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Homiletics: Studies on the Swedish Gospels

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HOMILETICS

Studies on the Swedish Gospels

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 16:10-15

The Text and Its Central Thought.—This text follows the Standard Gospel for the day immediately. It, too, emphasizes the wise use of money, but shows that this consists in true and faithful stewardship of our possessions. The principle of stewardship is outlined (v.12). Our wealth is set forth as "another man's." We are referred to as "slaves" (v.13). The thought of giving account is implied in v.15, where the Pharisaic concept of justifying oneself in the sight of men is condemned and where God is set forth as the true Judge. Vv.10, 11 likewise establish the fact that what we have is a trust and not a personal possession.

The proper estimate of wealth is also presented. Money is referred to as "least" (v.10). This thinking is the very opposite of the world's, which not only regards it highly but will become "unrighteous" to possess it. Christ here shows that the spiritual riches of our salvation so far exceed it in value that there is no comparison. Cf. Phil.3:8. Spiritual riches are the "genuine thing" (v.11). Mammon is fleeting, brings no real joy. If we make its acquisition our purpose in life, we shall lose "our own" (v.12), the salvation Christ has provided for us.

A third thought is that every man has a "god." If it isn't the true God, it is something else, often "mammon." But it is impossible to serve God and gold at the same time. If mammon owns us, our worship of God will be insincere and sham. The Pharisees are a case in point. Their "money loving" led them to reject Christ and God. Were not concerned with God's judgment, only man's (v.15). False standards always lead to false life.

The Day and Its Theme.—From Israel's history of fornication and murmuring against God at Sinai the Epistle issues a solemn warning against idolatry and the evil life it always generates. The Gospel for the day is the parable of the Unjust Steward, which sets forth the necessity of wisdom in the use of money. Both Gospel and Epistle fortify the text. The Introit points up the Christian's dependence on God and His protection against evil men and circumstances. This trust is

basic for proper stewardship. The Collect prays for things that please God—the mind of Christ, which a real “slave” must have. The Gradual stresses the glory of God, to which the Christian is dedicated and which he shows forth by a God-pleasing behavior. Finally, this is the one grand purpose of our “working together” as stressed in *Parish Activities*.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—Redemption won by Christ for us means more than heaven and its bliss; it goes beyond a mere negative avoidance of sins and wickedness. It is a total Christianity, a life wholly dedicated to holy things also this side of eternity with all we are and have.

Sins and Their Fruits Diagnosed and Remedied.—Materialism is the reigning sin of our day. Countless Christians, too, have been affected by it. It is responsible for many of the horrible maladjustments in society. Labor strife, domestic quarrels, class hatreds, crime, vice, gambling, and war are attributable to mammonism. Only by putting God back on the throne of the heart, where He belongs, can there be any effective solution to these social problems of our day, to the hindrances of the great business of the church, and to the things that upset our personal peace of mind. There is no greater hindrance to our eventual inheritance of heaven than this vice.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—We became sons of God and inheritors of heaven (v. 12, “your own”) when Christ by His perfect redemption made us His. Luther’s explanation of the Second Article (“serve Him in everlasting righteousness”) makes Christ’s redemption basic for every facet of Christian life. “Slave,” too, implies bought free from Satan for God’s service.

Illustrations.—Biblical: Barnabas and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). Solomon, David. Others: Immanuel Church, St. Louis, cornerstone, as well as many another: “*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam.*” So every living temple, too. Le Tourneau is a wonderful illustration of one who used his wealth wisely. Almost any newspaper will furnish abundant evidence of the wrong use of wealth.

Outline

The Responsibility of Stewardship

- I. It Is a Divinely Imposed Responsibility
 - A. We are God’s children by creation, redemption, and sanctification.
 - B. As a result our love for God should rule our entire life (v. 13).
 - C. Even “the least,” “the unrighteous mammon,” is our trust from Him.

II. The Expression of This Responsibility—Christian Life

- A. As "slaves" and "faithful" stewards we are to obey God's will in every particular, as God-pleasers. The Commandments, also the Second Table.
- B. We are to renounce every form of mammonism (v. 13).
- C. We are to count our heavenly blessings greatest. This attitude will cause us to put the proper estimate on wealth and enable us to use it rightly.

III. The Fruit of This Responsibility, a Full Life

- A. Our service to God gives us peace of mind from a good conscience toward God.
- B. We are benefactors of men. Rivers of living waters flow from us. The joy this gives.
- C. We have God's promise that we shall come into "our own." The hope this promise gives us in the midst of life's problems.

San Francisco, Calif.

ARTHUR NITZ

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LUKE 4:23-32

The Text and Its Central Thought.—This text expresses a reaction to the first sermon which Jesus preached in the synagog at Nazareth. It happened on His first return visit to the old home town after His installation in the public ministry. His old neighbors, friends, and acquaintances were shocked when Jesus identified Himself as the Christ, prophesied by Isaiah, who was anointed "to preach the Gospel to the poor . . . heal the brokenhearted, etc." (vv. 18-21). This isn't what they had expected of their native son. They had expected Him to perform some of those mighty miracles for which He had become famous in Capernaum. Skeptical of His renowned healing powers, they sought confirmation and elaboration of His ability to heal bodily sickness, disease, and infirmity. Had Jesus complied with their wishes, He would perhaps have established the authenticity of an M. D. degree, but He would not have achieved the end result of His healing ministry—to get people to recognize His divine Sonship and the fact that He is the promised Savior who has come into the world to save that which was lost. Having rejected His Messianic claim, the people of Nazareth were not going to experience the satisfaction of seeing Jesus perform a few

miracles merely to gratify their earthly impulses or even to give them physical relief. Still Jesus wants to be their Savior. If He is to win their confidence at all, He must continue to appeal to their ears and not their eyes. So He cites two concrete examples from the Old Testament as warnings against unbelief. Israel had rejected the divine utterances of her prophets and consequently suffered the withdrawal of God's providential hand. A pagan widow, however, had turned in faith to Elijah and was saved; a pagan general, likewise, had turned in faith to Elisha and was cleansed. As the Savior relates these examples, it is as if He were pleading with the people of Nazareth to make an exception to the generally accepted rule, "No prophet is accepted in his own country." But the desired response does not materialize. The unbelief of the people refuses to be rebuked, and their darkened minds refuse to be enlightened. Their unbelief begets, as it usually does, hatred for the bearer of the Gospel, active hostility, even attempted assassination. At the same time the unbelievers who have succeeded in bringing Jesus to the brow of the hill cannot conclude their murderous designs. Jesus is always in complete control. In a miraculous manner He slips from their grasp and quietly, unhurriedly, escapes through the crowd. This dramatic action on the part of Jesus should have given the stubborn inhabitants of His home town something else to think about after His departure to rouse them from their unbelief. Did it?

The Day and Its Theme. — In the Gospel for the day, Luke 19:41-48, Jesus demonstrates the softness of His love when He weeps over Jerusalem because she has rejected Him, but He also demonstrates the hardness of His justice when He cleanses the Temple. The Epistle, 1 Cor. 12:1-11, emphasizes the diversity of gifts the Holy Spirit has given to believers, to be used not for selfish ends but "to profit withal," that the one soul-saving Gospel may be brought to bear on the hearts of men. The Introit, the Collect, and the Gradual expresses the plea of a humble, dependent child to the Father of all help and mercy to keep him safe from everyone and everything inimical to his faith, that would rob him of life everlasting. The Swedish lectionary suggests the theme "Wasted Opportunities." The day's theme puts purpose and goal into "Working Together," the monthly theme of *Parish Activities*.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon. — To impress the hearer with the unreasonableness of unbelief and expose its self-destructive character, as a warning to the hearer himself and to give him greater boldness to testify against every form of unbelief, that the loving Christ with His saving power may step in and be grasped by faith.

Sin and Its Fruits to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Unbelief is, in the final analysis, the only damnable sin, because it rejects Jesus, the only Savior from all sins, and hence must be clearly exposed and severely rebuked. Man's pride—thinking of himself more highly than he has a right to think, living purely for self, insisting on accepting nothing as truth unless it can be explained satisfactorily to his finite mind, etc.—is at the root of unbelief. Until a man is humbled, he cannot see Christ, much less come to Him.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—Here we have a sample of Jesus' love extending itself, exhausting all possible means to persuade the unbeliever to turn believer. Vv. 18-21, which are pure Gospel, must be drawn into the sermon.

Illustrations.—There is dramatic impact in the text itself. The Gospel for the day. Modern examples of the unreasonableness of unbelief as manifested in Communism, Modernism, Judaism, Christian Science, etc.

Outline

Beware of Unbelief

I. Unbelief Is Unreasonable

- A. It refuses to give the Gospel a fair hearing.
- B. It ignores the warning voice of history.
- C. It breeds unreasonable hatred and persecution.
- D. Hence we must keep our minds and ears open to the voice of Jesus lest our hearts harden in unbelief; we must not be afraid to testify against unbelief; we must be prepared to expect unreasonable treatment from unbelievers.

II. Unbelief Is Damnable

- A. It binds the blessing hand of Jesus.
- B. It is spiritual suicide.
- C. Hence the church must, besides rebuking unbelief, preach the Gospel patiently, lovingly, untiringly; for it is the only way to turn man from unbelief and destruction to faith and salvation. The individual witness-bearer, however, must be sure to cultivate his own faith lest, in preaching to others, he himself become a castaway.

St. Louis, Mo.

ALVIN C. MACK

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 21:28-32

The Text and Its Central Thought.—In telling this parable, Jesus does not make us guess at its meaning and central thought. He Himself gives us the key to it when He says to the chief priests and elders (v. 31b): "Verily I say unto you that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you," and then applies this truth to them in v. 32. Jesus would make it very plain that true discipleship involves genuine faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. It is not enough to recognize sin as something that offends God; sin must be repented of. It is not enough to know Jesus only intellectually as Savior; Jesus must be known in the heart and followed. It is not enough to acknowledge that there is forgiveness with God; forgiveness must be appropriated and appreciated. It is not enough with the mouth alone to accept Jesus as Lord; Jesus must be enthroned in the heart and permitted to rule there! Not mere hearing suffices, but the Word must also be done (Matt. 7:21; Rom. 2:13; James 1:22). It is not the mere use of pious words, good intentions, grand promises, that marks a Christian, but a complete surrender to God's will.

The Day and Its Theme.—Not only the Standard Gospel but also the Standard Epistle for the day demonstrate true and false religion, "True and False Righteousness." The Epistle shows true discipleship in action, while the Introit, the Gradual, and the Collect bow in complete submission before Christ Jesus, the Source of true righteousness.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To activate the hearts of hearers, to enliven their faith. The sermon should be aimed at "the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12), so that the whole congregation "work together" (*Parish Activity*) in His vineyard. The whole parable is aimed to build up a people that has been saved to serve.

Sin and Its Fruits, to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The sin of the second son, who said: "I go, sir, and went not," must be emphasized and revealed in all its shallow ugliness. We see it in the hundreds of confirmands who kneel at the altar, saying: "We go," but do not. We see it in the thousands of communicants approaching His Table with "We will," but do not. We see it in the many bridal couples who link hands before His altar, saying: "We will," but do not. Add to it the hundreds who sing: "What is the world to me," but make the world their one and all; or those who sing: "Take my life, and let it be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee," but deny Him even a little part of it. There

is no mistaking the vicious fruits of this sin. Its only remedy is patterned by the first son, who afterwards "repented and went."

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—Since the immediate parable refers to the way of life, can anyone miss the opportunity of pointing to this explicit Gospel message? The whole point of the parable rests upon the Lord's question: "Whether of them twain did the will of his father?" It must ring in John 6:40: "This is the will of Him that sent Me, that everyone which seeth the Son and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life."

Illustrations.—The repentance and complete turning of the first son is illustrated in the lives of such men as Zacchaeus, Paul, St. Augustine; while the second son has such followers as Felix, King Agrippa, and those described in Matt. 15:8 and v. 32 of the text.

Outline

True and False Discipleship

- I. False Discipleship Illustrated by the Second Son in the Parable
 - A. His "I will" was insincere, hypocritical.
 - B. His later life was equally insincere—no repentance—impenitence cluttered with lame excuses and postponements.
- II. True Discipleship Illustrated by the First Son in the Parable
 - A. His "I will not" was open rebellion.
 - B. His repentance was sincere and spelled itself out in "he went."
- III. The Touchstone of True Discipleship: "Go work"
 - A. It comes as an awakening to all who expect church and religion to do something for them.
 - B. It comes as a privilege to all who understand that they have been saved to serve.

Tacoma, Wash.

A. W. SCHELP

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 12:33-37

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Matthew 12 relates the discussion which Jesus had with the Pharisees in Galilee in regard to Sabbath observance. These wicked and obstinate leaders had even gone so far as to tell the people that Jesus was in league with the devil. Jesus not only exposed the illogical conclusions to which these Pharisaic claims would lead but also issued a very serious and solemn warning to the Pharisees themselves because of the malicious use of their tongue in blaspheming the Holy Ghost.

The verse immediately preceding our text brings us the statement of Jesus regarding the sin against the Holy Ghost, which has often been discussed and has raised many questions, since Jesus states that this sin shall not be forgiven. Anyone who in the face of evidence and conviction deliberately and blasphemously and persistently uses his tongue against the Holy Ghost forfeits his salvation.

From these gross sins Jesus goes on to discuss other abuses of the tongue and using the illustration of trees and treasuries He points especially to the heart as the source of that which the tongue produces.

The Day and Its Theme.—This text was selected for the twelfth Sunday after Trinity in the Swedish Gospel Series of 1921. As one reads the Standard Gospel, Mark 7:31-37, for this same Sunday, the appropriateness of this choice becomes immediately apparent. Mark relates the healing of the man who had an impediment in his speech. The man's tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Mark, however, also points to a misuse of the tongue in that same Gospel when he tells us how those who witnessed the healing used their tongues to spread the news even though Jesus specifically forbade them to do it.

The Introit for this Sunday also strikes a very relevant note as it voices the prayer: "Let them be ashamed and confounded that seek after my soul"; as well as the Psalm: "Let them be turned backward and put to confusion that desire my hurt." No one will ever know what anguish of heart has been caused by the wicked misuse of tongues. How many people can verify from their experience the truth of James 3:6: "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell."

Accordingly, this text fits also very well into the theme "Working Together" in the *Parish Activities* schedule for August. Where men

use the tongue slanderously and maliciously, there one will not expect to find much working together.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The preacher must seek to bring the hearers to a realization of the serious nature of the sins of the tongue and emphasize that their chief concern must be with the condition of their heart, which is the source of the outward words and conduct.

Sin and Its Fruits, to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The sins of the tongue are so obviously condemned in this text that much emphasis in the sermon will be centered in them. But it would be a mistake simply to enumerate a number of "tongue" sins, e. g., cursing, swearing, slandering, defaming, lying, betraying, etc., and to overlook or to neglect to emphasize the two main points which Jesus makes in this text, namely, that wicked words come from a wicked heart (Matt. 15:18, 19), and that every word is so important that we are expected to give an account of the idle use of even one word. It will be the preacher's obligation to make all hearers feel the guilt which is theirs because all have a heart that has wickedness in it and which will thus also cause wickedness to proceed out of the mouth.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The Gospel emphasis must come as the term "good man" is explained. How can a man be good, or how can his heart be good, unless the goodness of Christ is present? The sinner must recognize that Jesus has also died for the sins of the tongue, yea, he must believe that Jesus has paid for all the sins of the heart also. When the Holy Spirit leads a heart to accept this atonement of Jesus for sin, such a heart becomes a good tree, a treasury of good thoughts and words, and the abundance (whether it be words or actions) that flows from such a heart will not be useless or malicious or corrupt "but that which is good to the use of edifying" (Eph. 4:29).

Good exegesis would not permit the preacher to interpret the expression "make the tree good" in v. 33 to refer to the work of sanctification by the Holy Ghost, because the verb "make" in this instance means "judge" or "regard." Jesus warns them not to continue to repeat their ridiculous mistake of making (judging or regarding) Him, the tree, evil (Beelzebub) but the fruit good (healing).

Illustrations.—It would be wise to use a number of Biblical illustrations (Pharisees, Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, Doeg, King Saul, etc.) to demonstrate how the tongue revealed the wickedness of the heart. On the other hand, the many wonderful statements of children of God (Noah, Abraham, Job, Daniel, Paul) show the love of God in these hearts as the source.

Outline

Introduction: Reference could be made to all the duplicity in man's dealing with man today in international affairs as well as in local communities. Yet always the true nature of an individual will eventually be revealed.

Out of the Abundance of the Heart the Mouth Speaketh

I. The Importance of the Heart as the Source of Our Speaking

A. The heart is the fountain (v. 34) and the treasury (v. 35) from which the words proceed.

B. It is folly to leave the heart wicked and expect good words (vv. 33, 34a).

C. As the Holy Ghost fills the heart with the goodness of God in Christ Jesus, the words will be good (v. 35a).

II. The Importance of the Mouth as the Evidence for Judgment

A. God takes notice of every idle word and demands an account (v. 36).

B. The nature of our words will be evidence for us or against us in the Judgment (v. 37).

Conclusion: Hymn 395:3.

Milwaukee, Wis.

WALTER W. STUENKEL