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Outlines on Old Testament Texts (Synodical Conference)

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Outlines on Old Testament Texts (Synodical Conference)

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

Genesis 28:10-22

Glorious is the revelation of God in nature, Ps. 78:18, 19; dreadful in punishment (Deluge, Tower of Babel, Pharaoh's Army); blessed in protection (Daniel, Elijah, 2 Kings 19). God reveals Himself in various ways: personal appearances, to Abraham and Moses; spoken words, Gen. 22:11; Matt. 17:5; visions, Dan. 10:5; special dreams. Jacob's dream is an impressive revelation of God's grace not only to the Patriarch, but also to us who live in the time of fulfillment. It strengthened Jacob in his faith. May we also be more firmly grounded in faith as we consider

A Dream Come True

1. *The dream*; 2. *How it came true*; 3. *Its effect*

1

a. *Setting.* Vv. 10, 11. Having incurred the anger of his brother because of the blessing, Jacob had to flee. He should inherit this land, v. 4, but now must turn fugitive. Not even a roof for night's lodging. 1 John 3:2.

b. *Scene.* Vv. 12, 13 a. Unique. Heaven rent asunder. Earth and heaven joined. Angels ascending and descending. The Son of God at the top of the ladder. Cp. 31:11; 48:15 f.

c. *Message.* Vv. 13 b-15 a. Speaker: the everliving God, unchanging, sufficient to keep His promise. As Christ showed Himself to His disciples in the glory of His Transfiguration before their serious trials, so here to Jacob to strengthen him. — Temporal gifts: He shall possess the land; be progenitor of a vast people, cp. 22:17; God's protective presence and a safe return. — Spiritual blessings: Jacob the third Patriarch to receive this Messianic promise. "In thee and in thy Seed"; "In him, i. e., in his Seed" (Stoeckhardt). The word used for seed is in the masculine singular. Jacob a blessing in his capacity as human ancestor of the Messiah. "All families," refers to universal grace.

2

V. 15 b. The dream of Jacob was not a fleeting image, but a promise of things the Lord would surely accomplish. The dream came true.

Under Joshua the land was given to Jacob's descendants.

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At the Exodus, Israel had 600,000 warriors. Over one million Jews perished at the destruction of Jerusalem; yet there were many left. The many Jews today. The Lord protected Jacob against Laban, cp. 31:7, 29, and returned him safely home, cp. 35:6.

The fullness of Jacob's dream was realized in Christ. Through His redemptive work, Christ took away the sin of the world so that heaven is now open to all. John 1:51; Heb. 9:12; Hymn 105:1. Christ the ladder uniting heaven and earth through His incarnation. This event the theme of angelic praise; 1 Pet. 1:12. Christ is Jacob's Seed, Gal. 3:16. "With His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death," He redeemed all sinners; and in Him, the true Seed of Jacob, all families of the earth are blessed for time and for eternity and made heirs of heaven and His glory.

3

The marvelous dream of Jacob moved him to action, vv. 16, 17. He felt the nearness of God's presence. "He feared and said, How fearful is this place." The cognate expression emphasizes the awe which filled Jacob's heart. No earthly dwelling sheltered him, but he was now in God's house; the door of his parental home was closed to him; here was the gateway to heaven. Vv. 18, 19. Jacob used the means at hand to glorify God. He erected a monument, consecrated it, and named the place "God's House." Vv. 20-22. Looking to the future, he made a vow of faithfulness and service to God—an act of faith. Heb. 11:9. As Wise Men from the East trusted the star on their weary way to lead them to Christ, so Jacob throughout the various vicissitudes of his perilous journey in firm faith held that this dream would come true. The brightness of heaven lighted the darkness of his trials.

If the dream urged Jacob to such activity, how much more should "the dream come true" fill our hearts with stronger faith and greater zeal. During the Christmas season we heard of the appearance of Christ in the flesh, 1 Tim. 3:16; John 1:14. Heaven and earth are joined. Now we are looking forward to Lent, with its message of blessings won for all people. Dark days are ahead. May we draw nigh to Christ in true faith; serve Him faithfully in our present position with such means as He has given us; pray to Him confidently as did Jacob.

Let us not lose ourselves in mystical contemplation of the appearances of God, but, having seen the Lord, also build a memorial, not of stones, but of consecrated service which flows out of faith, even as faith moved Jacob to say, v. 17 b; Hymn 533:4.

VICTOR MENNICKE

Septuagesima

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Man's fall into sin created the occasion for God to enter into a covenant with the fallen sinners. A covenant is an agreement between two equals, binding the contracting parties to perform specific obligations. Here God deals not with His equal, but with sinful man. And He does not demand any work or payment on the part of man, but offers Him the greatest of gifts free and gratis! What was this covenant?

God's Covenant With Man

1. *Under the Old Testament* 2. *Under the New Testament*

1

a. The text speaks of a "new covenant," v. 31. Did God make two covenants with man or one? Let us examine the text. Through a covenant God aimed to adopt sinful man as His child and heir. His further design was to enable that child and heir to serve Him with the ready obedience of a child, with holy works. "The covenant I made with their fathers," v. 32, can only mean the Law given on Mount Sinai. That was a pact freely entered into by God and His chosen people Israel. God laid down a number of "commandments," which constitute the essence of holiness. To them Israel should conform in deed, word, and thought. He on His part promised life, life in its fullest meaning, to all who keep His commandments, Lev. 18:5; Prov. 4:4. Failure on God's part to keep His pledge to man is unthinkable. If Israel breaks the covenant, it will incur a penalty: temporal and eternal death, Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26.

b. Israel failed to keep the covenant, v. 32. Not only did all Israelites sin, but their history is a constant repetition of relapsing into their besetting sin, idolatry. That constituted a violation of the sacred pact with God. The time came when God abrogated the contract in force between Him and His people, since it was "not faultless," Heb. 8:7. The Lord Himself called it "weak and beggarly elements," Gal. 4:9, not for any fault in the perfect Law of God, but because it could not create the holy life demanded, Gal. 3:21, and brought the curse upon the covenant breakers, who from innate corruption could not meet its stern demands, Rom. 8:2, 3. It decayed and waxed old and was ready to vanish away, Heb. 8:13.

c. Thus Israel did not achieve holiness under that covenant. Under it the relationship of child and heir was not feasible. It is likewise impossible today. To attempt it is the height of folly,

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Gal. 3:10. "All our works are vain And merit only endless pain."
 "Not the labors of my hands Can fulfill Thy Law's demands."

Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 2 Cor. 5:17.

2

a. How is "new covenant," v. 31, to be understood? What the text calls "new" was in reality old. The "new covenant" is identical with that made between God and the fallen sinners in Paradise, Gen. 3:15. Strictly speaking, there is only one covenant between God and man: the covenant of grace. This neither waxed old nor was it superseded by the pact of Sinai, Gal. 3:17, but remained in full force. The Sinaitic covenant was to show to Israel their own unworthiness and the need of the covenant made with Abraham, which was merely a renewal of the promise given to Adam. What became old was the Law covenant, which had been inserted and which was only temporary.

b. What is the covenant of grace, entered into with Adam and Eve and valid until the end of days? V. 34 b: Forgiveness of sin, based on the redemption through Christ. God's promise to the first sinners was that He would send a Redeemer, the Woman's Seed, who should bruise (crush) the head of the serpent and thus accomplish complete deliverance from the serpent's power and from the implications of man's disobedience and by His active obedience bring about a perfect righteousness. That was God's part in the new covenant. And man? He should appropriate the redemption through a God-implanted faith and rejoice in the free salvation. Rom. 1:17. This covenant has no human mediator. The Law covenant was based on the condition that man keep the Commandments, and Moses was the mediator. In the Gospel covenant there is no condition or demand. God acts directly with man and gives, donates, salvation procured by the Son of God. And, therefore, if the covenant of the Law was glorious, the covenant of grace is much more glorious, 2 Cor. 3.

c. Under this covenant man flourishes "as a tree planted by the rivers of water," Ps. 1. Cp. Gal. 4:31. Text, v. 33. Cp. Rom. 7:22. The joy of salvation is kindled in the heart. Not "weak and beggarly elements" any longer, because, v. 34, describing the richness of the New Testament knowledge of salvation; Ps. 110:3. Under the old covenant the priest's lips kept knowledge, and the Law was sought at his mouth (Mal. 2:7), but under the new: "And they shall be all taught of God," John 6:45. The indwelling Spirit of God enlightens New Testament Christians as with streams descending on the Church from above. As freedmen in the kingdom of God let us live unto Him who rescued us and exalted us to the heights of the glorious liberty of the children of God.

L. J. ROEHM

Sexagesima

1 Sam. 17:42-51

This is the favorite story of every Christian boy. Has that spoiled it a little? Have we slipped into thinking that it belongs only in the realm of children's stories? The adventure, the courage, the wonder of it are always there. But underneath is a great deal more; it is a story of God's great ways with His people. The story is told to help us, too, the better to realize that

The Lord Saves His People

1. *That God is interested in the saving of His people*
2. *That God has the means to save His people*

1

Our world has become so used to ruling God out of things that even Christians may fall into such habits of thought. They may not doubt God's power or His presence everywhere; but they may begin to doubt that He is concerned. This story proves God's concern in two ways.

A. The forces that threaten Christians threaten God.

1. When a Christian is in genuine danger, it is God's own cause that is threatened. The defiance of Goliath was a defiance against God, vv. 43, 45. It was an attack not merely on the bodies of the men of Israel; it struck at their oneness with God, their confidence in Him. The real problems of Christians are those which threaten their souls. True, the threat may come by means of assault on the body. But this is the greatest danger that man can face: that trouble and disaster looses his grip on God. Cf. Ps. 77:88.

2. But God is interested in His people. "The battle is the Lord's," v. 47. Ps. 121. This means He is concerned in their earthly needs, Matt. 15:32, and their spiritual ones, Luke 22:32. John 17:11-15.

B. When Christians conquer their enemies, it is a glory to God.

1. God had a stake in the conflict of Israel and the Philistines. Defeat of Israel would be also a shame to God; conquest by Israel would prove His power far beyond the borders of the Philistines. The very war and the threats of Goliath were means of making the glory greater at the victory, v. 46.

2. So God conquers our own problems and fears to demonstrate His greatness and love to the world. 1 Pet. 1:6, 7; 4:13.

2

This story is great in showing God's ways of saving His people.

A. He does not always employ power of body or of mind.

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1. David's method. "The Lord saveth not with sword and spear," v. 47. God has His own devices, sometimes humble and near at hand. But they are His.

2. The problem that Christians must overcome is not that they do not look to God to help, but that they expect Him to help with human forces. Rather 2 Cor. 12:7-10. Ps. 124.

B. But His help is given in response to genuine faith.

1. David's prowess and defense: "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel," v. 45. "In the name of"—by faith in, full of a conviction of all that God means to His own. Hence a faith in Christ Jesus, the guarantee of our hold on God. Rom. 8:31 ff.

2. The brothers had sulked and feared and worried, v. 24. But David thought on God, His constancy, His promises and power, vv. 37, 47. Faith is not an accident. It is a gift of God, and it grows as we draw on God's own Word of assurance and tighten our hold on His love in Christ Jesus through our use of the Gospel.

David won a great victory. We say it was great because He was so little and Goliath so big. No; it was great because David was so humble before God and so much greater than Goliath.

————— RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

Quinquagesima

Jonah 3:1-4:11

In times of war the feeling of mercy is often viewed as a sign of weakness. Ruthless destruction, strafing of warriors and civilians alike, hatred are the order of the day. Some claim that in order to be efficient in war, we must first be filled with a merciless hatred that will spare nothing.

As we are about to enter the season of Lent, we find in our text a different theme, the opposite theme: Mercy.

The Answers to God's Own Question: Should Not I Spare?

1. *No, says the history of a nation*
2. *No, says a forgetful man*
3. *Yes, I should, says a merciful God*

1

A. The city and country with which our text deals was notorious for its wickedness. Nineveh and Assyria were symbols of oppression to the Israelites. Two books of the Bible, Jonah and Nahum, deal almost entirely with this scourge of God's people. Nahum calls this a "bloody city, full of lies and robbery" (Nah. 3:1). The Lord says, Jonah 1:2. The history of Judah and Israel is inter-

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spersed with accounts of Assyrian wickedness. They exacted tribute, 2 Kings 15:19, took captives, 2 Kings 15:29, destroyed Samaria, 2 Kings 17:6, threatened Jerusalem and blasphemed, 2 Kings 18. Jonah justly is commanded to announce, 3:4. The whole history of this city would argue: Spare not!

B. Let us make a comparison with our own nation. Twice within a single generation the Lord has brought the scourge of war upon us. This is a call to repentance. Did the first great war of this century bring general repentance? On the contrary, there was a postwar season of general loosening of moral standards, increase in crime, a naturalistic philosophy of education bearing fruit. What will it be this time? Are not most people at this time ready and poised for the longed-for happy days of free indulgence, temporarily curbed to some extent by all kinds of restrictions? Also the recent history of our nation argues: No reason to spare. Therefore this season of Lent proclaims a real national repentance.

2

A. Jonah, a strange character to be called a prophet of God! Told to preach against wickedness, he chooses the easy path of flight from duty so that he may preserve a safe silence toward the sinners. Driven back to duty a second time, he spends a day in proclaiming the city's doom. Strange to say, he is disappointed at his success in bringing a city to repentance, 4:1; he grumbles because God spared the city, and he bids death to come, 4:2, 3. He would have rather seen the city suffer the full measure of God's wrath.

B. How shall we explain such objections to God's mercy? Jonah was more interested in being right than in saving a whole city. He seems to have completely forgotten that he still existed solely because of God's mercy, for he had been cast into the sea to perish, and only an outstanding miracle kept him from going to perdition. God also showed him his inconsistency: Jonah would spare an insignificant gourd because it offered him pleasure, but he would not have the Lord spare a city of more than 100,000 inhabitants. Thus the man who forgot that he had been spared would not spare others.

C. So self-righteousness often sits in judgment over others, enlarges upon their sins, finds it entirely just that sins of others should be severely dealt with, and objects to mercy. Ex.: The Pharisees and the woman taken in adultery, John 8:3-7; those who found the victims of murder and an accident justly dealt with, Luke 13:1-5. Whenever we think that God should not spare others, we are forgetting that He has spared us.

3

A. The Book of Jonah, though an announcement of impending punishment, is also a story of God's boundless mercy. Here an unworthy nation, a people not connected with the chosen race except by hostility, is visited by an Israelite prophet. God's mercy transcends the bounds of race, color, and nation. Here, too, is a prophet who had deserved to be rejected and visited with the wrath of God for not performing the duties of his exalted calling yet who was spared. Unwillingly, but truly, the Prophet praises the qualities of God: 4:2.

B. So today God still says: Yes, I should spare. He is still gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness. Is. 49:13; Eph. 2:4-6. In Christ Jesus His mercy is ever new. In this time of turmoil, when all values seem doomed to destruction, the grace of God is still immovable. As a nation and as individuals we have a foretaste of this grace in this, that in spite of our transgressions, He has not dealt with us as we have deserved.

C. God spared a penitent people, 3:5-10. Impenitence frustrates the grace of God. Here is an important lesson for us at this time of Lent: The suffering of Christ, which we consider especially in this season, is not merely to arouse pity, but penitence. Hymn 143, v. 3.

To every penitent sinner comes the heaven-born assurance:
Yes, I do spare.

H. O. A. KEINATH

