

Preaching from the Greek New Testament

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SOME four hundred and fifty years ago, in his Preface to his Greek Testament, which became the standard for three hundred years in spite of the haste and imperfections connected with it, Erasmus expressed his delight as follows: "These holy pages will summon up the living image of Christ's mind. They will give you Christ Himself, talking, healing, dying, rising—the whole Christ, in a word. They will give Him to you in an intimacy so close that He would be less visible to you if He stood before your eyes."

For a constantly fresh and perennially new presentation of Jesus Christ and the good news of His redemption, nothing can take the place of preaching from the Greek Testament. And that for several reasons.

The Greek language has been called "the most perfect vehicle for human expression ever devised." The Greek language, with all its charm and beauty and variety, has not only tones, but undertones and overtones, delicate phrasings and subtle expressions which cannot be reproduced in other languages except perhaps by paraphrasing. No translation of the Greek Testament can fully transmit the liveliness and vigor, the delicate turns of thought, and the subtle variations found in the nouns and verbs, the prepositions and particles found in the original Greek text. The real freshness and sweetness of the peach cannot be preserved by any freezing or canning process. But to take a sun-kissed and sun-ripened peach directly from the tree and eat it—this is a real joy and delight.

So it is with the preacher and his preaching from the Greek Testament. He, too, is gathering ripe fruit to share with his hearers. What joy and delight, what freshness and originality, in expound-

ing the living Word each week to his people, will be his if he will first invest a few hours of working in, and with, his Greek Testament!

Will it surprise you when we state that the Greek Testament has many homiletical hints and suggestions, sermons hidden away in nouns and verbs, pictures in prepositions and particles, which may readily be found by him who is willing to search? The observance of these delicate and precise shadings will add liveliness and vigor to our preaching.

Or would you wish to deny what Marvin R. Vincent in the Preface to the first volume of his *Word Studies in the New Testament* affirms? He says: "Even as nature fills in the space between the foreground and the background of her landscapes with countless details of form and color, light and shadow, so the rich details of New Testament words, once apprehended, impart a depth of tone and just relation and perspective to the salient masses of doctrine, narrative and prophecy. . . . How often a picture or a bit of history is hidden away in a word, of which a translation gives and can give no hint!" As a rose when plucked loses its beauty and the fragrance is soon blown away, so there perishes in translation that fleeting indescribable something that makes Greek one of the noblest languages.

Preaching from the Greek New Testament — is that too high an attainment for preachers in this day and age? Is the time and effort required for such study and preparation too high a price to pay in our busy day? It is rumored that the modern minister no longer has a study. Now he has an office. He who in former years was a pastor and preacher is now an executive, guiding and directing countless organizations and innumerable activities.

Few laymen understand the many tasks and jobs which clamor for the modern preacher's time and attention today. Much of modern ministerial life and activity is like a merry-go-round. There is swift and pleasant motion. There is lilting music, but often it doesn't get us anywhere. We ride a while on the organizational merry-go-round, and we get off at the same place where we got on. The modern preacher is busy — none can question that fact — going places and doing things, but what of the depth and lasting value of his many-sided activities? It was Jowett who said: "I am

profoundly convinced that one of the gravest perils which beset the ministry of this country is a scattering of energies over an amazing multiplicity of interests, which leave no margin of time and strength for receptive and absorbing communion with God."

And so the summons of the Lord comes to us anew "to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" our Greek Testament and permit some of its power and strength, some of its beauty and charm, to be revealed in our holding Jesus Christ and Him crucified before the eyes of the people entrusted to our care. There comes the call again to put first things first and bring the Bread of Life to hungry souls with all its freshness and life-giving qualities.

In the following we propose to show from here and there in the Greek Testament that A. T. Robertson was right when he said: "There is no sphere of knowledge where one is repaid more quickly for all the toil expended" than in a study of the Greek Testament.

It is especially in its tenses that Greek is often unapproachable by modern languages. A slight change in the verb distinguishes at once an action which is inceptive or continuous from one which is complete in idea and execution. Thus, when we read in John 19:2,3: "The soldiers arrayed Him in a purple garment; and they came unto Him and said, Hail, King of the Jews!" there is in the King James translation no distinction in the verb tenses. But the Greek, by a simple and most natural change of tenses, draws a vivid picture of the stream of soldiers who *continued* coming one after another to do mock homage to the King invested in the imperial robe. The Greek for "they came" is the imperfect middle of repeated action. "They *kept coming* and *kept saying*, Hail, King of the Jews!"

Or notice the sermon to be found in the Greek of Romans 6:13 which is translated in the King James translation: "Neither present your members unto sin, but present yourselves unto God." The distinction in the Greek between the successive and repeated and continuous acts of sin and the one supreme act of self-surrender which carries all else with it is of necessity lost. The Greek word in the first "present" is *παριστάνετε*, the simple present imperative, and denotes a repeated and continuous action. The Greek word for "presenting yourselves to God" is *παραστήσατε* and is the aorist imperative.

Again, how rich and rewarding a careful observance of the Greek tenses can be is seen in John 2:16, which reads: "Ἀρατε ταῦτα ἐντεῦθεν, μὴ ποιεῖτε τὸν οἶκον τοῦ πατρὸς μου οἶκον ἐμπορίου." "Take these things hence." The aorist imperative is used, denoting a single action. "Do not continue to make my Father's house a house of merchandise." Here the simple present is used, indicating that their action had been going on for some time. This was now to stop, once and for all time.

Have you ever noticed the different emphases found in the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer as recorded by Matthew and Luke? In Matthew 6:11 we read: Τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον. In Luke 11:3 this same petition reads: Τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δίδου ἡμῖν τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν. In both Matthew and Luke the verb δίδωμι is used. But whereas in Matthew we have the second aorist active imperative, in Luke we find the present active imperative. The aorist imperative denotes the single action of giving for today. In Luke the present imperative indicates an entreaty to continue to do an act, to do it day after day, continuously. Luke stresses that God's children wish Him to *continue* giving us our daily bread. Matthew stresses that we children of our heavenly Father are to set our minds at rest and keep them free from worry and anxiety by asking God to give us our *daily* bread for *today*.

Or take the seemingly insignificant particle *τι* found in John 4:29. Evidently the Samaritan woman, already convinced of the Messiahship of Him who had spoken to her at the well, uses μήτι to avoid a controversy, but at the same time to pique the interest and arouse the curiosity of her fellow townsmen: μήτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Χριστός; "This isn't the Christ, is it?" "He is not the Messiah, is He?" As for herself, she is already convinced that this is the Christ. And so with feminine skill she puts her question to the people in the village in a somewhat hesitant and quizzical form to avoid arousing opposition and yet to arouse their interest and attention. A touch of womanly hesitancy is added to the answer which is expected by adding the particle *τι*. Goodspeed translates: "Do you suppose He is the Christ?" It was an adroit procedure on her part, and it succeeded admirably as the concluding verses of this chapter show.

In Greek the simple μή is used to introduce a question expecting a negative answer, while the negative οὐ is used to introduce a question where an affirmative answer is expected. For instance, Luke 17:17 reads in the Greek: οὐχ οἱ δέκα ἐκαθαρίσθησαν; "Were there not ten cleansed?" Of course there were, and the answer is an emphatic "Yes, there were ten."

When the emphatic form οὐχί introduces a question, it insists on an affirmative answer. Matt. 12:11 reads: οὐχὶ κρατήσῃ αὐτὸ καὶ ἐγερεῖ; "Will he not take it and lift it out?" Jesus' point is: "Of course he will. A man will rescue his sheep on the Sabbath. No one would do otherwise. This is self-evident. Why, then, should not I rescue a man on the Sabbath?"

How helpful in expounding the message of Jesus' suffering and death would be, for instance, a study of the Greek text in Luke 22!

In v. 2 of this chapter the King James translation reads: "And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill Him." The Greek word for "sought" is ἐζήτουν. It is the imperfect and denotes continued action. "They were seeking [they kept on looking for] a plan whereby they might kill Him." Their attempt to kill was not one single act but a continuous plotting. The Greek word reveals their determination and their persistence in their evil plan and desire. Goodspeed has: "And the high priests and scribes were casting about for a way to put Him to death."

In v. 6 we are told that Judas agreed to betray the Master into their hands. We do not have merely ὁμολογοῦμαι, but ἐξωμολόγησεν. The addition of the preposition ἐκ indicates that his agreement came from the heart, freely, openly, voluntarily. It indicates that Judas was willing and ready to make this agreement with them and that he of his own will and volition promised to betray Him into their hands.

In v. 25 we read: "And they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors." Numerous papyrus documents brought to light in recent years reveal that many of the rulers of that day added to their official title the name Εὐεργέτης. The word really should be capitalized in the English. And when we recall some of the terms of affection and endearment which the Nazis heaped

upon Hitler and the Communists upon Stalin, we are reminded by the Savior's word here in v. 25 that there is nothing new under the sun.

Look at v. 28. "Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations." In the Greek we have not merely μένω which means "to remain," but we have the stronger word διαμένω. "You have remained with Me *through* all my temptations. You stayed with Me continuously. Others have come and gone. You stood by Me through it all." Phillips translates: "But you are the men who have stood by Me in all that I have gone through."

Or see the sermon on prayer tucked away in v. 40, which reads in the King James translation: "Pray that ye enter not into temptation." The Greek word for "pray" indicates that the Lord asked them to keep on praying. "Keep on praying not to enter (ingressive aorist, εἰσελθεῖν), not even once, into temptation." And in v. 41, where the imperfect tense is used, we are reminded that our Savior began to pray and then continued to pray.

In v. 48 the Greek has φιλήματι τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδίδως; Notice the emphatic position of "with a kiss." "With a kiss do you betray Me?" To betray Him was sad enough, but to betray Him with the sign of a friend was worse.

In v. 56 we have τὸ φῶς, the word for light which is never used of the fire itself, but of the light of the fire. This is the point to which the evangelist Luke directs our attention. The light of the fire shining on Peter's face called forth the challenge of the maid to Peter. She gazed intently upon Peter as the light of the fire played on his countenance and lighted up the features of his face so that she could recognize him as one of His disciples.

The Greek word in v. 61 is ὑπεμνήσθη, which is translated in the King James translation, "And Peter remembered." The Greek preposition added to the verb indicates the giving of a suggestion or a hint. Peter was put into remembrance. Phillips translates as follows: "And into his mind flashed the words that the Lord had said to him."

The Greek word for "mocked" in v. 63 is ἐνέπαιζον. It points out that these men began to act like little boys and had their fun with Jesus. They began to make and have their sport with Him, like little boys. And the imperfect tense here reminds us that they

continued their making sport with Him. Phillips comes close to the Greek when he translates, "The men who held Jesus made a great game of knocking Him about."

Any other chapter from the Greek Testament would be equally rich and rewarding in finding homiletical hints and sermons in the many pictures hidden away in the Greek nouns and verbs.

May we conclude with a word from Vincent, taken from his Preface to the first volume of his *Word Studies in the New Testament*? His statement is: "It is said that there was discovered, some years ago, in one of our Western States, a magnificent geode, which on being broken, disclosed a mass of crystals arranged in the form of a cross. It will be a great joy to me, if by this attempt to break the shell of these words of life, and to lay bare their hidden jewels, I may help a Bible student here and there to a clearer vision of that cross which is the center and the glory of the Gospel."

And so my plea is: Preach from the Greek Testament. Use it. Study it. Give it your best hours and your best effort as a preacher. There are many rewards for him who is willing to seek and search diligently and faithfully. An added thrill in bringing to dying men the living word will be yours. Your preaching will be original, fresh, and vigorous, and it will have power and charm. Your Greek Testament is a real mine with gold and diamonds to be found by the diligent miner. And may we pray: "O Almighty God, who by Thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to Thy holy Apostles many excellent gifts and commandedst them earnestly to feed Thy flock, make, we beseech Thee, all pastors diligently to preach Thy holy Word and the people obediently to follow the same that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Our Lord. Amen."

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