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Outlines on the Wuerttemberg Gospel Selections

Martin Sommer

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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And so, though the rationalist's insistence on reason may yield but a deistic concept of God, devoid of religious significance, and while the appeal to religious experience for the demonstration of theism involves a begging of the question and is veiled in many uncertainties due to the impossibility to distinguish between genuine and fallacious experiences, there is accumulating a great volume of insight into the constitution of matter and the phenomena of life which compel the student of science to acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Being, the Creator of all things. For the believer in Scripture there is a validation higher than that of any human philosophy. He knows God not only as the Absolute but as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that by an inner witness-bearing, which comes with an assurance given by the Holy Spirit, who "beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God," Rom. 8:16.

THEODORE GRAEBNER

Outlines on the Wuerttemberg Gospel Selections

Invocavit

John 2:13-22

Our text relates a story about Jesus, vv. 13, 19. Jesus means Savior. He is to destroy sin and its corrupting influence and promote spiritual life. To this end He pointed out during His public ministry what was wrong with the Church. Such sore spots were self-righteousness, mechanical observance of the letter of the Law with neglect of its spirit, prayer reduced to empty babbling, and others. Our Gospel-lesson, too, shows Jesus taking issue with forces that wreck the Church from within.

Jesus Deals with Two Ruinous Tendencies in the Church of His Day

1. *He ousts the evidences of commercialism from the Sanctuary*
2. *He meets unbelief with a reference to the miracle of His resurrection*

1

Jesus' pious parents annually journeyed to Jerusalem for the Passover, as commanded Ex. 23:17; Deut. 16:16. The events related Luke 2:41-52 took place on such an occasion. When Jesus reached manhood, He continued the practice in accordance with His principle stated John 4:34.

For the believing Israelite this pilgrimage had a deep spiritual meaning and climaxed the religious observances of the year. The elaborate services in the central Sanctuary with their meaningful

sacrifices, the heavy odor of incense, the choirs, and the officiating priests and Levites in their ornate garments should have guaranteed a worshipful atmosphere for the Temple and its environs. There should have been nothing to keep the heart of the devout pilgrim from echoing the psalmist's songs of praise in honor of the great Jehovah, the Savior of His people.

Jesus at the first Passover of His public ministry found reality far below the ideal. Deut. 14:22 ff. permitted the Jew who lived at a distance from the Temple to sell the articles constituting his tithe and to use the sums which he realized for the purchase of sacrificial animals and of victuals for the sacred meals. Supplying these and the exchange needed by foreign pilgrims became a lucrative business. With the connivance of the greedy element among the priesthood it had made its headquarters in the very precincts of the Temple, v. 14. God and mammon, as it were, rivaled for the attention of the worshipers. An unbearable situation for Him whose attitude towards the house of God Ps. 69:9 describes.

Fired by holy zeal, Jesus asserts His authority, v. 15. It is not said that He struck any. The scourge was symbolical of the power He could bring to bear if necessary. Jesus did not advocate reform by inflicting personal violence. 'On this occasion His words, v. 16, addressed to those who sold doves, but meant for all, struck so deep in the conscience of the offenders that they offered no resistance.

Jesus' purge of the Temple stresses the importance of keeping commercialism out of the Church. Commercialism is symptomatic of a declining Church. A glaring example is the commerce in indulgences in the Roman Catholic Church and all the evils in its wake. But Protestant churches, too, must be on their guard lest their commercial enterprises overshadow the real purpose of the Church. Fairs, bazaars, sales, suppers, and questionable financial schemes for the benefit of the Church are not a healthy sign. Let us be on our guard.

2

Jesus' second encounter in the Temple was with unbelief in high places. The "Jews," vv. 18, 20, apparently were not the merchants whom Jesus had driven from the Sanctuary, but they were the same enemies who later in His ministry systematically opposed Jesus, namely, the priests, scribes, and Pharisees, although they presumed to be the spiritual leaders of their people. To them Jesus was not unknown. They had heard John the Baptist's call to repentance, Matt. 3:2, and his testimony concerning Christ, John 1:15, 30, 36. However, they had hardened their hearts to both. Now they raise the question v. 18, not so much to reassure themselves, but rather to discredit Jesus before the people. They were unbelievers and sought to lead others astray.

Jesus knew that He was face to face with unbelief and hypocrisy and acted accordingly. He knew that no sign would satisfy these men and bring them to acknowledge their mistake. Wherever Jesus met honest doubt and search for truth, He displayed infinite patience, as with Nicodemus. But His unbelieving opponents Jesus here in short words refers to His resurrection, vv. 19, 21, as the ultimate stamp of approval for all His acts. That is the only sign He has for them. It is the irrefutable proof that He is actually all that He claims to be and at the same time warns them of the judgment that will then follow for those who reject Him. They will have to face the glorified Christ. Let them beware.

These men well understood Jesus' words; cf. Matt. 27: 63. Their reaction was scorn, v. 20. The sign that confirmed the disciples' faith in their Lord, v. 21, was meaningless to them. They persisted in their unbelief and continued on the path which led to their doom. Unfortunately these blind leaders led many to destruction with them. How the heart of Jesus who came to seek that which was lost must have grieved over the hard-heartedness of these men!

The Church of our day still has with it such unbelieving leaders. They are those preachers and teachers who deny the divinity of our Lord, turn His soul-saving Gospel into a social gospel, reject the truth that there is salvation through Christ alone, and spread many other soul-destroying errors. God has given us only one approved method to oppose them, and that is by the continued preaching of His powerful Word, and then to remind these enemies of our Lord that they will have to give an account to the risen Christ for their evil deeds.

In behalf of ourselves and of all others who love the Lord Jesus Christ we pray that He would mercifully stem all evil tendencies fostered and encouraged by Satan with the design to undermine the Church.

G. V. SCHICK

Reminiscere

Matt. 12: 38-42

Some of the most frequent hearers of Christ's preaching while He was on earth remained unbelievers. Pharisees and scribes, great multitudes, — all heard Him often, yet did not accept Him. At all times there have been those who outwardly heard Christ's Word but whose heart was far from Him. In our text the Lord is dealing with such unbelievers.

Jesus' Warning to Unbelieving Hearers of His Word

1. He shows them the real reason for their unbelief.

a) Christ had healed a man possessed with a devil, v. 22, a miracle which His enemies promptly ascribed to Beelzebub, v. 24.

Thereupon Jesus warned them of their responsibility for every idle word spoken, vv. 36, 37. Some of these unbelievers, chafing under the rebuke, proceeded to the attack ("answered Him"), challenging Him to perform a really convincing miracle. (The original about this: "From you we demand a real miracle.") The implication was that the reason for their unbelief lay in Christ, not in them.

Some people today likewise try to put the blame for their unbelief upon God; they say God's Word has failed to convince them, is too antiquated and unscientific.

b) Jesus pointed to one reason for this unbelief among those who heard His Word; He called them an "evil generation." They loved their evil-doing, pet sins, and indulgence of every kind. Many an unbeliever clings to unbelief lest he have to reform his evil life which he has learned to love.

c) Jesus also called these unbelievers an "adulterous generation." This was spiritual adultery, being unfaithful to God and setting affections elsewhere. The unbelieving Pharisees loved themselves and their honor; they would not curb their pride and self-righteousness. Here was a reason for their unbelief. Cp. Luke 18:18-23.

This is a word of warning to all who hear the Word of God and remain in unbelief. The reason for such unbelief is ever in themselves.

2. *He shows them that their unbelief is without excuse.*

a) The Pharisees of the text demanded a "sign," v. 38; on another occasion a sign "from heaven," Mark 8:11, perhaps some majestic miracle in the world of nature. Jesus had just performed a miracle by healing the man who had been blind and dumb, a miracle which the enemies had explained away. If He now performed a "sign from heaven," they would just as glibly try to explain it away. But in the veiled charge that Jesus had never performed a really convincing miracle they think they have a legitimate excuse for their unbelief.

b) Jesus showed them that their unbelief was without excuse in view of His coming death and resurrection, the "sign of the prophet Jonah." Jesus frequently pointed to His coming death and resurrection as the sign which unbelief could not argue away. Cp. John 2:18, 19; Matt. 16:4. See also 1 Cor. 15:12-20.

Christ's resurrection is the great fact today which stands as the impregnable rock against unbelief. Unbelievers often feel this more than Christians and consequently try to explain away Christ's resurrection. Unbelieving critics who have written books on the life of Christ maintain that His biography must end on Golgotha. Different types of modern unbelief are without foundation in view

of Christ's resurrection. The attacks of the theory of evolution, of human reason, of a false science—all are shattered at Christ's empty grave.

How comforting to Christians is this fact since they are daily surrounded by a world which mobilizes all resources against faith in Christ!

c) The unbelief of Christ's enemies was inexcusable also because *His message* given by His representatives in the Old Testament *had been effective*. Thus the evident success of His Word took every justification from their unbelief. The Ninevites had repented although an unwilling messenger had brought them God's message. The Queen of Sheba had come although she but heard the wisdom of one who was inferior to Christ.

Likewise all the millions who through the ages have found refuge in Christ's saving Gospel are an unbroken chain of witnesses to the truth of Christ's Word. Unbelief opposes all these witnesses to the truth by branding as false what the ages have declared to be true.

3. *He shows them the eventual result of unbelief.*

a) Jesus prophesied that at some future time the most unexpected witnesses would appear against His unbelieving opponents. In the resurrection, vv. 41, 42, the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba should appear as condemning witnesses; for these had listened to far less able messengers than Christ. Consequently those who rejected Christ when He appeared in person could only be condemned in their inexcusable unbelief.

b) Unbelief at all times can only expect a condemning sentence on Judgment Day. Cp. John 8:24; Heb. 3:19. Unbelief really remains the one all-condemning sin.

This whole text is a warning to those who reject the Word of God which they hear. Also Christians must be on their guard in this unbelieving world. But to the true Christian there is also comfort in this, that for all times Christ in His death and resurrection is the Foundation on which his faith is grounded.

H. O. A. KEINATH

Oculi

John 6:47-56

This is truly a Lenten text, because, as we shall see, it refers to the suffering and death of our Savior. Jesus uses figurative language in pointing to His great passion. We recall that when He, for the first time as far as we know, referred to His death and resurrection, He likewise used figurative language. It was on the occasion of the first Passover which He during His ministry at-

tended in Jerusalem, when He said: "Break this temple and in three days I shall raise it up," John 2:19. The Jews did not understand what He meant by the breaking of the temple, nor did His disciples. If they had inquired at the time, undoubtedly He would have told them. This reminds us that in the prophecies the suffering and death of Christ are often spoken of in figurative language and are referred to in types and symbols, like that of the paschal lamb, the brazen serpent, the sacrifices in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple, etc.

The central declaration of our text is that

Jesus Is the Bread of Life

1. *Just as manna came down from above, so Jesus came from heaven*
2. *As bread is eaten, so Jesus is put to death, offering Himself as a sacrifice*
3. *As bread nourishes our physical life, so our receiving Christ through faith means spiritual and eternal life for us*

1

In this great discourse Jesus wishes to show the Jews what kind of help and benefits He bestows. They had wished to make Him king because He had just fed them with five loaves and two fishes when there was a multitude numbering far more than five thousand. What they desired was that He should feed them every day without trouble or work on their part. He makes it plain to them that He is not an earthly but a spiritual King. There are higher things than bread and money, and these higher things He provides. His language is most striking. He calls Himself the Bread of Life.

In Jewish history bread that had been given in a supernatural way had played an important role. It was the manna given the children of Israel in the desert, when they journeyed from Egypt to Palestine; for forty years God had miraculously fed them with this bread. Six times a week it came down from heaven. Jesus was like this manna. He likewise came down from heaven. According to His divine nature He had been in existence from all eternity. We bring out this truth when we say that He came down from heaven and took upon Himself our human nature, uniting the divine and the human nature in one Person, John 1:14.

That Jesus is not only human but divine is something that is offensive to our reason. It was offensive to the Jews. But we must not let our reason dictate to us. How foolish it would have been for the Israelites in the desert if they had refused to eat the bread that had fallen down from heaven because they could not explain

how it could come from the skies! They ate it, and their physical life was preserved. So we must not let the dictates of human reason influence us but take Jesus as a precious Gift and believe in Him and rejoice.

2

When we think of the figurative language that Jesus employs, calling Himself the Bread of Life, we must say that it is very apt. Bread is eaten, which means that its outward form is destroyed. Jesus, in speaking of the service that He renders, points to something similar, saying that His flesh is to be eaten and His blood is to be drunk. It must not be thought that this is a reference to the Lord's Supper. This Sacrament had not yet been instituted, and still Jesus says that everybody must eat His flesh and drink His blood to have real life. How, then, could He be referring to the Lord's Supper, the institution of which was still a whole year removed? Besides, when He instituted the Lord's Supper, He did not speak of the eating of His flesh but of the eating of His body. The terminology is different. No, what Jesus is referring to here is simply this, that He will let Himself be put to death and have His blood shed, so that our sins will be paid for and the great sacrifice that is required be rendered.

Jesus in these words points to what is the central fact in the Christian religion: His suffering and dying, the substitutionary sacrifice which He offers. It must be granted that His language is very fitting. He had spoken of Himself as the Bread of Life, and now He continues employing figurative language belonging to the sphere of food to make plain that He would have to suffer and die; He speaks of the giving of His flesh and the shedding of His blood. These expressions harmonize with the general theme, stating that He is the Bread of Life.

That Jesus must die to help us is likewise offensive to human reason. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:18, 23. Let us not listen to its dictates.

3

Jesus is the Bread of Life in a third sense. If bread is to help a person, it has to be received. It must be eaten and digested. The mere fact that a person has bread in his house will not keep him alive. *Looking* at bread will not give him any strength. If Jesus, the Bread of Life, is to furnish us any help, we must receive Him. The mere fact that He offered His sacrifice for men does not put the whole human race into heaven. He must be appropriated by the individual.

How is Jesus received? He tells us, v. 47: "He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life." It is clear, then, that when Jesus speaks of the eating of this Bread and of the eating of His flesh and of the drinking of His blood, He points to our receiving Him by

faith. We speak of this eating and drinking as a spiritual eating and drinking.

Is it not very extraordinary that Jesus should call receiving Him in faith an eating of His flesh and a drinking of His blood? Not at all. He merely continues the figurative language with which He began when He called Himself the Bread of Life. It furthermore stated forcefully that Jesus would actually have to be received into the hearts of men as the great Savior and Sin-bearer and that mere outward contact with Him, the mere looking at Him, was not sufficient.

Let us learn the lesson. Jesus every Sunday, in the Word, is placed before us as the Bread of Life. In this season of Lent He is with special emphasis preached to us as the sacrificial Lamb whose flesh and blood, that is, whose sacrifice, mean life to us. Let us realize that the mere listening to this message does not suffice; that we merely hear it does not mean life to us. Jesus must actually be received into our spiritual being as food is received into our physical constitution. If this truth is made very vivid to us by the text, then its contemplation has not been in vain.

W. ARNDT

Laetare

John 6:57-69

Our text is the continuation of last Sunday's Gospel selection and stresses the same lesson, so immensely important: the vicarious sacrifice of the God-man for the salvation of our soul. At the same time it brings out the reception which the Redeemer God meets among the sons of men.

Life through the Living Son

1. *That is an offense to many*
2. *That is our only salvation*

1

Vv. 57, 58. Once more Jesus states definitely the meaning and purpose of His coming into the world. He who from eternity was the Son of the Living Father, cp. Ps. 2:7; Micah 5:2; He whose human nature the Father had miraculously created through the Holy Ghost, Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35, 37; He, the Son of Man, to whom the Father had from the moment of His conception as Mary's son given to have life in Himself, John 5:26, to live by the Father,—He had been sent as the living Bread from heaven, that every one who "eateth Him," makes Him his own in faith, shall live by Him and live forever. Here is the exact opposite of God's Word in Eden, Gen. 2:17. There God spoke of an eating unto death. Here Christ speaks of an eating unto life.

Vv. 60, 61. That seems to this day a hard saying, surpassing

the reason of man, exceeding the understanding even of Christians, mysteries which no human mind can fathom, 1 Cor. 2:7-9; 1 Tim. 3:16. The former disciples were offended that He who seemed no more than a man (vv. 41, 42) should lay claim to eternal Sonship. Is that not still an offense to many in outward Christendom? And for this reason they are offended also because He claims to be the only Bread of Life, the only Way to salvation. Why should so many "good" people, "noble" characters, be lost merely because they cannot believe that Christ alone saves? These men know neither themselves, Gen. 8:21; Jer. 17:9; Matt. 15:19, nor their need of a Savior, nor the true nature of this Jesus.

Vv. 62-65. In an endeavor to regain those "many disciples," v. 60, Jesus shows that they have no reason to be offended. He points forward to a still greater miracle to be performed by Him whose ascension proves that He was all that He claimed to be, v. 62. He warns them against following the reasonings of their own flesh. The flesh is unprofitable, weak, Matt. 26:41; sinful, Rom. 7:25; 8:5-7; spiritually dead, Col. 2:13; leads straight to eternal damnation, Rom. 8:13. Why follow that unprofitable flesh? On the contrary, the Spirit quickens, and this Spirit is found in Jesus' words. In these words, recorded in the Bible, lives and pulsates the life and spirit of Him who is Life and Spirit. He had spoken these words to them, and they had experienced their Heaven-born nature, their life-giving spirituality, their divine power to save and to sanctify. Why cast away these words simply because they surpass understanding?

Thus Jesus seeks to recall them from the course they have taken, which will unfailingly lead them to everlasting destruction. He, the loving Savior, knew from the beginning that with many this plea would serve only to harden them, be a savor of death unto death to them, v. 63. "There are some that believe not." As Christ directs these words to us, let us not think of others but ask, Lord is it I? Lord, keep me from unbelief. And let us then heed His warning, v. 65. Most Christians have grown up in Christian homes and communities. It seems the natural thing for them to be members of the Christian Church. They forget that it is a miracle of divine power ("My Father") and of divine grace ("were given"). Let us always be grateful to God for having made us His children.

V. 66. The words of Jesus roused the antagonism of "many of His disciples." They did not want to be told the truth. They went back, literally, went away toward that which was behind, to their pharisaic satisfaction with their own righteousness, to their Sadducean enjoyment of life and its joys. Their disinterestedness in Jesus gradually became enmity, hatred, mockery. They walked no more with Jesus, but with whom?

2

Vv. 67, 69. Whither shall we go? With Jesus we have the words of eternal life; words that soothe the heart, refresh the anguished and famished soul, and call it back to life; words whose life-giving, justifying, sanctifying power we experience every day; words that even in the valley of the shadow of death point forward and lead us to the everlasting light and life eternal. Leaving Jesus and His Word, we have only death, spiritual death, temporal death in all its bitterness and hopelessness, eternal death. Ought the choice to be hard?

Jesus is that Christ, the Messiah, who brings us all those blessings promised throughout the Old Testament, Is. 61:1-3, etc. Without Him Is. 1:6 applies; captivity to cruel foes without hope of liberty; broken hearts and none to bind them up; ashes to feed on instead of the Bread of Life; mourning, weeping, gnashing of teeth, instead of joy and everlasting bliss. What will you choose?

Jesus is the Son of the living God. In Him and through Him we are all children and heirs of God, Gal. 3:26; 1 John 3:2. Shall we leave all that and go back to the bondage of sin, the tyranny of Satan, the darkness of hell? Forsake Thee, Jesus? Go away from Thee? Never. Hymn 327. But let us remember v. 65 and let our prayer be: Hymn 340.

TH. LAETSCH

Judica

John 12:20-23

When Jesus appeared in Judea, many asked, Who is this man? Cf. Matt. 16:14; 11:3; 14:2. Jesus referred all such to the signs, which answered their question. It is a legitimate question to ask:

How did Jesus Himself Look upon All that He Experienced During His Earthly Life?

Our text supplies the answer:

1. *He saw in all of this a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies*
2. *He recognized each of these occurrences as a proof that the remaining prophecies would also be fulfilled*

1

a) Our text tells us that Greeks applied to Philip for an interview with the Lord Jesus. These Greeks were Gentiles who through the Old Testament prophecies had come to believe in the Messiah and wished to see Jesus that their faith might be strengthened.

The Hebrews of the Old Testament were the chosen people of

God, from whom truth and salvation were to go forth to all, John 4:22. They were the people from whom the Messiah was to come. They were also the first who were to be invited to rejoice in this God-man. *But they were not to be the only ones.* God's grace was intended also for the Gentiles. In our text we have a demonstration of this fact. The Gentiles came to the Lord. Jesus recognized this, and when He heard of their desire, He declared, "The hour is come," etc. Jesus saw in this occurrence a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah, "The Gentiles shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising," etc., Is. 60:3.

b) There were other occurrences which demonstrated this same truth. Even at Jesus' birth the angel proclaimed that this birth was to be a joy "to all people," Jews and Gentiles alike. Therefore not only Jewish shepherds came to His manger, but also the Wise Men from the East, *Gentiles.* (The festival of Epiphany.)

Even in the time of the Old Testament there were many converts from the Gentile world: Rahab, Naaman, the Queen of Sheba, and many more.

All these occurrences were correctly regarded by Jesus as a fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Kingdom of God in the New Testament.

Application.— We also should make a careful comparison of the prophecies with their fulfilment in Jesus, so that with full confidence we may say to Him, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

2

But the Lord Jesus also saw in each of these occurrences a proof that all else which had been prophesied concerning Him and His kingdom would come to pass. Therefore He answered Andrew and Philip: "The hour is come," etc. He said this with an eye to the future.

a) Even at that time all prophecies had not as yet been fulfilled. Jesus never doubted that God would perform all that He had promised, and every fulfilment of a prophecy supported this conviction. Jesus knew that He was to be betrayed by one of His disciples, that He was to be brought before the council of the Jews, etc. Jesus frequently spoke of all this. He wanted all to learn and to note just this. Men were slow to grasp the full meaning of His earthly life, Matt. 16:21 sq. Cf. John 12:32. This is exactly what He meant when He said, "The hour is come," etc. While Jesus' suffering was a humiliation, yet His perfect obedience to the will of the Father glorified Him in the sight of His Father and all the holy angels, glorifies Him also in the sight of all those who know what He accomplished through His suffering and death.

Moreover, Jesus knew that the prophecy had been spoken con-

cerning His resurrection, and His resurrection certainly was a glorification of the Son of Man. Jesus asserted with great authority again and again that He would rise again from the dead. He knew also that it had been prophesied that He should be in control of heaven and earth and all power was to be given to Him, Matt. 11:27. Yes, Jesus knew that His words would not pass away, Luke 21:33. Thus He was sure of His glorification.

b) And just so we should look upon every fulfilment of a prophecy since Pentecost Day as assurance that all other prophecies will also be fulfilled. As yet all prophecies have not been fulfilled, but we should be sure that they will be. And as Jesus, the Head of the Church, gained an eternal victory after suffering and death, so we, you and I, the members of His body, shall follow Him to glory and to everlasting life and blessedness.

Application. — Just as Jesus, when facing His trials, spoke of His coming glory, so we Christians, when passing through sorrow, should say: The hour is at hand when Jesus is to be glorified in me. God's promise assures me of this, and I will believe it with all my heart. That is the faith which overcometh the world.

MARTIN S. SOMMER

