's love. He stoops to conquer, coming to earth and entering through lowly door of His mother's womb. C. S. Lewis suggests picture of strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great complicated burden. He must stoop in order to lift, almost disappearing until, incredibly, he rises and marches off with the whole mass on his shoulders.

B. Christmas reveals the hope of man.

1. Man needs a Savior. — Symptoms of need suggested by Christmas story are the selfishness of the people of Bethlehem ("no room" for others in our inverted lives) and the fear of the shepherds ("sore afraid" in our mean, befouled lives before the glory and holiness of God).

2. The Savior man needs is the Child of Bethlehem.

a. He is Our Brother. — The Child of Bethlehem, our little Brother, born into the fellowship of human suffering through the pain of His mother. Able to sympathize (Heb. 4:15).

b. Our Substitute. — Weakness, lowliness, and poverty reveal

shadow of Cross already over birth of this Child. When He died, He was once more absolutely poor, His one piece of clothing divided by soldiers. "*For our sakes* He became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9). The "for us" of Christ's life was vindicated on Easter when "He was justified, vindicated by the Spirit" (text, cf. Rom. 1:3, 4).

C. Christmas reveals the future of the universe.—Though Christ was "received up into glory" (text), He is still the Incarnate One. His life is still identified with the stuff of our universe. The heavenly reality has invaded this tired old world. The full implications of this wait to be revealed. (Cosmic aspects of Incarnation best illustrated from Colossians, also Rom. 8:18 ff.)

D. Christmas reveals the mission of the Church.

1. The Church has a message to proclaim.—Mystery of Christmas not to be kept secret as were the revelations in Greek mystery religions. It is to be "preached unto the Gentiles" by the Church, which is "the pillar and ground of truth" (text; cf. Luke 2:10, also the missionary activity of the shepherds). And this mystery, incredible though it is, will be "believed on in the world."

2. The Church has a life to exhibit.—The Church, as Christ's body, is the extension of His incarnate life. Our text calls the Church the "house of God," the place where He dwells on earth. The Church is our Bethlehem, our Immanuel, our "God with us."

The ultimate mystery and the ultimate revelation of Christmas is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27; cf. the second stanza of "O Little Town of Bethlehem").

Burlington, Colo.

WALTER BARTLING

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

2 COR. 1:3-20

Paul never celebrated the birth of the Son of God as we do in our times. The manner of celebrating Christmas is of late origin. Christmas as a Christian festival was not celebrated during the first three centuries after Christ. In fact, many of the practices connected with the celebration of Christ's birth have come from heathen customs. Examples.

However, Paul who never celebrated Christmas knew of the

blessings of Christmas. In our text, Paul speaks of some of these blessings which you and I enjoy because Christ was born. We may say that Paul knew the blessings we have

WHEN THE CHRIST OF CHRISTMAS COMES TO US

I

Then We Have Comfort

A. We have the comfort and consolation of the heavenly Father *for ourselves*. As Paul had suffered many things as a follower of Jesus and had enjoyed Christ's consolation, so we, too, have the same Father of mercies and God of comfort as we follow in the footsteps of Christ.

We also have this comfort *for others* in their troubles. Paul, who had learned the comfort of Jesus Christ, could comfort others. Christians today who have enjoyed God's comfort can comfort others.

B. We have this comfort in all tribulation and in any trouble, whether spiritual or temporal. No tribulation of the body is too small, no trouble of the soul is too big, for this comfort to console.

C. We have this comfort because Christ has come to live in our hearts. When the Christ of Christmas comes to live in our lives, we know the heavenly Father and with Him comfort.

II

Then We Have Deliverance

A. Paul cites his own example to show the Corinthians the deliverance he enjoyed in Christ (vv. 8-10). Paul in Asia was in so great danger that he had despaired of his life. We do not know to what event he refers. But in that danger Paul enjoyed deliverance.

B. By means of this example Paul teaches regarding the wondrous deliverance that comes with the knowledge of Jesus. Paul could look to the future, but he was not afraid. We can look to the end of the year and the beginning of another, but we are not alarmed. With the Christ of Christmas at our side, we are assured that our heavenly Father will deliver us from every evil work, yea, even from death, and will keep us unto the day of Jesus Christ.

C. We have this deliverance, not through trust in ourselves, but through trust in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have a sure deliverance because the historical Christ has come to live in our lives.

III

Then We Have a Good Conscience

A. One of the great joys is the testimony of a good conscience. The terror of an accusing conscience.

B. Paul had this joy of a good conscience (v. 12), even though some accused him of speaking and dealing deceitfully with the Corinthians. The accusation had arisen because Paul had written that he was planning to visit them before he went to Macedonia, but had to change his plans and had gone to Macedonia first.

C. Paul possessed this good conscience, "not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God." Enjoying this grace of God, he looked forward to the "day of Jesus Christ." This grace in Christ Jesus enabled him to have a good conscience.

D. When the Christ of Christmas comes into our lives, we can have the same good conscience by the grace of God, as we look forward to the day of the Lord Jesus.

IV

Then We Have Certainty

A. We live in a world of uncertainty. Paul's change of plans is a good example. We can plan, but we cannot be sure that our plans will be carried out. This will be true also in 1954.

B. In this uncertainty we can be sure that all of God's promises are Yea and Amen. Paul's plans may change, but the word of God written by Paul to the Corinthians cannot change. The Christ, the Son of God, preached by Paul, never changes. The promises of His forgiveness, His salvation, His righteousness, His care and protection, are Yea and Amen.

C. This certainty is based on Christ (v. 20). When the Christ of Christmas comes to us, we have this blessed certainty of God's Word and salvation in the future.

Take this Christ into your lives in ever greater degree. Keep Him in your hearts and lives during the new year.

Springfield, Ill.

LEWIS C. NIEMOELLER