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Outlines on the Wuerttemberg Gospel Selections

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Outlines on the Wuerttemberg Gospel Selections

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

John 4:19-26

Throughout the world men engage in what they regard as divine worship (churches, shrines, pagan temples, rituals of cults and savage tribes, schools and homes). How many of these are "true worshipers," such as "the Father seeketh" (v. 23)?

And what of our own worship, both in the house of God and in our private chambers? We take for granted that this is "true worship," a benefit to ourselves and an acceptable sacrifice to God. But is it? Let us judge our own worship in the light of the present passage, the first recorded teaching of Jesus on this important subject.

The Only True Worship of God

1. *Wherein it consists*

2. *What is required for it*

1

A) The woman realized that she was in the presence of a prophet. (Context, v. 19.) Hence she asked a question that had been troubling her, v. 20.

B) Instead of answering the woman directly, Jesus goes to the very heart of her problem. Fundamentally she has a wrong conception of what the worship of God really is. Hence Jesus instructs her on the *essence* of divine worship.

1) Jesus says: "*God is a Spirit*," v. 24. This fact must be basic in all our teaching on divine worship as well as in our worship itself. Since God does not have a body, He is not confined to any one place, be it Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem. He is omnipresent, Jer. 23:23, 24. Accordingly, the place where we worship is of no importance. The fact that our bodies are at one place or at another cannot bring us closer to God nor remove us farther from Him; for God is a spirit filling heaven and earth, and men can enter into communion with Him no matter where they may be, Acts 17:24.

2) True worship is essentially a matter of *the spirit*. Since God is a spirit, "they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit," v. 24. The spirit, the soul, the heart of man, must enter into communion with God; otherwise there can be no divine worship. Worship is a spiritual exercise and does not consist in repairing to temples, engaging in rituals, assuming worshipful postures, or speaking prayers. True, all these things, if properly used, may be an aid to divine worship, but in themselves they neither constitute worship nor represent an integral part of it, Acts 17:25.

3) However, before there can be such an intimate spiritual communion between man and God, there must be *harmony* between them. "There must be harmony between God and His worshipers; such as God is must His worship be. This is according to a principle which prevails throughout the universe: we look for correspondence between an object and the organ to which it reveals or yields itself. The eye has an inner fitness for the light, the ear for sound. The man who would truly worship God, would find and know and possess and enjoy God, must be in harmony with Him, must have a capacity for receiving Him. Because God is *spirit*, we must worship *in spirit*. As God is, so His worshiper." (Andrew Murray.)

Application. — Do we always realize this? Do we not often act as though the mere going to church, singing hymns, reading the Bible, speaking prayers and engaging in religious ceremonies were in themselves true acts of worship? No one can deny that we are inclined to emphasize the external features of our worship at the expense of its very essence, the spiritual communion with God. In some respects we are still in danger of drifting into the position of the Samaritan woman. Let us therefore stress the spiritual side of our worship and strive always to worship God in spirit.

But what is required for such genuine spiritual worship?

2

A) *Sincerity.* This is implied in the words "in spirit," v. 24. A mere mechanical recitation of prayers and an external performance of ceremonies is no worship at all. True worship always springs from the heart, Matt. 7:21; 15:8.

B) However, sincerity is not enough. Untold numbers of persons worship with the utmost sincerity, and yet their worship is in vain, for it is not the kind of worship that "the Father seeketh," v. 23. If we would worship "in spirit," we must worship "in truth," v. 24. This implies —

1. That we do not worship an unknown god, as certain Greeks did in the day of Paul, Acts 17:23, and as the Samaritan woman did, v. 22. In other words, we must bring our spiritual sacrifices to a God whom we have learned to know and love as our Father.

2) This is possible only through Jesus, v. 26. He alone is the Truth, John 14:6, and only through and in Him can we worship God in truth, John 16:23; Matt. 21:22.

3) A mere intellectual knowledge of the teachings of Jesus or the mechanical repetition of His name will not suffice, however. In order to worship God "in spirit and in truth," we must have

entered into spiritual communion with Him by faith in Christ Jesus. Without saving faith, which, after all, is something far superior to mere confidence in God, there can be no true worship. Worshiping in the name of Jesus presupposes believing in Him as our Savior.

Conclusion. — Recapitulation. May we give due and continual attention to our worship of God, so that with His help we may ever become more successful as true worshippers!

E. J. FRIEDRICH

Septuagesima

Matt. 11:16-24

John the Baptist's embassy to Christ gave opportunity for instruction concerning the great ministry of the forerunner, Matt. 11:1-15, but also for a reprimand because of the refusal of the Jews to accept either John's or Christ's ministry, and an admonition to repentance.

Christ's Warning against Despising God's Word

1. *He complained against the generation of His day*
2. *He upbraided the cities which had witnessed special grace*

1

The generation of Christ's day enjoyed God's special favor. The greatest preachers of all time, Jesus and John (Matt. 11:11), preached among them. Prophets had emphasized the exceptional greatness of that day. Is. 40:1-11; Mal. 3:1; Is. 9:2-7; . 61:1-3 (cf. Luke 4:17-19); Is. 11; Amos 9:11, 12; Micah 5:1-3.

John had begun his brief but remarkable ministry about six months before Christ was baptized by him. John was very austere, rigid in his personal discipline, odd in appearance, refusing to indulge in strong drink and rich food, v. 18; Luke 1:15; Matt. 3:4; 9:14. Jesus, however, "came eating and drinking," v. 19. He did not distinguish Himself from ordinary men, did not preach and practice abstinence, but was sociable, mingled with men, wore customary clothing, and partook of food and drink as other men do.

Christ's generation, especially those influenced by pharisaism, rejected both John and Jesus. They said John had a devil, v. 18. They did not want to hear his call to repentance, Matt. 3:7-12. — They called Jesus a glutton and wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, v. 18; Matt. 9:10-13; Luke 7:39; Luke 15. They resented the thought of salvation by grace. They wanted no Savior from sin.

Jesus likened "this generation" to the foolish, capricious children of the streets and the market-places, vv. 16, 17, never willing

to do what others desire, but acting very selfishly. "This generation" was centered upon self, upon earthly affairs.

The world today presents the same classes of people. They want neither John nor Jesus. John's preaching of the Law hurts their feelings. Jesus' salvation for the helpless sinner is even more repulsive to them. Take to heart Christ's warning!

2

Chorazin and Bethsaida were cities near Capernaum which Jesus often touched on His journeys. Their people had heard the impressive sermons of Christ repeatedly. They had also witnessed some of His mighty miracles, Mark 6:45; 8:22; Luke 9:10; John 6:1-13. However, they had not heeded His call nor regarded His miracles. Tyre and Sidon, coast cities, notoriously wicked, against which God's curse had been prophesied, Is. 23:1; Ezek. 26:2-3; 27:2; Zech. 9:2; Jer. 25:22; 27:3; Joel 3:9, would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes, v. 21. What an inexcusable rejection of God's grace!

Capernaum, Christ's headquarters during the greater part of His active ministry, had surely experienced a superabundant outpouring of God's grace. Her people had heard many sermons and seen many outstanding miracles of Christ. However, they had rejected God's grace. Extremely wicked Sodom "would have remained until this day" if it had witnessed such mighty works.

Jesus emphasized the serious consequences for the cities that despised God's grace, vv. 22, 24. The greater the grace, the greater is the responsibility, and the more severe will be the judgment for those who neglect it.

Our day is noted for despising God's grace: worldly-mindedness, indifference to church attendance and Holy Communion, Sunday-school, Bible classes, unbelief, ridicule of sacred things, denial of miracles, etc. Are these things making inroads upon our churches? Let us be warned. God's grace is bestowed upon us for a definite purpose—our salvation. We shall obtain salvation only by God's grace. (Luther's explanation of the Third Commandment.)

J. W. BEENKEN

Sexagesima

John 8:21-29

In the passage preceding our text we find the Jews, especially those of the ruling class, in repeated altercation with Jesus in an endeavor to trap Him. How eager and determined they were to put Him out of the way! Always they are unsuccessful. Do they not finally desist from further attempts? No. In this text we again find them in an altercation with Him. How do they fare?

The Jews in Their Altercation with Jesus

1. *They are warned against their sin of unbelief*
2. *They are made to feel that their unbelief is without excuse*
3. *They are warned of the disaster which their unbelief will bring upon them*

1

Vv. 21-24. "I go My way." You Jews may plot and scheme, yet I am going of My own free will and accord. Jesus does not tell the Jews where He is going. That was not necessary; He has told them before. The time will come when ye shall seek Me in despair. Too late. What a warning against their unbelief! They ignore it and catch merely at His last words, saying: v. 22. Jesus pays no attention to their remarks but proceeds to repeat and stress His warning, v. 23. Their origin is mundane, His is heavenly, divine. He has come into their midst to save them and is well able to do so. If they reject Him, they shall die in their sins. They need not; there is still a way of escape. Jesus is not only warning them against their unbelief; His heart goes out to them in sympathy and mercy; He would still win them over.

The unbelieving world of today is also engaged in an altercation with Jesus, rejecting, denying, ridiculing His statements in His Word. Christ is warning them, pointing out to them to what their unbelief must inevitably lead. At the same time He is pleading with them to turn to Him for salvation before it is too late.—We are Christians. Are we? Let us make sure of it, 2 Cor. 13:5. And then we are ever exposed to the danger of apostasy, 1 Pet. 5:8. We are surrounded by the unbelieving world; the voice of unbelief presses into our homes over the radio. Our own reason is always ready to engage in an altercation with Jesus and His Word. Let us heed the warning of Jesus against unbelief. The day of grace, still before us, will soon be spent.

2

V. 25. The Jews, especially their leaders, make no excuse for their unbelief. They have none. But they are made to feel the impossibility of an excuse. The very fact that they try to sidestep the warning of Jesus, v. 22, shows that they are at a loss for an excuse. And then v. 25. They do not here ask for further information regarding the person of Christ. He has told them often enough and is just now telling them. This is rather a sneer, "You, who are you anyway?"—That is the way of unbelievers today. They make no excuse because they have none. When pressed, they change the subject or strike at some minor point to avoid the warning against their unbelief. At last they take to

ridicule and vituperation. Frequently they try to stifle their inner conviction by loud mouthings. There simply is no excuse for unbelief.

Vv. 26, 27. Jesus need not say anything more about Himself, but He has many things to say and to judge of them, especially that they do not believe. And what He says is true, for He that sent Him is true; and Jesus says only those things which He heard of Him who sent Him. What excuse is there for disbelieving the truth? — Christ is speaking the truth in the world today through the Bible, Christian preachers, testimony of Christians, etc. What excuse can be offered today for rejecting the truth, especially the truth of salvation in Christ? What excuse can we who have the Word of Truth in such abundance offer if we yield to unbelief?

3

Vv. 28, 29. Even though the Jews lift up the Son of Man on the cross, they cannot bring disaster upon *Him*; for He does always those things which please the Father, also in giving up His life. The Father has not left Him alone; the two are always together. By crucifying Jesus, the enemies cannot separate Him from the Father. He is carrying out the work for which He has been sent. His work will be done even though they try to frustrate it. As the Father has taught Him, He speaks these things, and they cannot hush His voice. — All unbelievers should bear this in mind. The work of Christ and of His Word will go on; He will continue to build and expand His kingdom in spite of the machinations, vilifications, and loud mouthings of all unbelievers.

The Jews are bringing disaster only upon *themselves*. When they will have lifted up the Son of Man, they will know that He is the Son of God and the Savior of mankind. But then their realization will be too late. Having rejected the only Savior and having died in their sins, they have then to face the Judge. Eternal disaster will be their well-deserved doom. — That will be the lot of all unbelievers. They die in their sins, perish, sink into eternal torment. — Is there a lesson in this for us? Indeed. What else have we to look forward to if we yield to unbelief? Watch and pray; use means of grace diligently; be faithful unto death. Then not disaster but eternal bliss.

R. NEITZEL

Quinquagesima

Matt. 16:21-23

Quinquagesima Sunday the door to the Lenten season when we, in special services, begin to show forth (v. 21) the sufferings and death of our Savior. If these special meditations are to bring

us spiritual blessings, we must not attempt to judge these things according to our reason but view them in the light of God's revelation. And that is the lesson contained in our text.

How must We Study the Passion of Christ?

- 1. We must not permit our reason to judge it*
- 2. We must view it in the light of God's revelation*

1

V. 21. The God-appointed time when His only-begotten Son should give His life for the salvation of sinners was at hand. Having thoroughly shown His disciples that in Him the prophecies of the Old Testament find their fulfilment, Jesus now begins to tell them in detail what would soon happen to Him. The highest court in Israel would prosecute Him for teaching a false religion. It would make Him suffer and die; but He would be raised again on the third day. Jesus is here speaking of His forthcoming Passion.

The reaction of the disciples. Impulsive Peter is their spokesman, v. 22. He is startled, shocked, stunned, so much so that what Jesus said about His resurrection escaped his notice. He takes the Lord aside and vehemently admonishes Him. God be merciful to Thee, the good Lord help Thee from this! What Jesus has told the disciples is repulsive to his reason.

V. 23. Never before had Jesus spoken so severely to one of His disciples. He calls Peter Satan. He saw that Satan used Peter as his tool to prevent Jesus from saving the world. Thus Peter, as a tool of Satan, became a trap, a snare, for our Savior. He was also proud. He would be wiser than his Lord. The Lord must be the fool who does not know how to avoid danger. How impertinent and arrogant is Peter!

And all this because he permitted his reason to pass judgment on the Passion of Christ. By thinking the things that are of men, by viewing the story of the Passion of Christ in the light of human reason, he follows the promptings of the devil and thereby destroys salvation for himself. That is the very thing the Jews did. Therefore they became the murderers of the Prince of Life.

The Modernists also take the heart out of the Christian religion by refusing to accept salvation by the atoning suffering and death of Christ. They are proud in their imagined wisdom, and the Bible must be wrong. The crucified Christ is unto the Jews a stumbling-block and unto the Greeks foolishness, 1 Cor. 1:23. Yes, the Passion of Christ is repulsive to our reason. Therefore we must beware lest our reason become Satan's tool and destructively criticize what God has ordained for our salvation.

2

V. 23. Christ tells Peter that he should have savored the things that are of God. When He explained to him the coming events, His suffering at the hands of the Jews, he should have, though startled and perplexed, restrained his reason. Reason, be still; the Lord is speaking. I shall ask Him to explain why He lets all these terrible things happen to Him. Lord, why must Thou go to Jerusalem? What is the purpose, etc.? And the Lord could have reminded Peter of instructions given before, could have spoken of great prophecies, such as Is. 53, and explained the wonderful plan of merciful God to save the lost and condemned sinners. Yes, the time soon came when Peter and his fellow-disciples understood this merciful plan and became eloquent and convincing preachers of the Gospel of grace for sinners by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

What our reason cannot comprehend God has revealed to us. In the light of this divine revelation we must view the Passion of Christ. Then we shall accompany our Savior on His way from Gethsemane to Golgotha as such as realize that it is our sins for which He suffers and dies, but that just in this way we are saved from death and damnation. His resurrection is proof for it. And we shall rejoice in our salvation, praise Him, love Him, and become eager to tell all the world about this wonderful plan of God.

H. J. BOUMAN

