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Homiletics: Outlines on Hannover Epistles

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on Hannover Epistles

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 10:1-33

We have become thoroughly familiar with such words as "Go ye, therefore, and teach all *nations*"; "God would have *all men* to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." But the Apostles were equally familiar with them, and still they did not see them in their true world-wide significance because of their Jewish scruples. It may be that we need just as much instruction from God as did Peter before we fully and finally do what God asks of us. Actually it all hinges on the answer which our faith gives to the question:

FOR WHOM IS JESUS CHRIST?

I

The Marvelous Grace of God in Preparing Cornelius for the Preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

A. What Cornelius was in his relationship to God (vv. 1, 2). With a high position of trust from God (centurion) that only too often was abused for selfish purposes. A Gentile who was a proselyte of the gate, using the two most highly regarded Jewish virtues for the expression of his faith.

NOTE: It should be shown that the alms and the prayers were not the reason or cause of grace, as if Cornelius had greater merit than others who received no such favor. Actually the word for "prayer" here would seem to indicate something beyond the Jewish offices of prayer. Without a doubt the strong, constant pleading for the revelation of the Messiah and the inclusion of himself and his own in the blessing of the Messiah. Cornelius would be something of a Gentile counterpart of the Shepherds, Simeon, Anna, and others.

B. The grace of God in urging Cornelius to send for Peter (vv. 3-6). God sends an angel to encourage and indicate to Cor-

nelius what he should do, but the preaching of the Gospel God reserves for the holy ministry, which He Himself instituted. Doubtless there are angels working today without our being aware of them, angels of crosses, angels of bells, angels of memories, perhaps even angels carrying H-bombs and threatening C-bombs; but the best that God will let them do is urge men to send for those who can preach the Gospel or prepare men's hearts for the Gospel that is preached.

C. Cornelius in his relationship with his own (vv. 7, 8). Cornelius is a sharer of his religious knowledge and experience with those close to him. At the time he was better in this respect than Peter, though himself still in need of much information. Might it be that many of the sects and many less privileged individuals put us to shame in this respect?

NOTE: Perhaps to offset any possibility of misunderstanding, the emphasis in this section should be on Cornelius' need of grace, for all the fine things said about him would profit him nothing if he did not believe the Gospel that Peter was to bring. It should also be shown that Cornelius served a larger and wider function than his own person, because God was using him in a very special way to open the doors of His Church to all. For whom is Christ? Even for me, because He is for Cornelius and for all.

II

The Marvelous Grace of God in Breaking Down the Wall of Partition by Preparing Peter to Preach the Gospel to Cornelius

A. Peter had stronger reasons for not preaching to Cornelius than we have for not preaching to some in our day (v. 14).

B. God recognizes neither our personal scruples nor any man's background, descent, or even sin. The only thing that God recognizes is Jesus Christ, who by His death and resurrection has made all things clean (v. 15).

NOTE: Here, of course, is the heart of this text and therefore must also be the heart of the sermon. It is most tempting to take v. 15 as the theme, but it is subject to too much misunderstanding. Most pertinent is that we ask ourselves to what extent we are calling common what God has cleansed for far lower reasons and

from lower motives than Peter had. Everything that we let interfere with the preaching of the Gospel is for us a way in which we call unclean what God has cleansed. This would make a strong mission sermon.

C. God's special grace in His patience with Peter (v.16). It would seem that Peter refused three times, but God is gracious also in His dealings with our unwillingness. A sermon such as this one can become shows how patiently God still deals with us after we have refused not three, but many times!

III

A Convinced Peter Does Not Hesitate When God Asks

A. Peter finds the application of his vision in the people who have come to bring him to Cornelius (vv. 19, 20). We err when we attempt to confine the Gospel to our own musings or theoretical discussion of the question "For whom is Jesus Christ?" God always has only one application. Christ is for people who are not "unclean" because Christ died and rose.

B. Peter willing to go because he knows what God wants (v. 21). If we know what God wants over against the Corneliuses of the world, what must our refusal show?

C. Peter sincerely acknowledges his unwillingness, but is under the constraint of God (vv. 28, 29). More often than not we offer willingness and do not go. Perhaps the Parable of the Two Sons is pertinent here.

IV

The Marvelous Soil for Sowing the Seed After God Has Prepared It

A. Frank acknowledgment on Cornelius' part of God's grace in that he mentions not what he, but what God has done (vv. 30-32). These are those for whom Jesus Christ is: humble before God, empty of virtue and merit, hungry for righteousness. One could almost think of all the Beatitudes in connection with Cornelius.

B. The purpose of the gathering (v.33). This should be the theme of every congregation, and to hear and do all that God has commanded should be the single purpose of its existence as well as the heart of its worship.

NOTE: Let us be sure that we do not use this as a new judgment on what is clean and unclean, as if we were able to tell in advance that certain groups are more amenable to the Gospel than others and some people were more eager to hear all that God has commanded than others. That is why the theme must be developed in all the parts of this sermon, even more perhaps than has been indicated, because the only conclusion that this text warrants is that Jesus Christ is for all, and we have something less than an understanding of Him, His death and life and work and resurrection, if we in any way attempt to keep Him as our exclusive prerogative.

Minneapolis, Minn.

WILLIAM A. BUEGE

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 12:1-17

There is a language everyone understands — trouble (Job 14:1). Christians not exempt (Heb. 12:6). God permits trouble to come to His children.

WHEN TROUBLE COMES

I

The Christian Prays

A. The Christians prayed then (vv. 1-5).

1. Trouble came like a storm to church in Jerusalem. Herod vexed church. James beheaded. Peter, leader of the church, imprisoned. Clouds of trouble dark and threatening.

2. The Christians prayed. It seemed so futile. Herod determined. Prison secure. Future of church looked dark. But Christians went to the very God who let trouble come to young and struggling church. Prayed far into the night.

B. The Christian prays today.

1. Day of trouble not past. Troubles of all kinds. Enumerate. We have trouble as Christians and trouble because we are Christian. What shall we do?

2. The Christian prays. Things may seem to be as hopeless as when Peter was in prison. As night is darkest before the dawn, so God's help is nearest when trouble is greatest. That is why the Christian prays.

II

The Lord Answers

A. He answered then (vv. 2, 6-10).

1. He answered James, but in His own way. James had requested a seat of honor (Mark 10:35 ff.), but received a martyr's crown. God also answered his request for a steadfast faith when facing the sword.

2. He answered Peter. Facing execution, lying on prison floor, chained to two soldiers, but sound asleep. Not the guilty sleep of Gethsemane, but the peaceful sleep of a child of God committed to His care. "So He giveth His beloved sleep."

3. He answered the prayers of the church in Jerusalem. Here describe the miraculous delivery of Peter. Almost too good to be true (v. 9 b).

B. He answers today.

1. The promises of God to answer prayer (Ps. 50:15; Is. 65:24; Matt. 7:7) are sure (Ps. 33:4).

2. But He answers in His own way. One woman receives no child, another as many as she desires. One Christian dies, another gets well. One succeeds in business, another fails. We may not be able to understand the ways of God, but we can be sure of His love. Therefore we trust His wisdom and submit to His will.

III

The Christian's Faith Is Strengthened

A. How the early Christians were strengthened (vv. 11-17).

1. Peter was strengthened and strengthened his brethren. What seemed like a dream became a conviction (v. 11). What seemed impossible was now very real. He went to home of Mary to encourage his fellow believers.

2. The praying Christians were strengthened. They needed it. Refused to believe Peter was free. Said Rhoda was mad or that it was Peter's angel. But what joy when they saw the delivered Apostle! He had to signal to them to remain silent. Then, after listening to his account of his deliverance, they went to strengthen their brethren. The result? (V. 24.)

B. Christians strengthened today.

1. Some have been strengthened. Here I would like to step down from pulpit and have some of you relate how you went to God in the day of trouble, how He answered your prayers, and how your faith was strengthened. To do this publicly here might embarrass you, but will you do it privately? Share your increased joy!

2. Some will be strengthened. Are you now facing some problem that seems to defy solution? Keep on praying like those early Christians. God will answer even though you may not believe it possible. And then, when His time comes, how much stronger your faith will be!

Do you know of someone who is behind the "iron gate" of trouble? Pray for him. No hand was seen by Peter when the iron gates opened, but the folded hands of praying Christians held the key. The arm of the Lord is not shortened. His ear is not closed. Your folded hands hold the key. Open the gate, and set your friend free.

Riverside, Calif.

WILLIAM GRAUMANN

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 THESS. 3:1-13

Our best intentions for service are in vain unless they are founded in Christ. We need to plant our feet firmly on Christ and then work. All of us have duties and obligations in many of our relationships in life. In the family, in business, and in the church we have responsibilities. We ask for clear vision to know that we stand with Christ and for Him. Let the world see Christ through us in our life and service. Our text gives some

DIRECTIONS OF DUTY FOR CHRISTIANS

I

We Are in Christ

A. Faith in Christ is a gift of God.

1. By nature we have no faith (v. 2). "All men have not faith." By ourselves we are misdirected (Eph. 2:1; 5:14; Col. 2:13). Amid a hundred philosophies of salvation we know that

2. God alone creates saving faith (v.5). He directs the way (Eph. 2:8,9; Acts 15:11; Rom. 3:24). This is the triumph of Calvary and the empty tomb. And God, who creates faith, will also preserve it (v. 3; 2 Tim. 2:13; Rev. 1:5).

B. Faith in Christ demands expression (v.4).

"Faith without works is dead." (James 2:17 ff.) After we worship, we serve (Matt. 4:10; 5:16; 1 Tim. 6:18; Heb. 10:24). Faith must function. First we hear the sermon, then we live it. The Great Commission has been given also to us. We show our love to those whom we love. The Lord directs us into service for Him.

II

We Who Are in Christ Have Duties

A. The duty of prayer.

1. There must be prayer that the Word of God have free course and be glorified (v.1). The Gospel must keep on moving forward by winning new hearts for Christ. To stand still is to go backward. We must pray for our faithful missionaries. (List some of the projects of our Church: Lutheran Hour, "This Is the Life," missionaries in foreign fields and at home, the opening of two new missions every week, Sunday School by Mail, and other efforts that are being made for the spreading of the Word.)

2. Pray also that opposition may come to an end (v.2). Paul's life was not to be cut short by evil men. His life may have been the most important one on earth at that time. There was much enmity against Paul for his preaching of the Gospel (1 Cor. 16:9). Note the catalog of troubles in 2 Cor. 11:25 ff. We pray today that opposition to missionaries and their work may come to an end. We pray also that various governments may not hinder the spread of the Gospel.

B. The duty of patience (v.5).

The congregation to which this letter was sent needed patience. The Lord is the great Example of patience (Is. 53:7). Christ was patient through all His suffering (Heb. 10:36; James 5:7). We must have patience to wait for His advent and in all our duties.

C. The duty of withdrawing from evil associations (v.6).

There were sinners in the church. They were walking disorderly (v.6; 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 John 10).

The true Christians were to withdraw from such persons. This was social exclusion, ostracism. Christians cannot live on terms of intimacy with those who deny the faith. The world judges us by the people with whom we associate.

D. The duty of work.

Paul gave a good example of work. He could have received support from the church. But in order to give a good example he earned his own living (vv. 7 ff.; 1 Cor. 9:14, 15). Paul was not ashamed to work. Those not working should not eat (v. 10; Rom. 12:11; Prov. 20:13). This refers to those who are able to work but refuse (Gen. 3:19).

Don't be busybodies (vv. 11, 12; 1 Tim. 5:13). Don't meddle with work that is none of your business. Work with quietness, and eat the bread earned by your own toil (v. 12).

In these Christian duties don't become weary (v. 13). There is no rest in the spiritual life. We must always be at work for the Lord. Work while it is day. We shall have our rest in heaven.

Buffalo, N. Y.

JOHN E. MEYER

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 14:8-20

One thing we all like, to have others compliment us for things we are, do, and have. Warm feeling to know others approve, no matter who. As individual Christians and as a Church collectively often long to bask in sunshine of public approval. Strive in every way to build up this approval, to have a good place in the public eye. Being

IN THE PUBLIC EYE

may be a pleasant and a hazardous thing as the text shows in experience of Paul and Barnabas. They enjoyed and suffered

I

Loud Adulation, Even to Deification

Preaching in Lystra reached high point of success on a certain day. A regular listener, converted (vv. 8, 9), "had faith." The success we still seek, not to bring men to ourselves, but to Christ.

Then the real miracle has been accomplished. This is what we want to be in the public eye.

In addition, some wonderful things. In the text (v. 10). This secondary success was received with crushing public approval. Maybe Paul regretted he had said it so loud. He had public approval, publicity unsurpassed, which soon put him on the razor's edge. He was indeed in the public eye.

Response of public was immediate, spontaneous, enthusiastic, loud, and sincere (v. 11). They could not estimate quickly how they looked in the public eye; they did not understand their dialect. To this day often difficult to estimate our place in the public eye. At the moment we do not understand the dialect of the world.

There was loud adulation, too loud (vv. 11 b, 12). The heathen legend of Baucis and Philemon well known. An aged poor couple had been hospitable to Jupiter and Mercury (explain order and function of these deities) as they traveled in disguise. Neighboring wealthier people destroyed by flood for not taking them in. Humble cottage changed into temple. They became its priests, granted a long life, and died within the same hour, as requested. Their bodies changed into oak and lime trees before the temple. (See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 8,611, etc.) Those who had not believed the story up till now believed it now. These men are not from God; they are the gods themselves. They were truly high in the public eye. Too high!

What they said, they did (v. 13). Double motive: fear, to protect their property; hope, to receive a great blessing.

This was the backfire: Instead of getting them away from their heathen religion, their paganism had been strengthened. This dare not go on! Though praised to the skies, it was public approval, wrong in itself, wrong because excessive, wrong because given for a wrong reason. Learn this lesson: for a Christian or a Church to be in the people's eye may be an awkward, embarrassing thing. You are at their mercy. Their vision, not only slanted, but entirely distorted. This is the bitter lesson of the text for Paul and us. What to do? Every effort made to correct the public—a most unpopular thing to do (vv. 14-18). "Preach unto you," we bring you good news. You think it is good news that Jupiter and Mercury are with you—no such thing. They do not even exist. Turn

from these vanities, these nothings. Turn to Christ, who made this man leap to the throne of God. This is the slant we wish to attain in the public eye: our work is to save souls. Is this where you stand in the public eye? you, your congregation in its various activities?

II

Loud Condemnation

They quit their adulation reluctantly (v. 18). Were they insulted? If not, they were confused. 1. Resentment: All right! If you don't want our attention, you won't get it. 2. Indifference: Just forget it. 3. Acceptance: Some converted, came to hear Paul through the publicity, disciples gained (v. 20). 4. Open hostility.

Would not take much to tilt emotions from adulation to condemnation. It came from 30 to 130 miles away (v. 19). A religious goon squad exploited the grievances in true totalitarian style. The miracle was a fake. The Apostles were impostors exploiting the legends of the people. Truly, in the public eye! From loud adulation to loud condemnation. Sacrifice in the hands today, stones tomorrow. Have you ever felt the sting of such stones?

In the public eye either as individual Christians or collectively as a Church. The heathen public has two slants, both wrong: (1) Adulation which considers us in a superstitious way, regard with awe and respect, a power for good, personal approval that we are fine people, to be trusted; pray, worship together, maintain schools, etc. Good for us, but not acceptable to them. (2) Condemnation, the slant of the vast majority. Consider every Christian a poor deluded fool, or a fool who is trying to fool others. Sin, heaven, hell, Christ, in their eyes — a colossal scheme of delusion. Their thoughts are hammering the planks for the gallows. Have you ever felt the pressure of public opinion?

To be in the public eye, a good thing, not for its own sake, but to bring them to God's Word, e.g., miracle of the text, the other fine things we do. For this reason eager for good public relations. Should not make ourselves obnoxious; though many

things about us in themselves that are so in their eyes. The temptation: to stunt our witness to keep the fangs of the masses covered.

One purpose to be in the public eye: not that *we* receive the praise of men, but that *God* receive the praise of men. That we put in their eye what is in our eye, Jesus Christ.

Did you ever feel the spite of other people because you are a Christian? Ever lose a friend? Then know that these are the stones of Lystra. For a Christian to be high in the public eye is often to get a black eye. The test question: Am I willing to hold up my head and take a "shiner" for my Lord Jesus? Paul was. Are you?

Schaumburg, Ill.

F. A. HERTWIG, JR.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 15:4-22

A rather lengthy text. Yet fits admirably into assigned place of the scheme of the church year. Many District conventions have been held, pastoral conferences are in the offing, and generally congregational activities will again be resumed after the summer's lull. For all of these activities this text contains some valuable lessons. Reports to congregations of District conventions; preparation for pastoral conferences; Bible Study Advance in the congregations; all will profit by a study of the text before us. For our learning let us summarize the text under the caption:

PROBLEMS VIEWED AND SETTLED ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD

I

The Problem

Text: vv. 4, 5. Must be considered in the light of Galatians 2. Text does not say that Paul and Barnabas spoke freely of uncircumcision of the Gentile Christians. Presumably in the light of Galatians 2 a fact which was well known. Now this problem brought to the fore. Clamors for a settlement. Unity of Church is at stake. But future progress of the Church through Gentile nations in question also. Cp. *Das Neue Testament Deutsch*, Vol. V.

pp. 89 ff. Questions to be settled: Will Gentiles consider freedom from Law license? Will they despise Law? Will Jewish Christians be offended? Truly a delicate situation!

Illustrate by problems of today.

II

The Discussion

Vv. 6-18. Evidently a tense situation, for "there had been much disputing." Peter relates his experiences (vv. 7-11). He points to the rule to be followed, a good rule for all times: to ask no more of the Gentiles than Jews are able to bear (v. 10). Peter also points to chief concern, personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 11).

Surely these directions deserve to be followed in our discussion of doctrine and practice, especially in the discussion of problems of casuistry. We submit that there can never be an unreasonable insistence upon observances of customs, laws, and traditions, especially laws, which do not apply, neither in the congregation nor at conventions and conferences. To this presentation of Peter James agrees. He points to the blessings of God upon the work among the Gentiles (vv. 13-18). In each instance we note that the norm for the discussion is the Word of God.

Thus it should be among us when we come "together for to consider" problems as they arise.

III

The Settlement of the Problem

V. 19. As spokesman for the Apostles and the Christians at Jerusalem James proposes a settlement. It is contained in v. 20; and the reason for the proposal is given in v. 21. The unity of the Church is to be preserved. The Jews are not to be offended by being invited to partake of idolatrous orgies. In fact, these have no place any longer even in the lives of the Gentiles. In his pastoral wisdom James points out what of the Law is applicable to both Jew and Gentile. Uppermost in James' mind is the salvation of souls (vv. 16, 17).

The application: Practical value of District synods, pastoral conferences, Bible classes in the home congregation. All designed to enable us to resolve disputes in matters of doctrine and practice

according to the Word of God. Sometimes matters referred to special committees for further study, such as the question of woman suffrage in the Church. When reports are issued, diligently study them in the light of the Scriptures. Thus we are sure to be on the right track for a God-pleasing settlement of the problems of doctrine and practice as they arise in our age and day.

NOTE: If the pastor has at his disposal *Das Neue Testament Deutsch*, it will pay him to read the section treating this chapter in Vol. V, pp. 89—97. Herman Wolfgang Beyer makes the interesting observation that Paul and Barnabas perhaps didn't even attend this session or synod and that v. 12 is an interpolation. Beyer bases his opinion and finding on the fact that a special delegation was chosen to go with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch and report the outcome of the meeting in Jerusalem, something which he considers superfluous, inasmuch as Paul and Barnabas were certainly capable of making their own report. However, in defense of v. 22 we can say that the report of Paul and Barnabas was merely strengthened and substantiated in this very delicate matter by the presence of distinguished members from the congregation in Jerusalem.

Duluth, Minn.

WALTER H. BOUMAN