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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

REMINISCERE

JOHN 8:21-30

The Text and the Day. The teaching of Christ in the setting of this text and context is the fearless and emphatic reiteration of His astounding claims concerning Himself; viz., *He is the Christ, the Divine Savior of the world.*

The prevailing thought of the Gospel Lesson for Reminiscere is the absolute necessity of believing in the vicarious atonement of Christ, who is the "Propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." The Introit (Ps. 25:6): "Remember, O Lord, Thy tender mercies and Thy loving-kindnesses; for they have been ever of old." The Gospel Lesson re-echoes the cry of the Syrophoenician woman: "Lord, help me." The Epistle emphasizes the need for holiness. In this text the Jews, in altercation with Jesus, deny that He is Christ the Savior. Jesus warns them on account of their unbelief. He shows them that they are without excuse and that eternal disaster will be their well-deserved doom.

Notes and Meaning. — "I go My way"; i. e., "I go away," "I am going away of My own accord." Woe to all who reject Christ. It is a terrible thing when He says, "I go away." He has gone away from Jews, Romanists, Modernists, Liberalists, materialists, social gospelites, etc. "I was the Savior among you and gave you the Father's Word." But if you do not want to be saved — very well — do as you please. You remain what you are, and I remain what I am.

"And ye shall seek Me" — the time will come when I am gone and you will be searching Messiahs, and they will be false and will bring neither temporal nor spiritual salvation. When the Gospel is gone, then the search begins. Alas, how men struggle in their work-righteousness today and find no peace and salvation!

"Ye shall die in your sin." Their chief sin was unbelief, which

underlay all their other sins. Unless they repented and ceased rejecting the Savior, eternal condemnation would be their lot.

"Whither I go, ye cannot come." — This is the climax — eternal separation from Christ the Savior. Here is the futility of "good" works: "ye cannot come."

V. 23: "From beneath," of things which are below; they were earthly, sensual, devilish. Christ's spirit was directly contrary: "from above," pure, peaceable, gentle, full of mercy, genuine.

V. 25: "Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning," "I am altogether even what I am telling you." He is nothing but what He represents, and from the beginning has represented, Himself to be.

V. 26. Christ constantly appealed to the Father as the Source of His Word and as His Witness — unlike those who speak their own notions and judgments, He speaks in the world what He has heard from Him who sent Him.

V. 28. Even the future will bear Him out, as the Jews will see in due time.

V. 29. You can see for yourselves that the Father is with Me, and prompts whatever I say, by comparing all My doings with His will.

Preaching Pitfalls. — Laying more emphasis on the doubts of the Jews than on Christ's witness that He is the Messiah. While we must point out the sin and folly of those who deny Christ's deity, nevertheless our emphasis must be that Christ is true God and true Man and the divinely appointed Redeemer of the world. Dealing in generalities, condemning the Jews and the Romans and the Russians and the modern Church and Congress and church officials will result in much assent and little or no penitence. Do we see the sin of the Jews in ourselves? Christ called sinners to repentance. He preached to them the Law in its full severity. He proclaimed to them the Gospel in its full sweetness.

Preaching Emphasis. — The absolute necessity of believing in Christ, who was crucified for the sins of the world. Preach Christ the Light of the world without whom everything is darkness, subject to Satan and death. The Lord preached that "He is the Savior of the World" right in the Temple at Jerusalem, where the Pharisees ruled and where they wanted to kill Him and dared not. Christ

abolished everything in which the Pharisees gloried — the Temple, the Law, and their form of worship. He preached, "I am He." Let the servants of God with courage and boldness preach the fate of the unbelievers, who shall die in their sin and be forever separated from Christ; and with the same courage let them preach the certainty of our salvation, which rests upon the Father, who sent Christ, and rests upon Christ, Who died for our sins.

Problem and Goal. — To see the spiritual dullness, ignorance, and unbelief not only in the Jews, but also in ourselves. With repentant and believing heart to accept Jesus Christ as "my very own and personal Savior and Redeemer." The Word of Christ is indispensable for every human being — for unbelievers, that they may come to faith; for believers, that they may continue in the faith.

Outline:

CHRIST'S TESTIMONY CONCERNING HIMSELF

I. The Contents of His Testimony.

- A. Who Christ is. Vv. 25, 28, 23, 24.
- B. What He has done for us. Vv. 28-29.
- C. How indispensable for all. Vv. 24, 26.

II. The Truth of His Testimony.

- A. Christ is precisely what He claims to be. V. 25.
- B. His Word is the Father's, as future will reveal. V. 28.
- C. His Word pleases the Father. V. 29.

III. The Effect of His Testimony.

- A. How all may escape dying in sin. Vv. 24, 21.
- B. How sarcastically the unbeliever sneers, "Who art Thou?" i.e., "Oh, is that so!" Vv. 25, 27.
- C. How joyfully the believer accepts, "Who art Thou?" i.e., "Oh, how wonderful!" V. 30.

EDWIN E. PIEPLOW

OCULI

JOHN 2:13-15

The Text and the Day. — In earlier days this was the Sunday on which the catechumens became *initiati*, or initiates, (1) by an examination in the things learned thus far; (2) by a public renuncia-

tion of Satan (cp. the baptismal vow and its renewal in confirmation); and (3) by a formal exorcism, commanding Satan to depart from them. The *Prophets* are very appropriate: "He shall pluck my feet out of the net" (Introit); "Defense against all enemies" (Collect); "Ye were . . . in darkness" (Epistle); "Let not man prevail" (Gradual); and Christ, after casting out a devil, warns against the dreadful consequences of his return (Gospel). How fitting our text, teaching the purging of the Lord's Temple (also the temple of the believing heart) from all that interferes with a consistent profession of faith.

Notes on the Meaning.— V. 14: "Those who sold oxen" — for the sacrifices of the worshipers who had come from afar; "changers of money" were those who for profit exchanged heathen coins which often had idolatrous inscriptions, for the Jewish shekel, which was required of every male as his Temple tax and which was the equivalent of a workman's wages for two days of labor.

V. 17: "The zeal . . ." quoted from Psalm 69, a Messianic Psalm, pointing to the holy indignation of God against the misuse of His holy Temple.

V. 20: "Forty and six years . . ." it took about eighty-five years to build the Temple. It was still under construction at this time and was not completed until about 64 A. D.

V. 23. "In the feast [*en heortee*] . . ." the feast covered a period of seven days, and during this period Jesus 'was doing' (*epoiei*, Imperfect) miracles. "Many believed" (*epistensan*, Ingressive, Aorist, came to believe in Him), but their faith was not going to last; and for that reason, Jesus, knowing all hearts, did not commit Himself to them (*episteneu*, Imperfect, lit., did not place confidence in them).

Preaching Pitfalls.— A warning against the use of money-making devices on church property and by church organizations ought not to be made the main point of the sermon. Our text is a lesson rather against the inconsistency of professing a faith in ceremony and form, without putting it to practice in life. The Scribes and the Pharisees, for instance, were in the midst of a *ceremonial* cleansing of God's Temple through burnt offerings and the custom of purging out the old leaven, but failed to accompany this with the *actual*

purging of the Temple from a practice which interfered with the proper worship of God. Such is also the case when we profess *formal* loyalty to God in rituals and ceremonies, but *in practice* allow extraneous matters to interfere with the *actual* hearing and keeping of His Word (the Gospel).

Problem and Goal.— In order to meet the hearer's need according to this text, the preacher will (1) Seek to make his people realize that it is a dangerous sin, of which they too are guilty, to allow anything to interfere with the consistent worship and service of God (Gospel and Epistle); (2) On the basis of Christ's perfect fulfillment of all the Passover symbolism and sacrifices, guaranteed by the sure sign of His Resurrection, the preacher will assure his people the complete cleansing of their hearts from all sin; and (3) he will appeal to them on the ground of this perfect purging from sin always to suit their actions to the word, to "walk as children of light" (Epistle), and thus daily to purge the Temple of their hearts from all that might interfere with the worship and service of the Savior.

Illustrations.— 1. In the Gospel the Lord shows us that carelessness may result in a return of Satan with a sevenfold possession. 2. The Epistle lists the kinds of sin which may prevent a consistent profession of faith in word and deed. 3. In Rev. 3:20 we behold our Savior seeking entrance into the heart's temple, in order to remove the dangerous sin of lukewarmness. 4. Dives, like the Jews and others, thought that miracles might be more effective than the Word, but miracles are not the sure ground for faith (Luke 16: 30-31; and John 2:23-25). 5. A good example of a layman cleansing his heart from that which caused sermons to seem dull to him is found in the *Walther League Messenger*, July, 1949, pp. 10—11, under the title "There Are No Dull Sermons."

Outline:

JESUS COMES INTO HIS TEMPLE TO CLEANSE IT

I. The Cleansing.

- A.** As the inconsistent practices in the Temple of Jerusalem required a purging, even so the inconsistencies of our profession of faith require a daily and repeated purging of the temple of our hearts.

B. Even as Jesus with a righteous zeal cleansed His earthly sanctuary, so with an equal zeal and with the full right of ownership He would cleanse our hearts.

II. Our Reaction.

A. As some demanded a sign proving His right to cleanse the Temple, so some today demand miracles for faith in His power to cleanse.

B. As some did believe because of His miracles, even so some today will accept Christ for a time, but fail in the hour of trial.

C. As the disciples remembered Christ's prophecy and believed the testimony concerning Him, purging their hearts according to His Word (John 17:17-19; Acts 4:33; Acts 5:41-42), even so let us believe in deed and in truth, purging our hearts from sin.

THEODORE F. NICKEL

LAETARE

LUKE 12:31-34

The Text and the Day.—This text cries for a hearing on this or any other day of the church year.

Notes on Meaning.—Jesus was preaching to a vast audience (Luke 12:1-12). Taking advantage of a pause in the sermon, "a boor with nothing but money on his brain brayed in, 'Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me'" (v. 13). (William Lyon Phelps tells us that after Lincoln had finished his memorable words in the Second Inaugural, one man pushed through the crowd and began pleading with him for a post-office appointment.) After rebuking the fellow, our Lord warned His hearers against covetousness, "for a man's life [his *real* life] consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (vv. 14-15). Grubby thing—worship as practiced by the Rich Fool, ends in eternal poverty. Only he is rich who has God (vv. 16-21).

Turning to those who have God, Jesus makes the application. We are not to be anxiously concerned about things. That is unnecessary. Our Father, who has given us the greater, our life, will certainly also give us the lesser, the things which we need for our life. Again, it is useless. All our worrying about things brings us

nothing. And it is heathenish. "Take no thought for your life. . . . For all these things do the nations of the world seek after; and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things" (vv. 22-30).

And now follows our text: "But rather seek ye the Kingdom of God." The children of God have a philosophy of life that is different: one that is concerned not with things, but with the Kingdom of God. They *have* the Kingdom. "It did please your Father to give you the Kingdom." Yet, surrounded by things and by people who seek after things, they must "keep on seeking the Kingdom," must keep on hungering and striving for the Kingdom, must keep on making oneness with God their all-consuming concern. To this end, Jesus tells them to "sell your belongings, and give alms." Sacrificing their things (if need be, all things) for the Kingdom will help them keep their hearts off things and on the Kingdom. Moreover, they thereby invest in the Kingdom—they exchange that which they can't take with them for that which they *can* take with them. John 15:16: "That your fruit should remain." Rev. 14:13: "Their works do follow them."

Problem and Goal.—Page through the "ads" in our magazines. Consider the lure of things. "Statisticians have estimated that a century ago the average man had 72 wants, of which 16 were regarded as necessities, but that today the average man has 484 wants, 94 of which are regarded as necessities, and that, moreover, whereas a century ago 200 articles were urged upon the average man by salesmanship, now 32,000 are urged on us" (Harry Emerson Fosdick, in *The Hope of the World*). In the midst of all this, Jesus wants us to show a true sense of values by giving the first place in our life to the Kingdom and by placing our all into the service of the Kingdom.

Outline: THE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

1. The most important thing about a person is his philosophy of life. Your idea of the purpose of life will greatly determine what you are going to do with your life, and it will have a definite bearing on your eternal destiny.

2. The life philosophy of the vast majority of people centers in things. Their aim is the accumulation and enjoyment of things. But

no number of things can fill their heart. And when their things leave them, or when they must leave their things, they have everlastingly nothing.

3. The great void in men's hearts is a God-shaped blank. The Christian philosophy of life centers in Him who alone can fill that blank — God. We Christians have God. He is our reconciled Father in Christ Jesus. We have the Kingdom. Righteousness, peace, joy, heaven, are God's free gift, which we receive by faith. That is our treasure, priceless and unfailing. Why bother about things?

4. But we *do* bother about things. Surrounded by things and the worshipers of things, we often find the pull of things tremendous. Time and again we catch ourselves indulging in the love of things — and forgetting about the Kingdom. Therefore the admonition of Jesus to "keep on seeking the Kingdom of God." To have the Kingdom within us and someday to live with our Savior-King in glory, this must be the prime purpose of our existence.

5. And what about things? Our Father knows what things we need, and He will add them unto us. As for the other things, they are given us that we may bring sacrifices for the Kingdom. By doing this, we avoid the danger of setting our hearts upon them and, at the same time, exchange them for that which we can take with us.

OSWALD RIESS

JUDICA

MATT. 20:20-28

The Text and the Day. — Judica Sunday is the Sunday prior to Palm Sunday and Holy Week. Holy Week emphasizes not only Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, but also Christ's supreme sacrifice on the Cross for the salvation of all mankind. The regular Epistle for this Sunday (Heb. 9:11-15) points to Christ, the great High Priest, and the service He rendered by shedding His blood so that mankind might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. In our text, especially in the last part, our Savior points the way to true greatness through humble service.

Notes on Meaning. — In treating this text it is well for us to remember that the "Then" of v. 20 points back to the context (vv. 17-19), the detailed description of the Passion of Jesus. It seems as though Salome and her sons completely ignored this statement of Christ concerning His Passion. Her whole request shows a

wrong conception of Christ's mission and Christ's kingdom. The prayer of Salome is unusual. Usually the disciples expected too little. They were men of little faith, but here a mother and her sons expect too much. Salome had a vision of Christ as a temporal king with a splendid court, and she requested that her sons, John and James, sit at the right and left of the kingly throne, in seats of honor as prime ministers of the state. It is well to remember that in the case of the division on Judgment Day (cf. Matthew 25) *the right* signifies honor and *the left* shame; but in a royal court both sides are places of honor, the left only slightly less honorable than the right (cf. 1 Kings 2:19; 22:19; 2 Chron. 18:18). The "cup" in vv. 23-24 is the cup of suffering (cf. John 18:11; Matt. 26:39, 42). To drink the cup means to endure suffering. In v. 23 Jesus identifies the suffering of His disciples, suffering for His sake, with His own suffering (1 Pet. 4:13, 2 Cor. 4:10, Gal. 6:17). "Not Mine to give." Disposition of the glory seats in heaven rests in the eternal counsel of God the Father. After showing in v. 25 how the great of the world exercise greatness, Jesus shows that true greatness involves becoming a servant, a lowly slave. True greatness is selfless service based on the example of Christ, who laid down His life to earn our salvation (Col. 1:13-14).

Preaching Pitfalls.—In preaching it is easy to make too much of the surmise that Salome tried to bind Jesus in advance by promising to grant a favor before He knew what the favor would be (v. 20), to speak of oath-bound lodge promises, etc. One can also stress the folly of Salome's prayer too much. She had the wrong conception of Christ's kingdom, and that makes her prayer foolish. It is not wrong for a mother to ask that her child be of real service in the Kingdom of God.

Problem and Goal.—Worldly people usually have the wrong idea of greatness. They consider power, authority, honor, lordship, the mark of true greatness. Christian people, living in this power-mad world, are often influenced by worldly standards of greatness and worldly ways to attain this greatness. The aim of Jesus and the aim of our sermon should be to show the right way to greatness, the Jesus way to importance.

Illustration.—A very poor St. Louis family found itself in financial difficulties. The father was in poor health, he did not have a

steady job, the children were sick, and the parents were wondering how they could raise a little money. Their little six-year-old son heard them discussing the problem, and he unselfishly offered to sell the best thing he had, his secondhand bicycle. He was ready to render this service to his parents and family. The result of this kind offer to serve in his childish way by making a sacrifice brought the picture of the little boy into the newspaper. As a result, he did not only keep his old bicycle, but received a brand-new one, together with \$345.00 in gifts, from kind and sympathetic people. A little willing service which was great service indeed!

Outline:

THE WAY TO TRUE GREATNESS

- I. Not the way of demanding prayer.
 - A. Salome's request was based on wrong notions concerning Christ's kingdom, v. 21.
 - B. Salome sought greatness for her sons through granted favors, vv. 20, 23.
- II. But the way of humble service.
 - A. Christ's idea of true greatness, vv. 26-27.
 - B. Christ's example of humble service, v. 28.
 - C. Our path to true greatness through grateful service to God and man.

E. L. ROSCHKE