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Outlines on the Wuerttemberg Gospel Selections

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Outlines on the Wuerttemberg Gospel Selections

Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

John 9:1-7

It is a truth often expressed in the Scriptures that God's children must endure affliction here on earth. "We must through much tribulation," etc., Acts 14:22. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," Heb. 12:6. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake," Matt. 5:10, a statement preparing the minds of the disciples for suffering of the gravest kind.

The Christian religion offers the greatest riches, earned for us by Christ: forgiveness of sins, peace of heart, a place in heaven. All this is bestowed free of charge; it merely has to be taken; it is laid hold of not through our paying of a price but through faith. But the Christian religion does not promise that its adherents will not have to suffer here on earth; it foretells them the very opposite. The Scriptures are right: pain, disease, disappointments, business troubles, beset the paths of Christians. It is important that we have the right view of tribulations when they come upon us and our fellow-Christians. Our text contains several important lessons on

The Tribulations of God's Children

1. *They are not necessarily the result of specific sins*
2. *They are intended to glorify God*

1

The text tells of a sufferer, a person born blind, subsisting on alms. Evidently he was a believing Israelite, waiting for God to fulfil the Messianic prophecies. The disciples of Jesus were touched by his misery. The question arose in their minds, Whose sin was responsible for his affliction, his own or that of his parents?

The disciples took the view that special suffering is a result of some particular sin, v. 2. It was hard to conceive how this man might have sinned in a special way before his birth; if not he, then, so they think, his parents must have committed some special wrong.

That suffering is due to the existence of sin in the world that, if there were no sin, there would be no anguish, no sorrow, is of course true. Cf. Gen. 3. The disciples, however, thought they could go farther and trace unusual suffering back to some uncommon act of transgression. We, too, are prone to engage in reasoning of this nature, especially if the brother struck by disaster has in some way hurt our sensibilities.

We cannot deny that there are instances related in the Bible

where God's children brought suffering upon themselves by some special sin. David's infant son, born of an adulterous union, died. The father had repented of his crime, but he must suffer. Similarly, a plague visited David's nation when he in a sinful way had numbered the people. Cf. 2 Sam. 24. David had gone to the Lord for forgiveness, but the plague was not averted. This is a moral universe, it has been said. Wrong-doing is followed by suffering. Cf. what negligence often leads to.

But now note that in our text Jesus clearly teaches that it is wrong to hold special suffering to be always the result of some particular violation of the divine Law. Cf. v. 3. We must, then, be careful in our judgment as to what caused the affliction of a fellow-Christian. An auto accident is not a proof that the occupants transgressed some special law. Business reverses are not necessarily the fruit of dishonest dealing. Cf. Luke 13:1-5.

When we ourselves are visited by adversity, we must not at once conclude that we have offended God in some extraordinary manner. If there has been specific wrong-doing, let us repent. If not, then let us humble ourselves nevertheless, remembering that we are sinful beings; but let us say, too, that the affliction may have its source in something else than some specific wrong-doing, and that God's purpose is not a vindictive one.

2

Jesus throws light on the cause of this man's blindness. God had permitted it to come in order that His glory might be made manifest through the miracle which Jesus was to perform. At the time when this man was born God had long ago determined how the sufferer was to be helped and blessed. Through the healing of this man Christ's divine power, His deity, His Messiahship were to be revealed.

The miracle which Jesus performed on this occasion was most remarkable. It is one of the few which John relates, all of them extraordinary manifestations of divine power and goodness.

Here is one of the great lessons God teaches us concerning our tribulations. Through our crosses God purposes to manifest His glory. Joseph is sold into Egypt. God permits it. But think of His beneficent design: Joseph was to be raised to unexpected heights and to become the benefactor of a large part of the world. Cf. Gen. 50:20. "What a mighty, wise, and loving ruler our God is!" we exclaim.

There are many other instances like that of Joseph, where God in striking fashion sends deliverance. Think of the case of Peter, Acts 12. Often, however, His course is different. He permits the cross to remain. But here, too, the "works of God are to be made manifest." The Christian that bears his affliction cheerfully

thereby shows that he has a God who can comfort and strengthen him in woe and anguish.

And even when a Christian's affliction is due to some specific wrong-doing, of which he, however, has repented, some carelessness in business, some act of neglect or overindulgence, he is not to regard it as a punishment, but as a paternal visitation, intended for his eternal welfare, Heb. 12:6. Even in such a case the Christian should pray that through his patience in cross-bearing the glory of his God and Savior may become manifest. May the lesson of 2 Cor. 12:9 f. always be before our mind. W. ARNDT

Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity

John 9:24-39

The great miracle by which a man born blind had his sight restored, caused a great stir in Jerusalem. The persistent enemies of Jesus sought ways and means to counteract the effect of this miracle. They examined the blind man's parents, they questioned the man himself. And they found that the miracle was performed on a Sabbath. But they could not shake the faith of the happy man. In contrast with this faith we see the blind, wilfully blind, unbelief of Christ's enemies which occasioned the peculiar comment of Jesus, v. 39.

Faith in Contrast to Unbelief

1. *Faith brings clearer vision*
2. *Unbelief leads to darker blindness*

1

Vv. 24 and 25. The man that was blind clings to the fact that now he can see. From this fact he draws his conclusions. The person who performed this unheard-of miracle cannot be a sinner, as the leaders would have him admit. Such a miracle can be done only by one whom God favors, vv. 30-33. His vision becomes clearer as the nagging questioning continues. The man that gave him physical sight must be holy, a worshiper of God, v. 31, must do the will of God, and be of God. He also sees that his questioners, who pride themselves on being Moses' disciples, who are the recognized teachers of the Jews, the custodians of the Law of Moses, are altogether in error in regard to the man who healed him. Rather than give up his conviction, he suffers excommunication, v. 34.

And finally, when Jesus reveals Himself as the Son of God, the promised Messiah, he worships Him, honors Him as he would honor God, vv. 35-38. Wonderful progress in vision.

Faith in Christ as your divine Redeemer brings you clearer vision of various essential truths. What wise philosophers,

psychologists, fail to see, what even world-famous theologians refuse to recognize, the total depravity of human nature, the complete enslavement of man's reason, will, and emotions—your faith opens your eyes to see it.

Again, many of the wise, even in the visible Church, fail to see the spirit of the Law, they are blind to the fact that God's Law demands perfection, that our righteousness must be better than the righteousness of the Pharisees. And because of this blindness they are speaking of salvation by character, by the works of the Law.

But faith brings clearer vision, the believer sees: Ps. 14:3; Eccl. 7:20; Is. 64:6, etc.; he sees the real purpose of the Law, Rom. 3:29; 7:7; therefore Gal. 2:16.

Many, even theological teachers, see in Jesus only a wise Rabbi, nothing more. Faith sees His glory as of the only-begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth, John 1:14. Explanation of the Second Article. And finally faith will bring us face to face with our Savior; then we shall see Him as He is. Indeed, faith brings to us an ever clearer vision.

2

In contrast to faith unbelief leads to darker blindness. We have an example in our text.

The blind leaders of Israel wilfully disregard a fact, the great miracle of Jesus. They fail to see, or refuse to recognize, the conclusions to be drawn from this fact. Their hatred of Christ, their pride in their position as teachers of the Law of Moses, their unbelief, leads them into deeper blindness. They fail to see the helping, saving, life-giving hand of grace held out to them in Jesus; in stupid blindness they lead themselves and their nation into disaster and ruin; finally even the possibility of being enlightened is lost forever.

Alas, these blind leaders have many followers. The unbelief of the so-called Modernists, who rob Christ of His deity and of His glory of Redeemership, makes them blind to obvious facts. They endeavor to make this world better by preaching a shallow morality and fail to see that their patient, the world, sinks deeper into sin and corruption. Under their leadership selfishness, cruelty, hatred, godlessness, wantonness, the pursuit of lustful joys, etc., grow apace. Their unbelief leads them into ever-growing blindness, so that what our merciful God has ordained for their salvation becomes utter foolishness to them.

Thus in their blindness they have set themselves and all who follow them on the road to the impenetrable darkness of hell.

Oh, that we tremblingly heed the solemn warning of Jesus, v. 39!

H. J. BOUMAN

Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity

Luke 7:36-50

The great central doctrine of salvation by the free grace of God through faith in Christ has ever been criticized as depriving men of any incentive to good works, aye, of actually putting a premium on sin, Rom. 3:8; 6:1. — St. Paul effectually refutes this charge and shows that the very opposite is true, *viz.*, that this very truth of the Gospel furnishes the only true incentive for devoted service of Christ. — The beautiful Gospel text for this Sunday also teaches this fact.

**Forgiving Grace the Only True Incentive for Devoted
Service of Christ**

This is clearly demonstrated

1. *By the example of Simon, the Pharisee*
2. *By the example of the penitent woman*

1

A) Simon's coldness. a) In the sight of men — and his own — Simon was a respectable person, ranking far above that sinful woman. She a great debtor, he a much lesser, if one at all. — b) Over against Christ, Simon is cold and indifferent. While indeed he had invited Jesus to his house, yet his entire conduct was utterly devoid of any affection for his divine Guest. In fact, he failed to accord him the common amenities of the times, vv. 44—46.

B) Tactfully, yet clearly and convincingly, Jesus points out the reason for this coldness, v. 47b. Simon had not experienced forgiving grace. "Little," *i. e.*, nothing, had been forgiven him (there is no "little," or partial, forgiveness). In fact, the proud Pharisee felt no need of grace and of a Savior such as Jesus had come into the world to be. — Indeed, the Savior's grace was freely offered to all alike. But Simon, the Pharisee, haughtily spurned grace, resented the very thought that he was in need of it. Hence he loved "little," had no true love at all. All his seeming piety was not acceptable service of God and Christ but revealed a cold, mercenary attitude, designed to obligate God, to merit salvation. Why should he, from his point of view, love Jesus and devotedly serve Him? There was no true incentive without experience of forgiving grace.

C) *Application.* — The case of Simon is that of every sinner that lacks the true incentive of forgiving grace, the case of modern Pharisees with their much-vaunted righteousness. Apply above to them.

But let us look into our own hearts and to the oft glaring weak-

nesses of many professed Christians, to the coldness and indifference with respect to service of Christ. As Simon failed to accord Jesus even the usual courtesies extended honored guests, so we must note much weakness in the performance of most obvious acts of Christian service (attendance at public worship, contributions for Christ's kingdom and charities, self-denial, sacrifice, etc.).—All this should raise in our hearts the concerned question: Do we fully realize what Christ and His forgiving grace means to us? Are we fully aware that it spells the difference between eternal perdition and eternal life? Absence of this incentive accounts for every failure to render Christ that loving, grateful service which He rightly seeks in all for whom He died and rose again.

2

The example of the penitent woman the positive evidence.

A) Describe her devoted service. It was a costly service to anoint Jesus with precious fragrant perfume. Her entire conduct without words indeed expressive of complete humble devotion. There was nothing too good for Jesus that she would not give, no service too great that she would not render.

B) What incentive prompted such devoted service?

a) It was certainly not the expectation to merit forgiveness. The words of Jesus, v. 47a, cannot in this setting be thus interpreted. Obviously, forgiveness of her sins anteceded her service of grateful love and constituted the cause of her devotion.—The parable, vv. 41, 42, so clearly shows remission to be the antecedent cause and love the consequent effect that even Simon unhesitatingly judges rightly, v. 43.—Furthermore, in direct application of the parable the words of Jesus, v. 47, clearly present the woman's great love as evidence of the fact that she had experienced forgiving grace. The "for" = ground of knowledge, *Erkenntnisgrund*. Finally, the expectation of meriting forgiveness had been contrary to all Scripture, Rom. 3: 23 ff.; Eph. 2: 8.

b) No, the one impelling incentive was the forgiving grace of Jesus.—A notorious, vile sinner indeed, the woman had evidently heard of Jesus, whose fame filled the land. What she had heard of Him, perhaps directly and personally, had aroused her conscience to the vileness of her sin, filled her heart with fear of the righteous wrath of God. All the more eagerly and hopefully she had heard the precious Gospel-message proclaimed by Jesus and His gracious invitation "Come unto Me," Matt. 11: 28. She had heard of His kindness to sinners. Through Jesus she felt assured of gracious forgiveness of all her sins. This glorious experience filled her heart with love of Him who had stood between her and eternal ruin, to

whom she owed all her new-found happiness. How she welcomed the opportunity now to give expression to her love and render devoted service, not here only in the house of Simon but throughout her life, strengthened as she was by the sealing of forgiveness in the precious assurance: vv. 48, 50. The same forgiving grace has ever been the incentive for saints of God. Paul's matchless zeal accounted for by his rejoicing: "I obtained mercy!" 1 Tim. 1:16. John and his hearers declare: "We love Him because He first loved us," 1 John 4:19.

C) *Application.*—Not Sinai but Calvary furnishes the one divinely powerful incentive for devoted service of Christ. Over against all modern pharisaism, in view of our own weakness, let us look more intently to the Cross of Christ. This alone, this surely, will strengthen us and fill us with greater zeal, and at every opportunity of service we shall say with Paul: "The love of Christ constraineth us," 2 Cor. 5:14. — Hymn 351:2. AUGUST F. BERNTHAL

Twentieth Sunday after Trinity

Luke 18:1-8

All things work according to fixed laws of nature which nothing can change, says the false scientist.

All things in our lives are determined by fate, and whatever is to happen will happen, is the claim of the unbelieving fatalist. If that were true, prayer would be useless and foolish.

But our Lord is wiser than the scientist and the fatalist; He tells us to pray.

Continue in Prayer

1. *This is what God expects of us*
2. *This has the promise of being heard*

1

A) The context: Jesus had spoken about terrible times preceding the return of Christ, Luke 17:26-29. Preparation for such times consists in persistent prayer. That is the Christian's defense program in critical times.

How applicable to our own day! The world is in a state of chaos. Many of the greatest gifts of mankind, scientific discoveries, the conquest of many forces of nature, the great inventions, education, — all are being used in an effort to destroy human beings to a degree such as the world has never seen. War times are always times of special temptation to the greatest moral laxity; a spirit of godless indifference then rules the masses.

B) For such an age our parable presents God's encouragement: *Continue* in prayer. So many factors in this parable stress this need of *continuing* in prayer: The widow is one who *keeps on coming* (imperfect ἤρχετο); she troubled the judge; her persistent pleading is such that the judge calls it a continual coming which wearies him. (Original as much as "beats my eyes black and blue with her demands.") And of His elect Jesus says that they "cry day and night unto Him." Cf. Rom. 15:30 ("strive"), Col. 4:12 ("laboring").

C) Thus God wants us to be persistent in prayer. Too often this is neglected. If God does not hear a prayer at once in the manner in which we expect, or if He has in reality heard a prayer and we are merely too blind to realize it, we draw the conclusion that praying for a certain gift is of no use. This is a false conclusion; we should continue in prayer, plead, repeat, wrestle with God.

2

A) The persistent prayer of the widow in this text was heard. The judge, moved by her continued pleading, avenged her. The Lord adds: "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily."

God has shown so many times in Scripture that He will hear prayer as He has promised. David's prayer against Ahitophel, 2 Sam. 15:31; Jesus' prayer for Peter that his faith fail not was fulfilled when this man became a staunch apostle, Luke 22:32.

B) We have the promise of God that He will hear our prayer, Jas. 1:5. Human reason would argue against the hearing of prayer and ascribe all to chance. The Christian may indeed not always see the granting of his desires, but as a Christian he has the privilege of believing that his prayer is heard.

At times God may delay His answer: "Though He bear long with them." Paul's desire to depart and be with Christ (Phil. 1:23) was not granted for about seven years. The prophets of the Old Testament who prayed for the coming of the Messiah died in a hope which was not realized until many centuries later. So we may pray for things in youth which are finally granted in old age. As Christians we believe that in His manner and at His time God will hear all prayer.

Our age is an age of staggering calamities. Men's hearts are failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth. In such times the Christian seeks refuge in prayer, persistent prayer, and he has the promise of the Father's almighty help.

H. O. A. KEINATH