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Homiletics: Sermon Studies for the New Church Year

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Homiletics

A Series of Sermon Studies for the Church Year

JUDICA

1 PET. 1:17-25

(See Sermon Study, Vol. IX, page 182)

The Text and the Day.—This Sunday is also known as Passion Sunday. It points at closer range to Holy Week. It and Holy Week have been spoken of as the Passiontide from very early times (Strodach, *The Church Year*, pp. 126—127). This fact makes this text, with its strong emphasis on Christ's Passion, doubly appropriate and effective.

Notes on Meaning.—Context: Vv. 3-12 are a grand doxology on Christian hope, followed by four exhortations in view of it: (1) to set our hope completely on grace; (2) to strive toward holiness; (3) to pass the time of our sojourn in fear; (4) to love one another without ceasing. Only the last two are part of this text.

V. 17: Since "Father" has no article, it is best to read: If as Father you call on God, etc. — "Without respect of persons," literally, God does not accept faces. He looks for repentance. — "Judgeth." — The judging goes on here and now, John 3:18; comes to a climax on the Last Day. — "Work." Singular points to the sum of our entire life and conduct on earth. — "In fear." Not slavish fear, not reverence for God, but the fear and trembling of Phil. 2:12. The anxious heed, or deep concern, lest we lose faith and come short, Heb. 4:1. — "Knowing." This beautiful section furnishes the motive and power for carrying out these exhortations. — "Vain." All human endeavor, however noble, is empty and fruitless without faith in the Lamb. — "Tradition," original sin. — "Precious," because He is God's Son. — "Foreordained," God's eternal plan of salvation. — "Manifest," unfolded, revealed.

V. 21: "Through Him." Without Christ there would be no regeneration by the Holy Spirit. — "Raised." The resurrection is God's final seal on this redemption.

V. 22: "Purified," since you were reborn through faith in the Lamb, a change which continues through life. This rebirth

results in sincere love not only to God, but also to all brethren; not mere lip service. — "Obedience." Faith is essentially obedience, a yielding to the authority of the Gospel. — "Fervently," earnestly and persistently. — "Being born of God" adds force to "fervently," for we are born again by the living and abiding Word of God, Is. 40:8. Spiritual motives and actions become second nature.

Preaching Emphases. — Great stress should be placed in both sections on the accomplished fact of our redemption as described so beautifully and thoroughly in vv. 18-21, even though the text is an admonition to Christian living on the basis of this redemption. In that way the spirit of the day, which is to point forward to the impending Holy Week, will receive proper recognition.

Problem and Goal. — To impress hearers that the greatness of God's grace and mercy should impel His children to manifest deep concern about their life in relation to God and their brethren. Here is a splendid opportunity for a truly evangelical appeal to sanctification.

Outline:

THE CALL OF THE CROSS

- I. It is a call to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. To this we should be moved:
 - A. By reflection on the impartial judgment of Him whom we are privileged to address as "Father."
 - B. By reflection on the tremendous price paid for our redemption.
- II. It is a call to continue unremittingly in the exercise of brotherly love.
 - A. This blessed fruit should likewise spring from the fact that through Christ's redemption our souls have been purified from sin.
 - B. Such brotherly love should continue without ceasing, because we have been born again by the incorruptible seed of the Word.

Conclusion (v. 25): By God's grace we are the happy beneficiaries of Christ's redemption. Let us heed the call of the Cross to manifest ever greater sanctification.

O. E. SOHN

PALM SUNDAY

HEB. 12:1-3

The Text and the Day.—The text is appropriate for a confirmation address or for a sermon at the beginning of Holy Week. The leading thoughts of the Epistle, Christ's humiliation and exaltation, are expressed in the text, but the application varies. The Epistle exhorts to humility, whereas the text stresses endurance.

Notes on Meaning.—“Witnesses”: not spectators, but the saints mentioned in ch. 11, who bore witness of their faith in Christ by word and deed, some also by martyrdom. —“Race”: not a foot race in competition with other runners, but a test of endurance in the face of hindrances and opposition on life's road. Cf. 2 Tim. 4:7. —“Patience”: perseverance. —“Weight”: impediment, encumbrance, things which will interfere, though not sinful per se. Business, social life, and many adiaphora become a “weight” if not used wisely. —“For the joy that was set before Him.” He foresaw the joy of sitting on the right hand of God, His glorification, the joy of mankind redeemed. For this He paid the price of the cross. Cf. Is. 53: 10-12. —“Contradiction”: opposition in general, especially His crucifixion.

Preaching Pitfalls.—While a sermon on this text will naturally be hortatory, and while the text clearly presents Christ as our Example, the preacher must be careful lest he reduce Christ to a mere example. He is the Author and Completer of our Faith. Only because He died for us and rose again, is there a race and a goal for us. —Placing the witnesses into the grandstand surrounding the stadium may be striking, but it is not Scriptural. Is. 63:16.

Preaching Emphases.—The text is not so much a warning as an encouragement. It supplies strength for endurance. The goal, the witnesses who have reached the goal, and Jesus, the Finisher of our Faith—these are incentives for enduring unto the end.

Problem and Goal.—The Hebrew Christians were tempted to become impatient in the face of persecution and to give up. The greatest hindrance, however, is not persecution, but “weights” and sin in its many forms. Looking unto

Jesus enables us to lay aside hindrances, to face persecution courageously, and to persevere and finish our course with joy.

Outline:

RUN LIFE'S RACE WITH ENDURANCE

I. The Race.

- A. It began when the new life was created in us by Jesus, the Author of our faith.
- B. It is strenuous. There is opposition all along the way.
- C. It is a real endurance test, which calls for intense application.
- D. The examples of the witnesses in ch. 11 and others.

II. The Goal.

- A. Not vague or uncertain. 1 Cor. 9:26.
- B. The joy of eternal glory prepared for us by Jesus.
- C. Its preciousness entirely out of proportion to our efforts and endurance. Rom. 8:18.
- D. All Christians run toward the same eternal goal, whatever other goals they may have in this life.
- E. The goal has been reached by many.

III. The Runner.

- A. Not everyone, but you who have been put in condition for this race by the Author of your faith.
- B. A runner will not wear a heavy coat and boots; a Christian will strip himself of whatever tends to impede and weaken him, such as "weights" and sin.
- C. In the face of opposition he will combat weariness by
 - 1. Considering the many witnesses who have successfully finished their course;
 - 2. Looking unto Jesus, the Finisher of his faith;
 - 3. Keeping the goal in view. V. L. MEYER

MAUNDY THURSDAY

1 JOHN 4:19-21

The Text and the Day. — The "new commandment" (*mandatum*, Maundy, John 13:34), given on the first Maundy Thursday, is here picked up by John, v. 21. There the Savior pro-

vided a visual lesson in humble love (foot washing, Gospel, John 13), introduced with "Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end." Lent, drawing to a close, has showed us His sacrificial love. The Holy Communion, instituted on this night (Epistle, 1 Corinthians 11), is a continuing gift of His love.— Our text is suitable for highlighting the Gospel thought of humble love (cp. the Propers) or in underlining proper appreciation of the Lord's Supper (Epistle). It is especially useful if the sermon is to supply the confessional feature in the Communion service.

Notes on Meaning.— "Love" occurs seven times; always *agapao*, love of understanding and comprehension and high purpose; never a "take love," mere desiring for self, but a "give love," pure unselfishness.— No "Him" in best MSS. "We love because. . . ." "We have this principle of love" (*Pulpit Com.*).— "A man," generic term, "someone," "anyone of such a character."—"Hate," as opposite of love, but note that there is no middle ground between love and hate.— Hence, "How can he love God?" or (R. S. V.): "cannot love God." His God is "but a fiction, a self-made idol-god who lets him hate his brother" (Lenski), and his love is a monstrosity.— "Hath seen," adduced not because it is easier to love the visible (we see faults all the more clearly), but rather as a fair test of tangible evidence.— "Brother," defined in 5:1, which incidentally might well be added to the text.— "Commandment," as above.

Preaching Pitfalls.— A superficial handling would degenerate into barren legalism— even in attempting to preach "love"— a mere "Thou shalt love" sermon, based on assumption that mere "commanding" will produce it. V. 19 balances the text in favor of the proper Gospel approach.— Also, for understanding of terms here, it is essential that previous chapters be restudied. John has touched on the same truths several times. Hebraistic style of writing.

Preaching Emphases.— The unifying concept here is "love." Though it has two objects for its expression, God and man, yet the two are one. That is John's point. And what "God hath joined together" let not preacher or hearer part asunder.— Description of true *brotherly* love will serve to condition hearer (Law) to show him his need for God and *divine love*. Then we may "Gospel" him, with emphasis on

the prior ("first") love of God. This, in turn, will strengthen him in "faith towards" God and "in fervent love to one another" (thanksgiving in Communion service). Thus the Communion concept could be developed in sermon "The Feast of Love for the Increase of Love" or by a similar approach.

Problem and Goal. — Love is mark of true Christian, John 13:34; 1 Cor. 13:13. Of Early Church: "Behold, how they love one another!" Often today: "Behold, how little!" Hearers' need for deepening of "love" in cold, selfish, world; self-centered old Adam. Tendency to excuse lovelessness; assumption that there is no immediate connection between "love brother" and "love God." — The goal, then, may be to alert the hearer to the danger signal of "hate" as symptom of need for God; to be instrumental in sermon in giving him divine love; and so in making him more loving.

Outline:

In a world of hate,

CHRISTIANS LOVE

- I. *Do we? The test: brotherly love.*
 - A. Our tendency: assume all is well, for "I love God," 20 a.
 - B. Searching test: Do I hate my brother?
 1. A fair test: I can see my brother. Define "brother," 5:1.
 2. A specific test: probes my daily attitudes, words, actions.
 3. A humbling test: may prove me a "liar" before God.
 - C. The diagnosis completed. We need more of God, who is Love (8 b). "As He . . . so we" (17 b). "Dwelleth in love" (16 b).
- II. *We do. The cause and cure: divine love.*
 - A. He "first." Man unable to reach up (even "enemy"); the divine is real "give love."
 - B. Provided (love expressed) way of salvation (vv. 9, 10, 16, 14; 3:16; 2:1 a). Recapitulate Lenten high-lights, stressing the "first."
 - C. Still offering (love continuing) Himself. Word, Sacrament. Now.

D. So God is loving through us, vv. 21, 11, 19 a: "We love," statement of fact.

Conclusion: That which began as test of discipleship, John 13:34, becomes proof of it, 3:14 a. **W. A. SCHROEDER**

GOOD FRIDAY

COL. 2:13-15

The Text and the Day. — The Introit, "He was wounded for our transgressions," and the Gradual, "Is it nothing to you," can be beautifully combined to introduce the text. Since the text speaks of the Cross of Christ, it is especially suited to be used on Good Friday.

Notes on Meaning. — "Being dead": Gen. 2:17 and Eph. 2:1. Without a clear understanding of our death the death of Christ remains meaningless. "Man in sins is not only weak and sick but defunct and entirely dead." Sins: actual sins. "Uncircumcision of your flesh": original sin. The foreskin was symbolic of alienation from God. Natural man is spiritually dead by virtue both of individual sins and of his sinful condition. Both roots and branches are dead. "Quickened": our spiritual life is dependent on the forgiveness of God. "Forgiven you": "us" is the preferred reading. With the liberation from sin is joined the liberation from the curse of sin (v. 14) and the power of darkness (v. 15). "Trespases": tropical meaning — a lapse, whence our debts and death come. "Blotting out": canceled. Rom. 8:1. "Handwriting": bond, indicative of our debt. "Of ordinances": The Law of God written in the hearts of all and revealed more clearly to Israel at Sinai. Cf. Apology, Art XII, 48. *Triglot*, p. 265. "Against us," "contrary to us"; Bengel: "The difference is as between the state of war and the actual fighting." Cf. Deut. 27:26. We cannot push them aside. They separate us from God and salvation. The Law establishes our debt and issues a bond against us. "Took it": "This He set aside," wholly removed it. Satan uses the Law as a weapon against us. When the Law loses its force against us, also Satan's cause is lost. "Cross": the Cross of Christ. Through His blood, shed on the Cross, Christ removed not only all our sins, but also every bond which indicted us before the justice of God. These words

tell us how the righteous God could take away the bond against us. Is. 53:5. As Jesus was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21), He also became our Bond. "Spoiled": disarmed. Satan "can no longer successfully accuse me, and I can now overcome his temptation." Rev. 12:10. "Principalities," etc.: the evil angels. "Openly": Christ's death was no private incident. It occurred before the face of the entire universe. "In it": the Cross. Through the Cross of Christ God carried out His gracious plan of salvation.

Preaching Pitfalls.— Good Friday sermons are to stress not so much the physical suffering of Christ as rather the doctrine of the vicarious atonement. They must not neglect an appeal to the emotions and heart, but at the same time should not sink into shallow emotionalism. Lurid details of the crucifixion dare not crowd out the Lamb of God's taking away the sin of the world.

Preaching Emphases.— The doctrine of the vicarious atonement must stand in the foreground. Sin and grace must ever be prominent. Cf. *Lutheran Hymnal*, 171:10; 142:3.

Goal.— In this day, when Christianity is so glibly confessed and so little practiced, our hearers should be told that they are "quickenened"; and since Christ has overcome Satan, they should serve Him and not again become slaves of evil. Let them hear that the death of Christ is not so much to be admired from the distance as to be operative in us.

Outline:

CHRIST CANCELED OUR DEBT

I. Wherein the debt consisted.

- A. Uncircumcision of the flesh. — Original sin.
- B. Trespasses. — Actual sin.

II. How debt was canceled.

- A. Not by our works. It was against us.
- B. Christ set it aside through His death on the Cross.

III. The result of this cancellation.

- A. The enemies of our soul are defeated.
- B. Our trespasses are forgiven.
- C. We are made alive.

VICTOR MENNICKE

EASTER SUNDAY

1 COR. 15:51-58

The Text and the Day. — Easter is the day of victory, the most astounding, the most glorious, the most significant, and the most blessed victory ever won.

Notes on Meaning. — V. 51. "Mystery" here means that which was hidden from the knowledge of man heretofore, but which God now revealed and which the Apostle could "show," or make known. — "We shall be changed," the great transformation and glorification which is necessary because — vv. 50, 53. Note especially the "must." Those who have died "shall be raised incorruptible," v. 52; and those who still live "shall be changed" likewise to be incorruptible, immortal. Marvelous! — V. 52. The three phrases "in a moment," "in the twinkling of an eye," and "at the last trump" (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16) describe the time and the suddenness of the great change. — V. 54. "Come to pass that is written," cf. Is. 25:8 and Hos. 13:14. "Death is swallowed up in victory." Death's gaping jaws, which swallowed many, are now swallowed up, divested of all power, forever destroyed.

Vv. 55-57. Great shout of triumph. We may thus challenge death. Christ has removed the sting (sin) for us and also sin's strength, for He fulfilled the Law. Cf. Rom. 8:2. Christ also tore death's fetters into shreds and thus abolished death. His victory is ours, for it is vicarious.

V. 58. "Steadfast" means firm, solid, fixed. Christians stand on the foundation of the Gospel as Paul proclaimed it. The doctrine of the resurrection is the keystone in the arch of the sum total of doctrine. "Unmovable" means we are not to yield when evil forces would drag us down from the foundation. "Always abounding" means that we are to be constantly active and ever increasing in God's work. "Not in vain in the Lord" refers to our labor, our suffering, etc. What a glorious promise!

Preaching Pitfalls. — Modern preachers often use Easter to speak in flowery language on the "resurrection" in nature at this season of the year. At best this is merely an illustration to be used in passing. — In presenting this text we need not prove the resurrection of Christ. This is presupposed as an established fact. Today's Gospel lesson, yes, the last chap-

ters of the Four Gospels and other passages prove this irrefutably.

Preaching Emphases.— We should concentrate on the great truth of the resurrection, our resurrection unto eternal life, which is based upon, and established beyond doubt by, the resurrection of Christ. There is wonderful opportunity for some excellent application in v. 58. People who possess the victory through Christ with its comfort and assurance and hope will be eager to be loyal to Christ and His Word and will serve Him with gladness.

Problem and Goal.— Easter audiences face many distractions. The devil is busy to prevent earnest meditation on the life after death. Challenge the attention of the hearers by the earnest thought of their death and their resurrection. The Day of the Lord is approaching, a terrible day for the ungodly, but most glorious for us who believe in Christ. It means our resurrection or our transformation, our immortality and life eternal.

Outline:

**WE LOOK FORWARD TO OUR RESURRECTION FROM
THE DEAD**

- I. It is based on the resurrection of Christ.
 - A. Christ, our Substitute, conquered death for us.
 - a. He removed the sting (sin).
 - b. He fulfilled the Law.
 - c. He entered death to break its fetters.
- II. It will occur on the great Day of the Lord.
 - A. This time will come quickly.
 - B. All the dead will then arise.
 - C. All the living will be changed.
- III. It serves as a mighty motive for us.
 - A. To explore the revealed "mystery."
 - B. To look forward eagerly to the great Day.
 - C. To thank God for our victory through Christ.
 - D. To remain loyal to Christ and His Word.
 - E. To abound in the work of the Lord.

J. W. BEHNKEN

QUASIMODOGENTI

2 TIM. 2:8-13

The Text and the Day. — The emphasis of the Day is not, as in the fragment of the Introit used as the title, upon the immaturity of Christians, but upon their growth in grace through the Gospel of the resurrection. Both Epistle and Gospel set forth this life of God in the Christian as the fruit of the redemption and resurrection. The Collect sets forth this idea most plainly; Introit and Gradual are more neutral. The text splendidly advances the program of the Day; however, with regard to one specific phase of the Christian's need and program.

Notes on Meaning. — The text is related to 2:1, a discussion of being strong in the grace that is in Christ. St. Paul is concerned particularly with the Christian's faithful and enduring witness among men to his Lord (vv. 3-6). What St. Paul says, he regards as applicable not merely to Timothy, but to those in whom Timothy stirs up the will and patience for witness (v. 2), and hence the text has relevance not merely to the preacher, but to all to whom he preaches. — The text suggests two examples of patient and enduring labor for God which are blessed with glorious fruits, namely, Christ and Paul, vv. 8-10; and it draws the conclusions for the instructing of Christians in their witness to others. — V. 8: Jesus Christ lived the full human life of lowliness, suffering, and death; yet He was raised from the dead and made possible the saving Gospel. Cf. Phil. 2:5-12; Heb. 2:9. — V. 9: Preaching the Gospel of Christ brings Paul into jeopardy and the status of a criminal. Yet when he preaches the Gospel, he is dealing with a power that is God's own life. Cf. Rom. 1:16. — V. 10: Hence Paul has the point of view toward his ministry of the Word which he is recommending to Timothy and those whom Timothy instructs, namely, one of endurance and courage. He holds in mind the life-giving power of the Gospel of the resurrected Christ, and the purpose of his work to bring salvation to men. That salvation is a rescue from death of the soul, through Christ, a salvation that displays itself in eternal terms. Cf. 2 Cor. 4:17. — V. 11: Our sufferings are for Christ's sake and hence with Christ; therefore we have also life with Him. Cf. Rom. 6:4-8; Col. 2:12. Our resurrection is from the old

nature and world already in this present existence, and it goes on into the life beyond time. The thought is repeated in the first half of v. 12. To reign with Jesus means not in a fleshly sense; His reign is in the hearts and His kingdom not of this world; through his Gospel witness to Christ the Christian achieves a heavenly control over men. — Vv. 12 b and 13. Cf. Matt. 10:33. Unreadiness to sustain the perils and pains of ministry and witness denies Christ and repudiates His life within. But immediately Paul reminds himself and Timothy and every Christian that even the unfaithfulness and waywardness of the flesh can have the forgiveness of Christ and the new supply of power. Cf. 1 John 2:1.

Preaching Pitfalls. — The temptation is at hand to develop a lesson on suffering in general. Text and context, however, stress endurance of suffering for the sake of and because of the powerful Gospel, for the sake of witness to others.

Problem and Goal. — The goal of this sermon is a better witness to Jesus Christ, His redemption and resurrection, which will bring others to faith and to that end will be patient and victorious in trouble and persecution. The specific problem which the text meets therefore is the Christian's assumption that he may slacken his witness, or that it will be less effective, when he experiences difficulties and pain. The sermon is to give insight into the purpose of suffering and to supply the victory of Christ for enduring it.

Outline:

THE SUFFERINGS OF THE CHRISTIAN WITNESS

I. What they are.

- A. The setbacks and disappointments in converting people; the apathy and persecution by the world; the pains and difficulties of living.
- B. Their problem: they tend to make the Christian discouraged and to weaken and retard his witness.

II. Why they need to be endured patiently.

- A. Christ Himself suffered, died, and rose again. He did so that He might live victoriously in the Christian.
- B. Hence the Christian's witness to Christ demonstrates

not only the untroubled living of the Christian, but also his hold on Christ in suffering.

C. The life of witness is for the sake of others. Hence the Christian proves his love and carries out his purpose in the world as he suffers manfully.

III. How the Christian can endure victoriously.

A. Remember: Christ's death and resurrection, v. 8.

B. Remember: The power of the Gospel of this Christ, v. 9.

C. Remember: The plan that Christ has for us that, after suffering, we are to triumph, vv. 11 and 12.

D. Remember: That He stands by us faithfully to help us achieve this plan, v. 13.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

