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Studies on Free Texts from the Old Testament

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ISAIAH 44:6-8

The Text and Its Central Thought. — “Let God be *your* God,” seems to sum up the thought of the text. It is a text filled with doctrine. It reminds the reader that the Lord God made all things, rules all things, loves His creatures, seeks them, and would comfort them. In it God challenges men to produce another god who could do the same, who could foretell and then bring to pass, a god who could tell what is yet to be, a god who could speak in terms of eternity. The warning that is implied is: Beware of idols. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. (See especially the verses following the text.) But the comforting promise is clearly stated: Fear not, nor be afraid. Hide yourself in Me, your Rock of Ages.

The RSV gives a clearer translation of the text than the AV. It indicates that the thoughts expressed above are all textual.

The Rock of Ages is not merely hinted at, but is taught in the text. The Lord calls Himself the First and the Last, not in any sense of the mere passing of time, not in relation to His creatures, as though He merely existed before them and will continue after they are gone. No, He is the eternal God, the Beginning and End of all things. He also uses the word “rock” in referring to Himself. It is a word occurring frequently in Scripture. In the Old Testament it is the word *tsur*, usually translated rock, but in a few instances inexactly translated God, as we find it also in the LXX. Figuratively it denotes a haven of refuge. (Cp. Deut. 32:1-43, which is a key passage for the understanding of the term and of our text as well; 1 Sam. 2:2; Is. 17:10; Ps. 18:2; 28:1; 31:2; 42:9; 71:3, etc.) In the New Testament Paul speaks of Christ as this Rock of Israel (1 Cor. 10:4). Christ calls Himself a Rock (*Petra*) in the well-known passage in Matt. 16:18. Here and in 1 Cor. 3:11 the Rock serves as the Foundation upon which the church is built. But foundation and place of refuge are not far apart. The thoughts are combined in the hymn “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less” (No. 370 in the *Lutheran Hymnal*).

The Day and Its Theme. — The Twenty-third Sunday after Trinity

comes close to the end of the church year with its message concerning the Last Things. Note that this is also hinted at in the text. God has established an eternal people for Himself.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The purpose of the text originally addressed to the Children of Israel by Isaiah, the prophet, was to exhort and especially to comfort the faithful Israelites who could see the day of captivity approaching. That meant the destruction of the temple, the leveling of the Holy City, the disruption of worship, the deportation of God's people into a land of idol worship. Surely, there was need of the comfort of the text, Fear not, nor be afraid. . . . You are My witnesses! Is there a god besides Me? There is no Rock; I know not any. In other words, I will still be your God in Babylon. No heathen gods can supplant Me. Let them try. Your future rests with Me as does your past.

If we seek to apply these thoughts to our hearers, we are tempted to say: They face no Babylon, no deportation, no loss of Christian worship. But we ought to keep in mind that our people, though not deported, except for those coming from subjugated peoples, are at least transported to areas far from home. Over three million young men and women are in the Armed Forces. Over two and a half million are away from home seeking an education. Many more millions are pulled away from home by employment or the lack of it. People living in the larger cities are often in the midst of crowds of people of whom they know no one. Idol worship of a subtler kind surrounds them. Unbelief is found everywhere. It may not have been evident in the foxholes, but it is in the barracks. It is only too evident in the classrooms. It doesn't seek to hide itself in the factories, the shops, the places of amusement.

The Israelites were warned of an approaching calamity, and the faithful were told not to fear. God would be there. Are we sufficiently warning our people of the things all about them that are just as serious a trial of their faith as that experienced by the faithful in Isaiah's time? Our people must be pointed to the God who is always there, the God who made us, rules us, seeks us, loves us, and would comfort us. Will not we worship Him, serve Him, return His love and pass it on to others, answer when He calls, and rejoice in His comfort?

Sin and Its Fruits to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Failure to appreciate God's love, on the one hand, and often a failure to hold on to His promises when things look forbidding. People are too apt to look around for help when they ought to look up. Our God is the only God.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—These lie in the names God uses in the text, Jehovah, the Covenant God, the God of Israel, the Lord of Hosts, the Rock of Ages.

Outline

God Has Us in Mind When He Speaks of Himself

- I. He gives us the only foundation for our faith
- II. He gives us the only assurance for our hope
- III. He gives us a true reason for our love

Springfield, Ill.

M. J. STEEGE

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ISAIAH 8:9-17

The Text and its Central Thought.—Approach this text with a view to developing a sermon theme that deals with basic political questions. The problem for the preacher is to garb the political aspects of Isaiah's day in 20th-century terminology and to extract from the Old Testament political situation those principles that apply today. The Holy Spirit has carefully selected the international situation of that day for an enduring lesson on the role that God plays in politics. Israel was not merely an ethnic group that represented a political unit among others. Israel was nation and church, God's "peculiar people." Through this unique combination God had determined to send the Messiah.

For background on Ahaz, king of Judah, read either 2 Chron. 28 or 2 Kings 16 before the Epistle. At the moment, there is a cold war of maneuvering, negotiating a deal with Assyria against Syria and Israel, who threaten Judah. Into this atmosphere Isaiah broadcasts his prophetic analysis. "Be broken, ye peoples," from רָעַע, Qal imperative pl. masc. AV "Associate yourselves" does not make good sense. Followed by another imperative, "be broken with fear." AV, "and ye shall be broken." The third imperative, "give ear," listen! *פֶּל מִרְחֹקֵי אֲרָץ*, "all from distant lands"—this indicates to whom the text is directed. Some universal lessons are to be established from that time, not only for Judah, Israel, Syria, and Assyria, but all nations at all times everywhere. Again an imperative phrase closes v. 9: "Gird yourselves," *הִתְאַזְרוּ*, from אָזַר, pl. masc. Hithpa., arm yourselves, mobilize! Tighten your belts, pat your holsters, break out the ammunition, "scramble" to meet the enemy, parade the weapons—and feel powerful? No! "Be ye dismayed!" Same word as above. From iron we go to paper; no doubt Isaiah has the signing of treaties, flurry of pens, and handshakes—

all-around scenes in mind. V. 10, עֲצֵי עֵצָה, "counsel a counsel," imperative again, i. e., counsel together, and it will be broken in pieces. "Speak a word, and not will it stand." It is the kind of counseling and words that leave God out; the attitude which assumes that the government, any government, is supreme. It may be a law over people, but not over God. "For with us is God," כִּי עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים, same as v. 8. See ch. 7:14. To summarize vv. 9 and 10: Tons of armament and gallons of ink mean nothing unless you can say, "Immanuel." Some say, "Let politics alone. God wants nothing to do with it!" The prophet, v. 11, "instructed," warned, the content of which now follows. V. 12, קִשְׁר, "conspiracy," better term than "confederacy," though that is also involved. "Do not call קִשְׁר everything which this people call קִשְׁר." The Assyrian alliance was scored. Isaiah and all like-minded were called traitors. So 1 Peter 3:14 quotes this verse. Have fear, but not their kind alone. God is still God, that is Fear Number One. Isaiah's instruction was not appreciated, though it was sound. V. 13, "Jehovah of hosts (of the armies, any army, every army, of Israel to the north, of Syria farther, and of Assyria still farther; of the U. S. A. or the U. S. S. R.) *Him* you shall sanctify, pronounce holy, *Him* fear, *Him* dread." אֱתוֹ, וְהוּא, וְהוּא emphatic direction. If these things are so, then v. 14; "So He will be for a מִקְדָּשׁ, a sacred place, an asylum," as the temple protects and surrounds with peace of mind, forgiveness, and a feeling that God is running things. If not that, then a contrasting opposite: "But for a stone of striking and for a rock of stumbling." Cf. Rom. 9:33 and 1 Peter 2:7. "For a trap and for a noose." See *Home Life in Bible Times*, Klinck, page 5. In v. 15 the imagery is carried through. See Matt. 21:44 and Luke 10:18. "On it," בָּמָה, that is, on Jehovah. Terms: stumble, fall, broken, snared, or whipped into a dangling position, captured. V. 16 spoken to Isaiah, צָרָר from צָר, impv. masc. sing., compress, bind up together as in a roll; this is the end of the sermon. הִעֲדָה, "testimony," from עָדַר to repeat what God has here said, in vv. 12-15, and now the preacher repeats. "Seal up," also to Isaiah, "the Law," תּוֹרָה, a familiar term to designate God's Word; so a clearly defined passage has here been added to the Scripture. Significant. In v. 20 these two terms are placed side by side again. V. 17 Isaiah speaks of himself waiting patiently for Jehovah. See ch. 30:18 and 64:4.

The Day and Its Theme. — Whether by design or accident, this text coincides with Veterans' Day, November 11, 1956 (Armistice Day). Note also the general election day of November 6 on the Tuesday previous. Has God anything to do with these matters? The activities

of government, whether in the formation of competing policies or the election to carry them out, is not over, beside, or in spite of God, but always under God. How much better if the individuals directly concerned and the citizenry have a God-fearing attitude! Christian people, caught in a welter of political news, domestic and foreign, may stumble into a state of submission and cynical indifference. Let one thing be impressed firmly, as Isaiah was, v. 11, that God is very close to politics, בְּחֹזֶק הַיָּד, "with a strong hand."

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To show that God and the politicians need not be separated. You may, and perhaps should be one. Refer to the unfortunate, exaggerated picture of government officialdom, as being fat-fronted, black-cigarred, and cruising in black limousines. The instruments of government, vv. 9 and 10, such as alliances, deals, trades, and the like, may be legitimate activity. It is the "master of all" attitude, by king and people, the matching-off to the "let's you and him fight" scheming that Isaiah-people decry. God does not need nor does He want to be enthroned by the government, or be officially declared to be God. God need not be legislated into existence, any more than He can be legislated out. God need not be put in the law books on paper, but sealed into the heart, v. 16. The meetings need not be opened with prayer if each man worships Him in spirit and in truth. Daniel did his praying at home. The government need not be dedicated to the glory of God when the people in it are themselves dedicated. The text does not supply political detail, but political attitude. If we can move closer to God's viewpoint, we will step up our appetite for the detail.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The government you live under is not something you are only *under*, but also *for*. Surely Isaiah was for his. The hands-off, ten-foot-pole, of-no-concern-to-me attitude is a sin of omission. To cultivate a studied avoidance of politics is to desanctify God and sanctify something else. It is a political disservice to God and man, national and international. Not everything that people call "conspiracy" is conspiracy. We choose to think that God does not concern Himself because it is not His department. At times He is as one who is hiding, watching, like a hunter behind the next tree, for His "machine" to spring, vv. 14 and 17. The supreme law over every law is that God is over all and the relation of God to Judah as a nation was not to be silenced. But the prophet's view was not appreciated, and it may be that some will not appreciate a sermon on this subject. A nation that commits a gigantic fraud for the good of its citizens is a curse, no matter how well accepted. To gain peace by

committing two enemies to butcher each other, is playing not only dirty, but bloody politics. Politics is serious business. It is God's will that we take it seriously.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.— It was politics in the very worst sense that killed Jesus Christ. While the Son of God stood between His own people and the man washing his hands, the "politics" of Heaven had to be served. No "machine" ever worked so benevolently and so inexplicably as when He set His face to go to Jerusalem (Isaiah's town too) to meet the politicians, both Jewish and Roman, church and empire. While they played politics, He was signing their papers for Heaven with His own blood. The Immanuel of ch. 7:14; 8:8 and 10, "God with us," was completely fulfilled. God died for the politicians too.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.— A discussion of domestic and foreign politics should not ignore the Master Politician. In v. 11 God extends a strong hand with an overruling sweep. Then it was horses; now it is horsepower. The technology of swords and jet rotors will never slice the God-connecting string, v. 16. God is not only the Master *of, over,* but *for* politicians. The people said, "Religion is O. K., but what we need now is what the Assyrians have." Christ's political outlook was so disappointing to the leaders of Israel, so contrary to their specified Immanuel, that they stumbled on Him. They called Him a pacifist, traitor, anti-Jewish, a political zero. He stood before the (in the lowest sense of the term) small-time, master politician, Pontius Pilate. What well-chosen words, "My kingdom is not of this world"! But they did not mean He had nothing to do with the empire Pilate represented. It was just that He was tending to a kingdom more important at the moment. Explore the drama of that scene.

Outline

God and the Politicians

- I. Armament appropriators, v. 9.
- II. The paper shufflers, v. 10.
- III. Instructing the loyal opposition, v. 11.
- IV. Name callers, v. 12.
- V. False fears, v. 13.
- VI. God prognosticates, vv. 14, 15.
- VII. The winning party, God-elected, v. 16.
- VIII. Wait for the returns, v. 17.

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PSALM 126

The Text and Its Central Thought.—“Turn the captivity” is idiomatic for any great salvation (Job 42:10; Ps. 14:7. RSV, “restore the fortunes”). Though its use here does not in itself prove that the Babylonian Exile is in the mind of the psalmist, the likelihood is strong on other grounds that this is the context, and we shall so regard it.

When Cyrus' proclamation (Ezra 1) invited the Jews to return to their homeland, the great majority, being practical realists, preferred to stay comfortably where they were. Only a comparative handful, 42,000 under Zerubbabel, possessed sufficient spiritual vision and fervor to return to the land of their fathers, rebuild city and temple, and under God re-establish His chosen nation. If they came looking for a paradise, they were quickly and bitterly disillusioned. The land lay in ruin, city and temple utterly destroyed, family farms turned to jungle. Centuries before, their fathers had inherited what others had built (Deut. 6:10, 11); now everything had to be built from scratch. Neighbors made trouble, drought and crop failure added to the long woe. The vision that inspired the return faded, the fervor died. Building of city and temple ceased, as each wrestled with his own hardships in the simple battle for survival (Haggai 1). The spirit of gloom and complaint paralleled that of an earlier age, when Israel, gloriously delivered from Egypt, found herself in the wilderness and promptly forgot God.

Our psalm seeks to restore the old vision and to place the hardships of the moment into their proper perspective under God's grace. Two things the people must realize: 1) The immediate problems that so depress them cannot compare in difficulty with the truly “impossible” situation that was theirs in exile; 2) The Lord, who by restoring them to their own land has miraculously reclaimed them as His own, can surely be trusted to remember them in problems far less difficult.

Recall the “great things” the Lord had done for them! They had been scattered through a vast realm, completely subjugated. Who could ever again rally them? Any such attempt would have been crushed as an act of rebellion. Though the prophets had spoken of return, the human impossibility of it had made them deeply aware of God's justice; surely they had forfeited forever all right to be called God's people! Therefore, when the proclamation was circulated under the seal of the Emperor, it was “like a dream.” What should move an absolute monarch to such unique concern for one despised people among the many nations scattered in captivity through his realm?

Why should he risk future insurrection, by rebuilding a stubborn and rebellious city (Ezra 4:12-16)? Why should a pagan ruler feel himself responsible for rebuilding the temple of the Lord, and why should he loot his own treasuries to return the precious vessels and instruments long ago carried as booty to Babylon? Even the nations marveled when they saw it (v. 2); and the Jews could not contain their joy and praise. "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad!" There is your perspective, cries the psalm! If the Lord has revealed Himself to us in such power and grace, will He forget us now? "Lord, here is a new 'captivity' (v. 4)! Thou who hast saved us once, save us again!"

"As the streams in the south (Negeb)." This was dry country, with no natural springs. Streams flowed when it rained, but dried completely in periods of drought. What shall the farmer do when the land is parched? Shall he withhold his little seed for fear of losing it in the ground? Or shall he, in spite of tears of anxiety, go forth, cast his whole future in the earth, so that it will be ready to receive the rain when God sends it? See Haggai's application, ch. 1:4-11. How can they expect to reap blessings if they do not sow in faith? Reason and human experience may weep in the face of hardships and doubts; but faith sows nevertheless. And as sure as God is still God, the faithful sower will return with new songs of triumphant praise, "bringing his sheaves with him."

The Day and Its Theme.—The propers look toward the second coming of Christ. The Epistle, 1 Thess. 4:13-18, sees it primarily as a climax of joy and victory to the believers; the Gospel, Matt. 24:15-28, emphasizes its dread to the ungodly. The theme, as related to the text, may be stated: "The church's hope for every future deliverance rests in the God who has already redeemed sinners in Christ."

Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The "great thing" God has done for us is Christ. When Christ is truly the center of our thinking, all of life makes sense. Then, in moments of distress, we shall remember that the greatest problem of life is sin and unbelief within us, and from this we are already marvelously delivered. Surely, then, we shall not cease to praise and serve our God, but trust Him to deliver us also from the little "sufferings of this present time"!

Sin and Its Fruits, to be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The negative of the above, namely, 1) that we magnify present problems out of proportion, by failure to appreciate the condemning horror of our sin; 2) that we put God on trial, demanding that He solve the present evil, before we will truly love, trust, and serve Him; 3) that we thereby in our hearts forget the wonder of the "great things" God has done

for us, exalting the external and physical salvation above the internal and spiritual.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—To make sin and redemption the parallel to captivity and return, is not to turn the psalm into allegory. For the exiles the return was in itself pure Gospel—it was God telling them that all was forgiven, they were still His people; for their Messianic destiny was sacramentally attached to their possession of the promised land. God set the return, in which He for the sake of His chosen people marvelously interposed Himself into human affairs, as an historic event to which they should anchor their faith in His grace also for the future. Other such "anchors" in history were the call of Abraham, the Exodus, and the kingdom of David with the promises attached thereto. We, of course, have seen the ultimate such interposition of God into history, in the life, Passion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But in all this history there has been no change in the nature of grace itself, nor in the nature of God's saving purposes and promises, nor in the nature of the faith for which God yearns and pleads, nor in the nature of the unbelief which opposes itself every step of the way, nor in the nature of the transformation of heart which the Holy Spirit must work to make a blind, earth-bound, rebellious sinner a grateful and trusting child of God.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—Illustrations abound in the text and its history. Possible introduction: How important the rule of perspective is to the landscape artist; how much more important that we view our whole life from the perspective of God's grace in Christ. The NT parallel which most admirably summarizes the theme is Rom. 8:32 and its context: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

Outline

The Perspective of Grace

- I. "The Lord hath done great things for us" (vv. 1-3).
 - A. The miracle of the return. Its implications. Their praise.
 - B. The miracle of redemption. Its implications. Our praise.
- II. "Turn again our captivity."
 - A. The danger of forgetting.
 1. Like the Jews, we magnify the immediate problem out of proportion.
 2. Like them, we cease to glorify and trust God.

B. Remember: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."

1. Tears — earthly anxiety.
2. Sow — the activity of faith which keeps its perspective.
3. Reap — God's unfailing promise.

New Orleans, La.

PAUL G. BRETSCHER

THANKSGIVING DAY

DEUTERONOMY 28:1-10

The Text and Its Central Thought.—The setting for the text is memorable. The text is a part of the valedictory address of Moses. Now at the age of 120 years, having been the political and spiritual leader of God's people for 40 years, Moses addressed to them his parting words. "In sustained declamatory power, it stands unrivaled in the Old Testament." (Deuteronomy, *International Critical Commentary*, p. 303.)

Woven deep in the fabric of this text is the concept of the covenant relationship which God had established with His chosen people, Israel. This was a covenant of pure grace. In His mercy God had chosen Israel from among all the nations of the earth to be His own. He had pledged Himself to be their God and owned them His children. This covenant, of course, was centered in Christ, the promised Messiah. By giving them faith in this Savior, God made the Israelites individually His children. By faith He also empowered them to lead lives of gratitude.

On their part they were now to live according to His will. To live contrary to God's will would be tantamount to breaking the covenant. In order to encourage the Children of Israel to live in the covenant of grace, God in this text shows them the blessings that will follow upon their obedience. These blessings are purely rewards of grace. They are not payment for works performed (Rom. 4:4), but blessings of grace which God promises shall follow upon obedience. Cf. 1 Cor. 3:8; Matt. 5:12; 6:33; Luke 6:23, 35; Luke 14:14; 1 Tim. 4:8; Heb. 10:35; Matt. 19:29. — Matt. 19:27—20:16 is the *locus classicus* of Jesus' teaching on the subject of rewards. Luther explains the purpose of these promises of rewards:

But how, then, do you explain the many passages which speak of reward and merit? Of that we say to the common people that the promises of a reward are mighty consolations to the Christians. For after you have become a Christian . . . you will find that you must do and suffer much because of your faith and Baptism. . . . If, now,

He would let us remain without a word of consolation, we would despair because of this persecution and say: "Who wants to be a Christian, preach, and do good works? Is this to last eternally? Is it never going to change?" Here He steps up to us, consoles, strengthens us and says: "You are now in grace and God's children; although you must on that account suffer in the world, be not terrified, but be firm, do not permit these things to tire and weaken you, but let every man perform his own duty; he may fare badly, but that shall not be his loss; let him know that the kingdom of heaven is his and that he shall be richly repaid for it." (St. L. VII, 666ff., in F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, III, 58.)

The central thought of the text, therefore, is simply this: God's blessings follow obedience. Godliness is profitable.

This text is both clear and graphic. V.1 establishes the basis upon which God promises that blessings shall follow (cf. also v.9). "If thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord, thy God," refers to the hearing of faith. "To observe and to do all His commandments" refers to the fruits of faith in the lives of Christians. Without this faith and its fruits not blessing but curses will follow (cf. chapter 27). But with faith and its fruits, God's blessing in richest measure will "come on thee" (v.2). The expression v.2 "shall overtake thee" indicates that the blessings are personified as coming from behind the person and catching up with him.

The blessings themselves may be grouped in three classes: plenty, security, and pre-eminence. Vv.3-6 and 8 refer to promises of plenty. God will bless their industrial and commercial pursuits in the city and their agriculture in the field (v.3). They shall have many children, large flocks, and bountiful harvests (vv.4,8). Theirs shall be bountiful harvests of fruit (cf. v.5, "baskets"). The term "store" (v.5) is better translated "kneading troughs" and refers by metonymy to the rich provisions they shall have for preparing food for their tables.

The second blessing is security. V.6 indicates God's watchful care of them in their life. Even though enemies march against them in close battle array, they shall be thoroughly routed. They shall "flee before thee seven ways" (v.7). Seven is the number of completeness. So victorious shall they be that nations "shall be afraid of thee" (v.10).

The chief blessing is stated in v.9. The people of God shall remain a "holy people unto Himself." They shall remain God's own peculiar people, children of the covenant of grace, holy through Christ, the Savior. God will always remember His covenant which He established with their forefathers with an oath (v.9). (Cf. Gen.22:16; Heb. 6:17,18.) As such, they shall always be set on high above all nations

of the earth (v. 1). Moreover, all people will see that they are called by the name of the Lord (v. 10). God's name is called upon people when they are adopted by Him and made wholly His (Rom. 9:4).

What an encouragement these promises ought to be to Christians to live as children of the covenant!

The Day and Its Theme.—There is a close relationship between the propers for Thanksgiving Day and our text. The Introit calls upon us to praise the Lord. In the Collect we praise the Lord for His providing for all our wants, and pray that His Holy Spirit would lead us to express our gratitude through service. The Gospel, Luke 17:11-19, illustrates both ingratitude and gratitude; and the Epistle, 1 Tim. 2:1-8, encourages us to give thanks for all things. The theme for *Parish Activities*, Prayerful Giving, also lies close to the heart of the theme of the sermon.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The goal of the sermon is to persuade people that genuine thanksgiving is thanks-living. The promised blessings of God are to serve as incentives to Christians to demonstrate their faith in dedicated lives of gratitude.

Sin and Its Fruits to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Although the text does not catalog specific sins, yet in the very admonition to "hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord, thy God, to observe and to do all His commandments," lies the indictment that we do not always do that. In fact, the sin in us all is that we forget the voice of the Lord and do that which seems good in our own eyes. That is sin. Moreover, the context indicates that failure to observe God's commandments brings God's curse. (Cf. chapter 27.)

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—Expressions like "The Lord shall establish thee an holy nation unto Himself" (v. 9) and "Thou art called by the name of the Lord" (v. 10), directly invite the preaching of the explicit Gospel. We are holy before God only through Christ, our great High Priest. Moreover, when reference is made to the covenant relationship between Israel and God, the preacher must show that that covenant was in Christ.

Illustration. Examples of blessing following upon obedience abound in the Scriptures. The whole history of Israel in the wilderness indicates how the blessings of the Lord overtook His people in time of need. One thinks also of how often God spoke reassuringly to Paul in crisis hours of his life. Illustrations of gratitude are found in the leper (Luke 17:11-19) and in Jacob (Gen. 28:20-22).

Outline

Let Thanks Demonstrate Faith

- I. God's covenant of grace calls us to a life of thanks.
 - A. God, through Moses, is addressing His covenant people.
 - 1. God established the covenant of grace in Christ.
 - 2. Out of gratitude Christians are to carry out their part in the covenant.
 - B. The manner in which they are to show their gratitude.
 - 1. Hearken to God's voice, v. 1.
 - 2. Do all His commandments, vv. 1, 9.
- II. God promises to reward such a life.
 - A. The blessings enumerated.
 - 1. Plenty, vv. 3-6, 8.
 - 2. Security, vv. 7, 10.
 - 3. Pre-eminence, vv. 9, 10.
 - B. These blessings are rewards of grace.
 - 1. No work-righteousness here.
 - 2. But gracious promises to encourage us to do what God wants us to do.

Springfield, Ill.

HENRY J. EGGOLD

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ZEPHANIAH 3:8, 9

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Zephaniah might well be called “the prophet’s prophet” for in his brief book he has condensed the heart of all prophetic utterances, namely that God punishes wickedness so that true religion might be built up (2:11). V. 8 belongs to the second major portion of the prophecy, in which the people were called to repent, and v. 9 belongs to the final portion, in which the prophet announced the final deliverance and salvation of God’s people. Thus the central thought of these two verses becomes a capsule statement of all true prophetic preaching and should be stated as follows: Believers trust in the Lord with repentant hearts, and they view all temporal judgments as parts of God’s plan to spread His kingdom.

The invitation contained in v. 8 is intended only for believers, for *נִפְרִי לִי*, “wait for me,” is only used for waiting in a believing attitude

for the Lord and His help (Ps. 33:20; Is. 8:17 especially; 30:18). The phrase "I will rise up to the prey" has been rendered in many ways. The LXX translates that the Lord will rise up εἰς μαρτύριον, "for a witness." Jerome translated it *in perpetuum*, and thus followed the majority of Jewish commentators who had always understood this verse as a specific reference to the glorious restitution which the Messiah would bring to the Jews forever. Calvin limited the expression to the Lord's punitive judgment, likening it to the lion who tears his prey to pieces. Keil explains it as a reference to the "booty" of saved souls which will fall to the Lord as He pours out His indignations. The Hebrew usage and the context, plus New Testament parallels (Acts 15:14), support this meaning. "Determination," according to Keil, means the Lord's justice, which becomes unforgettably clear as He punishes the hardened sinners and converts the elect to Himself. "Jealousy" here, as so often in the Old Testament, should be translated "zeal."

V.9 begins with an explanatory וְ by which the promise is connected with the threat of the preceding verse. Believers are to wait for the judgment, knowing that it will bring them redemption. Many commentators, including Luther, have explained "pure language" in the sense that the Lord will speak to the Gentiles in a clear and unmistakable language after He had visited them in judgment "to call them all in the name of Jehovah, that they may serve Him as one man" (Luther). But Keil says בְּרִירָה does not mean intelligible, but rather pure, purified, sinless. Is. 6:5 would be an important parallel passage. The lip is simply the organ by which a man expresses the thoughts of his heart, and so the phrase speaks of the conversion and resultant sanctification of the Gentiles. With their purified lips they shall call upon the name of Jehovah in a solemn and hearty manner instead of polluting their lips with the names of idols as they had formerly done (1:4,5). "To serve with one shoulder" (literally) is to serve together with unanimity as a group of men might work together to carry a heavy burden.

These two verses are thoroughly Messianic. The judgment of the Lord was not limited to the invasion of the Chaldeans (remember, though, that Zephaniah never bothers to identify the Lord's instrument), but was to continue through the time of Christ and down to the final Judgment. The men with pure lips and willing shoulders are those of all periods who have been brought into Christ's kingdom and who have been made willing in the day of His power.

The Day and Its Theme.— All the propers for the day direct our attention to the coming Judgment. The theme suggested for this series

of studies is "Trust in God for Endurance to the End." This thought lends itself well also for the development of the text into a sermon.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To sharpen our people's thinking concerning God's present and future judgments upon wickedness and to lead them to a greater appreciation of His gracious plan to deliver all men from this judgment through Christ, so that they may be led to call upon Him with pure lips and to serve Him with one consent until the final Judgment breaks upon them.

Sin and Its Fruits to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The current religious *Leitmotif* of the "cult of reassurance" that God is only love and that it is wrong to associate any thoughts of judgment with Him (Ferré, Peale, etc.). Any vain confidence that we have merited deliverance by churchgoing, giving, or working. Lip worship given to God and to idols of pleasure, convenience, and security at the same time. Our own failure to keep God's grand world-wide plan of salvation uppermost in our minds at all times. Our weak faith which keeps us from waiting completely upon the Lord at all times.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—These two verses point clearly to the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The description of judgment takes our thoughts at once to God's great judgment upon sin, Calvary. The victorious note of v. 9 finds its New Testament confirmation in the resurrection story. The deliverance from judgment comes only through personal faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—"I will rise up to the prey." Compare Luke 1:68; Acts 15:14; Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:29; Rev. 7:9. The role of judgment in building the Lord's kingdom. See Jude 15; 2 Thess. 1:7, 8; Heb. 10:27; Rev. 6:17. Compare also all the propers listed for this day. God's justice will be manifested in His judgment. See Rom. 2:2, 5; 2 Thess. 1:5; Rev. 16:5.

Outline

Introduction: Too many of us have made the Old Testament a closed book. As a result we have forgotten the prophetic message of judgment preceding redemption. God is both a God of love and a God of wrath.

I. The Lord's judgments are terrible.

- A. In Zephaniah's prophecy. 1:1-4, 15, 18; 2:8-11. Travelers generally agree that the ancient territory of the Moabites is today one of the most desolate areas in the world. Nineveh also lies in ruins.

- B. His judgment against sin. Calvary.
 C. The final Judgment. "Depart from Me."
- II. The Lord's gracious purpose is unchanging.
 Even calamity serves this gracious purpose of the world-wide kingdom. *Opus alienum — opus proprium.*
- III. Therefore, trust in the Lord always.
 A. Make the Christian Church your place of refuge.
 B. Find your joy in calling upon Him with pure lips and in serving Him with one consent.
 C. Look forward to the final Day of the Lord.
- Janesville, Wis. HERBERT T. MAYER
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The Series of Sermon Studies for the New Church Year

Beginning with the First Sunday in Advent, the format of the homiletical materials in the CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY will revert to outlines somewhat ampler in length than the past. The texts will be the Ranke Series of Epistle Pericopes.

The Ranke Series is noteworthy for its long texts. Many preachers find long texts troublesome. Yet they are useful for supplying rich material that deepens the preacher's own preliminary understanding. They are useful provided that the preacher fastens upon a unified central thought and devotes his chief concern to the major message of the text.

Sometimes long sermon texts do not lend themselves for reading to the congregation as it stands prior to the sermon. Where the congregation has the custom of being seated during the text, this presents no problem. Contributors are asked to suggest a brief extract or extracts of the text suitable for reading at the start of the sermon.

TEXTS OF SERMON STUDIES FOR 1956—1957

Date	Day	Text
December 2, 1956	1 Ad.	Col. 1:16-23
December 9, 1956	2 Ad.	Rom. 1:16-25
December 16, 1956	3 Ad.	1 Peter 1:3-12
December 23, 1956	4 Ad.	Rom. 2:1-12
December 25, 1956	Chris.	Heb. 1:1-12

December 30, 1956	S. a. Chris.	Heb. 3:1-6
January 1, 1957	N. Y.	1 Peter 2:1-10
January 6, 1957	Epiph.	Rom. 3:23-31
January 13, 1957	1 a. E.	Rom. 4:16-25
January 20, 1957	2 a. E.	Rom. 5:1-5
January 27, 1957	3 a. E.	Rom. 8:1-11
February 3, 1957	4 a. E.	1 Cor. 2:1-10
February 10, 1957	Transfig.	Rom. 13:1-7
February 17, 1957	Sept.	2 Cor. 8:1-9
February 24, 1957	Sexa.	Rom. 14:13-19
March 3, 1957	Quinq.	Rom. 10:8-18
March 10, 1957	Invoc.	Heb. 12:1-3
March 17, 1957	Rem.	Rom. 8:28-39
March 24, 1957	Ocu.	2 Cor. 4:7-14
March 31, 1957	Lae.	2 Cor. 5:14-21
April 7, 1957	Jud.	1 Peter 1:13-21
April 14, 1957	Palm S.	1 Peter 4:1-6
April 18, 1957	M. Thur.	1 Cor. 11:26-29
April 19, 1957	G. Fri.	Rev. 5:1-14
April 21, 1957	Easter	1 Cor. 15:20-28
April 28, 1957	Quas.	1 Cor. 15:50-57
May 5, 1957	Mis. D.	1 John 1:1-7
May 12, 1957	Jub.	1 John 2:12-17
May 19, 1957	Cant.	1 John 3:1-8
May 26, 1957	Rog.	1 John 5:12-21
May 30, 1957	Asc.	Eph. 4:7-13
June 2, 1957	Ex.	Eph. 4:14-16
June 9, 1957	Pent.	Acts 2:1-21
June 16, 1957	Tr.	Eph. 1:3-14
June 23, 1957	1 a. Tr.	Acts 2:42-47
June 30, 1957	2 a. Tr.	Acts 3:1-9
July 7, 1957	3 a. Tr.	Acts 3:9-26
July 14, 1957	4 a. Tr.	Acts 4:1-22
July 21, 1957	5 a. Tr.	Acts 4:23-31
July 28, 1957	6 a. Tr.	Acts 4:32—5, 11
August 4, 1957	7 a. Tr.	Acts 5:12-24
August 11, 1957	8 a. Tr.	Acts 6:1-7
August 18, 1957	9 a. Tr.	Acts 7:51-59

August 25, 1957	10 a. Tr.	Acts 8:1-8
September 1, 1957	11 a. Tr.	Acts 8:9-25
September 8, 1957	12 a. Tr.	Acts 8:26-38
September 15, 1957	13 a. Tr.	Acts 9:1-22
September 22, 1957	14 a. Tr.	Acts 11:1-18
September 29, 1957	15 a. Tr.	Acts 14:1-20
October 6, 1957	16 a. Tr.	Acts 16:13-40
October 13, 1957	17 a. Tr.	Acts 17:15-34
October 20, 1957	18 a. Tr.	Acts 20:17-38
October 27, 1957	19 a. Tr.	Acts 28:16-31
October 31, 1957	Reforma.	2 Cor. 3:12-18
November 3, 1957	20 a. Tr.	Rev. 2:1-7
November 10, 1957	21 a. Tr.	Rev. 2:8-11
November 17, 1957	22 a. Tr.	Rev. 3:1-6
November 24, 1957	23 a. Tr.	Rev. 3:14-22
November 28, 1957	Harv.	1 Tim. 6:6-10