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ARCHIVES

HOMILETICS

Outlines of the Hannover Epistles

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 16:9-15

It is wisdom on the part of a budding artist or a fledgling musician to study the methods and techniques of the masters. Similarly, God's children called by Christ to make disciples of all nations do well to study the mission techniques and methods of the master missionaries whose works are recorded in Scripture for our learning. The Apostle Paul was such a master missionary.

PAUL, A MASTER MISSIONARY

I

He Sees a Vision

The Apostle Paul beheld a vision (v. 9). This vision was given by God. God had wonderful missionary plans for the Apostle. Paul saw the vision because his eyes were always open to the missionary plans which God had for him. The Apostle Paul was wholehearted in his obedience to the Savior's command to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. Furthermore, he actually believed that with God's blessing he was able to carry out this command. Therefore it is not at all surprising that Paul saw the vision God prepared for him.

To be successful in mission work we need to see visions—visions of missionary needs, challenges, opportunities, possibilities. God still grants such visions. If our eyes are open to the missionary plans which God has for us, we shall see great multitudes all about us, men, women, children, pleading that we come and help them. Their ignorance of the grace of God, their unbelief, their helplessness and hopelessness, plead with us to tell them about Jesus and His redeeming love. To be missionaries like Paul we need to see visions like Paul. Furthermore, we need to believe with Paul that God actually wants us to preach the Gospel to every creature and that with God's blessing we can actually do it.

II

He Obeys a Call

After Paul had seen the vision, he did not lose time debating what to do (vv. 10-13). Immediately he obeyed the call of the vision. Immediately he journeyed to Philippi, and there he immediately went to the place where he would most likely find people interested in the message which the Lord Jesus had given him to preach.

To be missionaries successful like Paul we need to follow his example of obedience when God's call for action comes to us. Our Macedonia is all about us. The Macedonian call for help comes to us from all sides—from the same block in which we live, from the children with whom our children play, from the men and women with whom we work, from the rapidly growing suburbs of our own and neighboring cities, from Latin America, South America, Europe, Asia, etc. Without further loss of time, immediately and constantly, we need to visit for Jesus, speak for Jesus, plead for Jesus, bring mission offerings to Jesus.

III

He Reaps a Harvest

Knowing the Apostle Paul as we do, it is not difficult for us to surmise about what and about whom he talked as he "spoke unto the women . . . by a riverside where prayer was want to be made" (vv. 14, 15). He talked about man's sin and God's grace, about man's desperate need of a Savior and the wonderful Savior God gave man in Christ Jesus, His Son. And the result? Lydia and her household were won. Through the winning of Lydia a chain of events was begun the blessed results of which are fully known in heaven alone.

We need to remember that the simple story of Jesus is ever the only power of God for salvation. This is the story men everywhere need to hear and to believe. If we tell this story, preach it, teach it, the Holy Spirit will grant a harvest. To begin with, the harvest may seem insignificant; however, every harvest for the Lord Jesus is magnificent.

To be successful missionaries we need to see visions. We need

to see how desperately men everywhere need the Gospel. However, merely to see visions is not enough. We need to go into action when God reveals to us the great need for the Gospel in the life of men. We need to speak the Gospel with our own lips first and then also with the lips of missionaries we support with our mission offerings. If we so speak it, God will surely grant a harvest.

San Antonio, Tex.

ROLAND WIEDERAENDERS

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 18:1-18

One of the arresting qualities of St. Paul is his perseverance in preaching the Gospel. Even though he was beaten, shipwrecked, stoned, and imprisoned, he doggedly continued bringing the Gospel from Syria to Asia Minor, to Macedonia, to Greece, and thence to Rome.

In the account of the founding of the congregation at Corinth we have an example of Paul's perseverance. It can well serve as an inspiration to us in building the kingdom of our Lord in the twentieth century. Our text is a clarion call to us to

PERSEVERE IN THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

I

Because You Have a Glorious Message to Proclaim

A. Text. Vv. 1-5. Although Paul had been laughed out of Athens, he continued on his journey in the fall of 51 and came to Corinth. Corinth was a cosmopolitan commercial center, capital of the Roman province of Achaia. As famous as it was for its commercial interests, its Isthmian Games, and Corinthian brass, so notorious was it for its licentiousness. Chrysostom calls it ". . . a city, the most licentious of all that are or ever have been."

B. Working at his trade as a tentmaker during the week, Paul used the Sabbath days to dispute in the synagogue with the Jews and the Greek proselytes, "testifying . . . that Jesus was Christ." This was the message that Paul knew and loved. To Corinthians he could declare: "I am determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." He felt himself debtor

both to the Jew and to the Greek and must proclaim the glorious Gospel of God.

C. Like Paul, we, too, have received this Gospel. Through it the Holy Spirit has regenerated us. We have it to assure us of forgiveness, peace with God, and the blessed hope of heaven. But it is ours to share. There is nothing that our cities — Corinth all — need more than the knowledge that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the promised Messiah and Savior of the world.

What an incentive it ought to be to us to preach the Gospel that it has been freely given to us of God. May the knowledge that we have the cure for the soul ills of mankind inspire us to persevere in the preaching of the Gospel, proclaiming in public and in private the glorious truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

II

Because We Know in Advance that Some Will Not Believe

A. Text. Vv. 6, 7. An optimist might suppose that all Corinth gladly received the preaching of the Gospel by Paul. But instead we find that the Corinthians arrayed themselves in battle against Paul and blasphemed God. So intense was their feeling that they hated not only the Gospel but also Paul, who preached it.

B. In their fury they rushed Paul off to the tribunal of Gallio (vv. 12-17). Listening to the charges and knowing them to be false, Gallio drove them from his court, amused at the beating the Greeks gave Sosthenes, the spokesman of the Jews. Although Gallio judged justly in not condemning Paul, he met the truth of the Gospel with callous indifference, for we are told: "And Gallio cared for none of these things."

C. There we have some of the immediate responses to Paul's preaching: open enmity on the part of the Jews and indifference on the part of the Greeks. Yet Paul persevered in his preaching. Charging the Jews with having committed spiritual suicide (v. 6), Paul declared his innocence and moved next door to the synagogue and continued to preach.

D. How instructive Paul's attitude is for us today! As then, so now the preaching of the Cross is to some a savor of death unto death. Witness the enmity of the world to the Gospel throughout

the centuries — Neronian persecutions, the world at Luther's time, Communist opposition, the opposition of unbelievers to the Christians within their own family circle. Witness, too, the indifference of men like Gallio in our own day.

E. This very opposition to the truth may lead us to silence our lips, to lose heart, to become discouraged. But rather ought we to see in the opposition that we encounter a fulfillment of what Jesus said would happen in the world (Matt. 10:17, 18; 21-23).

Let us rather learn of Paul, in spite of the opposition, to continue zealously to press the claims of the Gospel upon the hearts of men. The fact that we have testified to them the truth will render them inexcusable on the Day of Judgment.

III

Because We Have the Assurance that Our Preaching Will Not Be in Vain

A. Vv. 9, 10. In the midst of the growing opposition against him Paul was encouraged by a night vision in which the Lord assured him that he had much people in the city of Corinth and that no one would hurt him. What a glorious assurance for Paul! The Lord gave him strength in his weakness, the assurance of success in the midst of his apparent failure.

B. This promise was fulfilled. V. 8 tells us of the conversion of Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagog and of many of the Corinthians. Among those gathered into the fold of the Church were Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:15, 16); Erastus, treasurer of the city; Tertius, penman for the Letter to the Romans; and Phoebe, bearer of the Epistle to the Romans. Paul left a flourishing congregation in Corinth. Cp. 1 Cor. 1:4-7.

C. The Church today, too, has this blessed promise from the lips of the Lord that in every city He has much people and that He is with us to bless the preaching of His Word. He assures us: "My Word shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." As our ascended Lord He promises: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

D. The remarkable success which has attended the preaching of

the Gospel in our Lutheran Church, especially in recent years, is a living demonstration to the truth of these promises. Two new churches are being established every week; 50,000 adults are being gathered into the fold each year; our mission work in foreign fields is growing at an unprecedented rate.

How this ought to encourage us to persevere in the preaching of the Gospel! Let us work, like Paul, while it is day, ere the night cometh when no man can work.

Springfield, Ill.

_____ HENRY J. EGGOLD, JR.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 21:3-19

God is not concerned that we be dramatic heroes of movies and history books. He is concerned that we as Christians have His kind of heroic personality, prepared to face any situation, even death. Only thus can we faithfully serve Him.

The text, a simple travelog, portrays the heroism the Spirit desires to work in us.

I

HEROES WANTED

Heroism Requires that We Live by Convictions and Principles

A. We must have such principles. (Contrast the heroic defenders of Dienbienphu, determined to fight to the death, with the relief column that was supposed to fight through the Communist lines, but could never decide whether to go.)

1. Paul had principles. Not a drifter, but a man of consuming purpose. God's purpose, yet he makes God's his own. If that purpose says, "Go to Jerusalem," like Christ he must go (Luke 9:51).

2. Here lies much of our failure and cowardice. We will be Christians, but with what halfheartedness! Careful not to go in "too deep." Church, but not every Sunday; sermons, but not Bible classes; gifts, but not suffering; belonging, but not working; possessing, but not witnessing.

"Let the garrison die bravely! I shall admire but not join them. Hooray for Paul and the martyrs! But I, like many, will take the

easy way." Thus we refuse to make the total decision for Christ. Outwardly we "go to Jerusalem," inwardly we run away.

Friend, you will never arrive if you do not make up your mind you are really going. The battle against Communists in Indochina cannot be won by indecisive "gestures," but only painfully lost. Far less your battle against Satan (Eph. 6:12).

B. Having convictions, we must stick to them. (Dog chasing rabbit, diverted to other rabbits, falls exhausted.) Satan's goal in every temptation is to divert us from God's single course.

1. Note the unwavering determination of Paul. In Ephesus (20:22-24, 36, 37); in Tyre, the rational argument: "Paul, you are too valuable" (21:4); in Caesarea, Agabus and the emotional plea (vv. 12, 13). Throughout Paul fears, like us, suffering and death (v. 13). Yet he goes.

2. Contrast our weakness. Our decisions in confirmation; our repeated, repentant resolutions, made in all sincerity.

But we fail. The flesh is too weary, world too glittering, suffering too great. Sometimes our pride is wounded. We are not appreciated. Thus serving self, we quit (Luke 9:62). Heroes? Anything but!

II

Heroism Requires that We Get These Convictions

Where Paul Got Them, in a Living God

A. Here the source of Paul's heroism. He serves no church, but a living Christ. His God is no psychological illusion or mental concept, but a personal, hand-in-hand Reality. Evidences: the constant prayer (20:37; 21:5); trust in "the will of the Lord" (v. 14); testimony, "what God had wrought" (v. 19).

1. His Savior owns him by right of creation and redemption.

2. His Savior uses him (v. 19) as a cabinetmaker uses his finest chisel on the hardest wood (the Jews at Jerusalem). Shall the chisel bend?

3. His Savior cares for him. No craftsman has ever used chisels more skillfully than Christ uses His witnesses. The aim is not to break the chisel, but to shape the wood. Not in pessimism, but in confidence Paul says, "The will of the Lord be done" (v. 14). Let his enemies tremble (Ps. 24:1-3). Paul will rejoice (20:24).

B. Here lies our strength today.

1. We have often missed it. We talk too much in terms of what the pastor thinks, or what the church wants and asks. Many are even offended that they "must" take instructions to join the church. Religion becomes membership in an organization. Pity the man who has only "pastor" and "church," but not God, or to whom God is small, distant, unreal, unimportant!

2. But we have not all missed it. The strength of our Synod—its principles are God's. Synod asks loyalty not to itself, but to God. Thus our missionaries sacrifice not for Synodical boards, but for God. A measure of such spirit also among us.

3. What about you? The Holy Spirit wants to make you a hero. Repent of coldness and unbelief; grow in the Word, in prayer, in faith and conviction, till you, like Paul, are stronger than death, a precious tool of God, a hero indeed.

New Orleans, La.

PAUL G. BRETSCHER

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 21:40—22:22

The text, one of the great confessions of the Bible, is the record of the most important hours in Paul's life. Its purpose was to produce an understanding of Christ in the mob's mind which would explain Paul's service of Christ and induce these people, too, to accept Him. It is therefore a testimony to the wonder of the Saviorship of Christ. It testifies concerning His power and glory, to be sure, but, above all, to the central wonder of His grace, so clearly and dramatically shown in Paul's own life. Our theme, then, is:

THE WONDER OF THE GRACE OF CHRIST

I

The Savior's Grace Is Toward Sinners

A. The Apostle himself was the greatest proof of this.

1. He had sinned so grievously, especially in his persecuting the Church, that he himself regarded himself as unfit to be called an Apostle or to receive forgiveness (1 Cor. 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:15; Gal. 1:13; Acts 22:4, 20).

2. Moreover, this sin had been committed, not merely against men, but, dreadfully, also against Christ Himself (v. 8). Paul had been the very tool of the great Adversary.

a. We have never thus persecuted. But have we belittled another's piety, or ridiculed or slanderously criticized the Church, or obstructed its work, because of hurt pride or feelings?

b. Avoid all this meanness. It is against Christ, and it makes the Adversary rejoice. Our grief later may be great and permanent, as was Paul's.

3. Yet the Savior's grace encompassed even Paul, not hating him but saving him.

a. Only one factor to be urged in Paul's behalf — He had done it "ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Tim. 1:13). Sincerely he believed Christ to be an impostor. Paul's motive was not selfish (revenge, prestige, privilege), but to save truth from error. Yet he was guilty and sorely in need of mercy, and mercy he obtained (1 Tim. 1:13).

b. So today. Opposition due to ignorance is not hopeless. But when the motive is only selfishness rationalized, there is fundamental dishonesty, impregnable self-love, basic and obdurate idolatry. Self valued more highly than truth — or God — is the ultimate blindness, the sin of pride, of the devil, who fell through pride (1 Tim. 3:6). Such God can only resist, never help (James 4:6).

4. The Apostle's case is encouragement (1 Tim. 1:16). Who else, then, should despair of that same grace? This is an encouragement to believe and also to seek to save others.

II

His Grace Embraces All Mankind

A. Therefore the Apostle, admitted to grace, was immediately delegated a witness of that grace to all men (Acts 22:15). Christ's love is all-inclusive — He loves all, hates none, and will have the death of no sinner.

B. We, too, have the same obligation. Unlike Paul, we are not chosen vessels in the same sense (Acts 9:15); and we have not witnessed all he experienced. But we have received the same grace

and the same commission to be witnesses to all men concerning the power and glory of the grace that found us, with no restrictions in either space or time. We are to spread the Gospel now to all nations and hand it on, intact, from generation to generation.

C. Like Paul, we, too, sometimes decline to go to *all* men. Paul desired to witness only among the Jews, as most effective there (Acts 22:19, 20); the Savior overruled that desire (v. 21).

1. Some Christians oppose foreign mission ("plenty of heathen right here at home"). Yet Paul was sent "far hence," despite the Christless thousands in that city.

2. Other Christians despise home-mission work; it lacks the glamor of far places. Yet this Apostle to far places was at this moment, at the risk of his life, engaged in "home missions."

3. Still others deem the Gospel something only for themselves. The hostile crowd (v. 22) became infuriated by mention of preaching to Gentiles. Here is pride—the pride that kills love. Our love, like Christ's, must be toward *all* men, or it is not love.

Milwaukee, Wis.

RICHARD A. JESSE