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Homiletics: Studies on the Free Texts from the Old Testament

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HOMILETICS

Studies on Free Texts from the Old Testament

CIRCUMCISION AND NAME OF JESUS

(New Year)

PSALM 33:17-22

The Text and Its Central Thought.—As we realize each day that our sins are forgiven in Christ, we pick ourselves up from the shambles and self-condemnations of the past and turn hopeful faces toward today. Our trust is in God. Each day serves the thoughtful Christian with object lessons enough that only such trust in Christ can be anything more than sentimentality or self-conceit. God's blessing and favor rest on those "that hope in His mercy." Though we are aware of this day by day, we are all the more aware of it as a new year begins. Weighed in God's scales, our hopes, ambitions, and plans in the past year were sometimes unworthy. That which was rooted in our relationship to God and related to the love of Jesus provides satisfying reflection now and basis for present encouragement. Mechanical means, insurance policies, and secure jobs provide no more final security than the horse of the Psalmist's day. For people of that day war horses were prized for help in battle, and their number could become a severe menace to trust in God. Cf. Deut. 17:14-16 and 2 Sam. 8:4. The outright plea for mercy, and the emphasis upon mercy from God as our hope for deliverance, strikes the right note, not only as we look backward in consciousness of our weakness and guilt but also as we look forward in the bold confidence of high hopes. The central thought is just this, that hope in God's mercy and trust in His purposes will see us on our way in quiet confidence that His eye is on us.

The Day and Its Theme.—New Year's Day has its own special problems as far as the mechanics of attendance and attention are concerned. These should be taken into account in the preparation of the sermon. The service theme of trust in God's mercy through Christ is appropriate for the day, the usual New Year's congregation, and the text. The *Parish Activities* theme of "Training Missionaries" will find better expression in the other Sundays of the season, but can certainly be referred to in connection with the contrasts to the spirit of the text which many people adopt as policies for the new year. We may consider it fortunate that New Year's Day falls on a Sunday

in 1956 and thus gives us a direct opportunity to inspire more of our people to worthwhile attitudes for the coming year on the basis of forgiveness in Christ and day-by-day trust in God. Our theme will be trust in God's mercy through Christ, expressed in the sermon topic: "His Eye Is on Us."

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The tally of last year is over, and faces are set resolutely toward the future. The inventory is good, but new orders must be arranged on the basis of it. We need more dependence on God's mercy, more patient waiting on the Lord, more daring confidence in the power of His holy name. To these the sermon should inspire people. A realistic, Scriptural analysis of the past, coupled with the great statements of confidence and prayer of our text, will edify.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Our text strikes both directly (v. 17) and indirectly (vv. 18, 19) at the great root sins of pride and selfishness. To those who do not feel the need of mercy from God, mercy toward others is almost unknown, i. e., mercy in distinction from kindness. False security in self-conceit and self-sufficiency because of mental or material resources represents idolatrous divergence from God's way. Repentance, acceptance of forgiveness, and renewed resolve to trust God is called for. Even the final New Year's Eve fling often represents the sense of futility which rules where God's forgiveness is not a glorious reality. Trust in national strength of power or threat of force, dependence on education, connections, skill, or mental prowess, and impatient determination in spite of another's need, represent direct challenges to God's supremacy as evidenced in Christian faith by forgiveness in Christ and trust in God.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The very proximity of Christmas itself should force the Gospel to be explicit as we set New Year in its context in the church year. Our text calls for an exposition of what it means to "fear" the Lord and what constitutes His "mercy." Trust in "His holy name" has a direct tie in word usage with Jesus in Is. 9:6 and in Luke 1:31.

Illustrations.—As a parent's eyes never stray far from his children as long as they are in view, at any age, so God looks on His people. Liquor, amusements, work, savings, land, investments, luxuries, and desires made necessities—these represent false sources of confidence, false goals, and false gods, either because of degree or kind, in many instances. What can change the attitude of another toward you as completely as his realization of your sincere forgiveness? So God's forgiveness, when realized by men, changes them.

Outline

His Eye Is on Us

The fact that His eye is on us may be either disturbing or comforting. At New Year we look ahead on the basis of the past.

- I. Trust in ourselves, or in resources, must never compete with, or substitute for, trust in God (vv. 16, 17)
 - A. Too many do not learn with the passing years the vanity of material and mental resources alone.
 - B. His eye sees through pretense of trust in God by outward slogan or action only.
- II. The basis of hope and joy as we look back and look forward is the mercy of God (vv. 18, 19, 22)
 - A. In Christ we have forgiveness.
 - B. We consider both ourselves and God, according to His revelation, in godly fear.
 - C. In forgiveness we find the strength to begin each day and each year anew.
- III. We go forward in quiet confidence because His eye is on us (vv. 18, 20, 21)
 - A. The experience of the past has borne out God's promises.
 - B. Our needs will be met in such a way that our salvation is assured and that we serve Him.
 - C. We know His mercy will not end, and His promises will be kept.

Portland, Oreg.

OMAR STUENKEL

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

MICAH 5:2-4

The Text and Its Central Thought.—The central thought of this text is the coming of the Messianic King, with a revelation also of the place of His birth and a description of the historical setting. He who will deliver His people will be the Ruler in Israel, "whose origin is from old, from ancient days" (RSV). We think of His manifestations as the Angel of the Covenant in Old Testament times, and of John 1:1, which tells us that the Word was "in the beginning." This eternal King shall have many subjects in His kingdom, for "the remnant of His brethren shall return unto the Children of Israel." What

a glorious text for Epiphany! Truly, the majestic words of Is. 9:6 apply to the King promised in the "little Isaiah." Other Old Testament passages also speak of the reunion of God's people at the time of the Messiah (Hos. 3:5; Is. 11:16; Ezek. 16:55).

Yet this great and eternal King will be born in an insignificant place, during a time of much suffering. Bethlehem ("house of bread"), Ephratah ("fruitful"), is solemnly addressed as His birthplace. "Little among the thousands of Judah"—this may be a reference to the Mosaic system of classification mentioned in Ex. 18:21, 25, and in 1 Sam. 23:23. The birthplace of Benjamin (Gen. 35:16-19) and David (1 Sam. 17:12) was an unimportant town, six miles southwest of Jerusalem. He who was coming would be an almighty Ruler, "great unto the ends of the earth," yet His birth would be of a human mother. The actual birth is prophesied in v. 3: ". . . she which travaileth hath brought forth." We are reminded of Is. 7:14, although here the fact of the virginity of the mother is not mentioned.

The time of His birth appears equally inauspicious. V. 1 must be considered as an integral part of our text, since it speaks of the times of His coming in terms similar to those of v. 3. At this time dishonor has been done to the "judge of Israel," evidently the representative of a people who, before Christ's coming, have no king. The general condition of Israel at Christ's time well fits with this prophetic description. Judah had been deeply humiliated and lived in restless dissatisfaction because of the loss of former glory. In v. 1 we have the picture of a hostile power besieging Israel, even within Jerusalem itself. (Henry Cowles, in *The Minor Prophets*, surmises that this may refer to the siege which took place when King Antigonos of the Asmonean dynasty fell before Herod the Great, who was aided by eleven Roman legions in 34 B.C.) Is. 9:2 also contrasts the greatness of the Messianic light with the darkness at the time of His birth. Gen. 49:10 had prophesied: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between His feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." We recall that God sent forth His Son "when the fullness of the time was come" (Gal. 4:4). God's people suffered the righteous punishment for their sins, yet the King came in His own time.

The King who is coming is also a shepherd who will "stand" in order to guard and oversee His flock and who will "feed" His people, that is, care for their every need. We have in Is. 40:11 a beautiful parallel to this verse in Old Testament prophecy, and in John 10:27, 28 the Savior Himself speaks of this aspect of His work. Yet, even as

Shepherd He is King, for He works "in the strength of the Lord." Cf. Is. 9:7.

This text is one of the great Old Testament passages, probably the best-known part of Micah's prophecy. The mention of Bethlehem as the King's birthplace makes this passage a favorite even among our Sunday school and day school children. Even the Jews of Christ's time understood the Messianic import of this passage (Matt. 2:4-6; John 7:42).

The Day and Its Theme.—The Introit and Gradual emphasize the coming of the Lord, the Ruler. In the Collect we pray for the fruition of what has already been granted to us. Is. 60:1-6, the Epistle, emphasizes the light and glory of the Lord in the majestic language of divine prophecy. The Epistle, however, also speaks of the "darkness" on earth at the time of Christ's coming, a factor also strongly emphasized in our text. The holy Gospel (Matt. 2:1-12) speaks of the fulfillment of the prophecy which is in our text. This should be mentioned in the sermon, since Matthew's use of Micah's prophecy is an outstanding instance of Old Testament fulfillment in the New. A proper reading of the lessons can give a marvelous unity to the Epiphany observance. "A Savior for all the world" is the service theme. There are obvious applications that suggest themselves for the *Parish Activities* theme: "Training Missionaries."

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—While this sermon should cause the hearers to rejoice anew at the coming of their King, it should also bring about a deeper understanding of the manner of God's working upon earth. The troubled circumstances of the time, the humble surroundings, the human mother—all these factors show how God, in His time, fulfilled His ancient promises in a manner known and wonderful to those who behold in faith.

Sin to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Israel abundantly deserved to suffer in the low estate in which she found herself at Christ's time. Sin had brought her low, as God had prophesied. Yet Christ came in spite of Israel's sin and hopeless condition. A very practical application can be made—sin is damnable, and brings about hopelessness and death. Christ, who redeemed the world and who comes to the lowly and humble, has the only solution.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The dark and humble circumstances at the time of Christ's birth make the greatness of the event all the more wonderful. The Savior born at Bethlehem, at such a time! So the saving light of the Gospel comes to the lowly and the helpless.

Illustrations.—This text of Old Testament prophecy, in the light of the glorious fulfillment in the New Testament, suggests the use of Biblical illustrations related to the old adage "Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet, Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet" (*Theological Hermeneutics*, Concordia Publishing House, 1924, p. 16).

Outline

The King Born in Bethlehem

- I. A great and divine Ruler (v. 2b)
 - A. Eternal Son of the Father.
 - B. The true Ruler in Israel.
- II. One who appeared in an insignificant place and at a time which seemed inauspicious (vv. 2a, 3)
 - A. The insignificance of Bethlehem when compared with other towns and cities (v. 2a).
 - B. Israel was living in subjection and humiliation when Christ appeared (v. 3).
 - C. The Light appears where and when the darkness is deepest.
- III. The only Savior of His people (v. 4)
 - A. He stands as the Rock of our salvation (v. 4a).
 - B. He feeds His people, and gives constant care and protection, (4b).
 - C. His people are safe in His hands (v. 4c).

Chicago, Ill.

JAMES G. MANZ

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

ECCLESIASTES 11:7—12:1

The Text and Its Central Thought.—As is frequently the case in preaching from the Old Testament, the preacher will do well to have an eye on the purpose of worship of the day first and thus discern the part that the text will play in the day's worship. As the congregation thinks of the Boy Jesus learning from the teachers of Scripture what His lifework is to be, it can well imagine that this famous passage served as guide, at least from the negative, to focus His concern upon His Father's business.—The text emerges from that portion of Ecclesiastes in which the bleak judgments upon the emptiness of human striving give way to the application: If life is so empty, then consciously walk under the judgment of God, and make

its good years contribute to God's plan. V. 5, immediately preceding, must have been in Jesus' mind when He spoke the words of John 3:8.—V. 7: "It's a great thing to be alive." Created things, and the senses to enjoy them, are splendid.—V. 8: But they do not go on forever; old age slackens their enjoyment. (12:1b ff.) Death erases them all. Luke 12:18 has the Savior drawing the same lesson.—V. 9: The application is now drawn for the reader who is apt to be least concerned, namely, the young man in whom the tides of life are high. This is not said sneeringly; the powers and cheer of youth are indeed something to enjoy, the pressures of the inner self are mighty and consuming. It is the mark of the young person to be sure that it is right to do "what comes naturally." Very well: be a whole person. But remember that God is judging, and He brings you into a final judgment. This implies that God knows our every sin (Job 14:16; Jer. 16:17); that God is jealously concerned over all that we do (Ex. 20:5); that He has aims for us not simply to stop from sinning, but to carry out His program and purposes (Ps. 143:10); that He chastens and punishes when His plan is foiled—the judgment of condemnation (Ps. 9:16); His judgment is also one of salvation and mercy (Ps. 54:1; 43:1).—V. 10: Hence the young man truly living under the judgment of God can put away sorrow, but he will also put away evil from his flesh. Childhood and youth are nothing in themselves, for they pass. Yet the child and the youth can be linked to God by faith in His righteousness.—12:1a: Hence the strategy of life for the young man is to remember his Creator already while he is young. He can be shrewd enough to realize that he doesn't stay young. And he can plan the part of God's man, remembering that already in his youth God has a plan for him and His judgment is upon him. This remembering involves turning from sin (Deut. 8:18), and turning to God for help (Ps. 42:5; 63:7; 119:55). "Creator" reminds that we have to do with Him before whom all our doings are open, with Him who has intentions for our lives, and with Him who has the help for us. For preaching the text may well cut off the word "youth."—In planning to preach on this text the preacher will do well not to limit his audience to young people. The text applies to every listener who observes strength in his own body; "youth" and "vigor" are equated. Thus a central thought emerges, "Live your life aware of God's judgment and dependence upon His power."

The Day and Its Theme.—Where a parish has not observed the Festival of the Epiphany, this Sunday may have to carry the chief

load of interpreting Epiphanytide—a time to ponder the revelation of Christ to the world as Savior, of the Christian to the world as the man in Christ. Epistle lections stress the latter, Gospels for the day the former. This text reminds of the young Jesus, who early was "about His Father's business" and in so doing prepared to meet the judgment of God upon our refusals to carry out God's plan in our own lives. *Parish Activities* suggest concern for foreign missions during the month, and many a foreign missionary has been a precious illustration of a man living under the judgment of God already in his youth.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The scope of the text is in the domain of the Christian life. It aims at the area of human living in which the will to be under the judgment of God is weakest, namely, the use of physical vigor, and seeks to help men remember that God has made them for His purpose and is deeply concerned that they meet it.

Sin to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—All of Ecclesiastes has probed into this sin: living life unmindful of the fact that it passes, that in every stage it must fulfill God's plans, and that the very forgetfulness is a species of idolatry of self, denial of the Creator—at once both folly and unbelief.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—"Judgment" of v.9 and "remember" of 12:1 are windows into which we can peer to see God's plan, both in making and redeeming us. Every act of "remembering" the Creator must be a rehearsal of His total love, at the cost of His own dear Son, in remaking us into His own. (Ps. 103:1 ff.)

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—The Gospel for the day is a progressive illustration. Our own day with its cult of youth in sports and amusement and advertising displays the derangement of the human heart that does not want to grow up into maturity as that age at which we accept responsibility for living and not merely enjoy living. The closest parallel is 1 John 2:14-17; Eph. 2:10 is useful in its relation to Eph. 5:1-14; note the concept of judgment.

Outline

Live Your Life Aware of God's Judgment ("My Life Is God's Business")

I. We tend to forget God's judgment ("My life is my own business")

A. He created us to carry out His purposes; love; image of God.

B. Yet just our physical vigor blunts our memory of His concern.

C. But this is foolish, for that vigor doesn't last.

D. It is foolish toward God and rejects His plan for us.

II. Let us live aware of His judgment ("Be about His business")

A. This means remembering Him as the redeeming Creator.

B. This means reflecting His Spirit in our daily actions and witness.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

PSALM 104:14-24

The Text and Its General Thought.—We might call Psalm 104 the Creation Psalm. Because the verses follow the order of creation in Genesis 1, Delitzsch has entitled it: "Hymn in Honor of the God of the Seven Days." The text deals with the works of creation performed from the third to the sixth day. However, there is no absolute conformity to the pattern of Genesis 1. This text would be an excellent corrective for unchristian ideas and preaching about nature. The trees are "trees of the Lord" (v. 16). The RSV "thou" (in rendering of the Hebrew participles after v. 10) is a little more forceful than the KJV "he." This also connects vv. 10-19 with the same person that is used in vv. 1-9 and in vv. 20-30. "Thou, the Lord, my God," doest all these wonderful works. God's lavish gifts include not only necessities but also luxuries. The mention of "wine . . . and oil" (v. 15) is typical of the Old Testament's healthy appreciation of God's physical as well as spiritual gifts. There is no deprecation of the physical; no Pietistic aversion to gladdening the heart through wine. A modern restatement of the "oil to make his face to shine" would be to say it is a cosmetic. "Bread to strengthen man's heart" is a token of the Psalmist's great understanding of man. The bread from God strengthens not only man's body but also his heart, his soul. Again it is clear that the Old Testament knows nothing of a Neoplatonic separation of soul and body. But the Psalmist not only knew man. He knew creation as well. The time pattern is just the opposite for lions as for men. When the lions are settling down, man is arising. The stress is on God's wisdom and His providence and on

the diversity of His gifts in creation. The earth is full of the creatures (RSV) of God. They are His riches (KJV). Central Thought: Praise God for His rich creation.

The Day and Its Theme.—"Use God's gifts for His service." In the Gospel, epiphanies of Christ continue in His first miracle at Cana. There the Lord graces a marriage and provides wine for the beleaguered couple. The Epistle turns to God's spiritual gifts and stresses the use of these gifts in service to the Lord, to the saints, to all. Both Introit and Gradual hymn the praise of the good Lord and His wonderful works. If the angels praise Him (Gradual), surely "all the earth shall worship Thee" (Introit). The Collect characterizes God as Him "who dost govern all things in heaven and earth." The text, echoing the Introit and Gradual, focuses attention on the physical gifts in creation, for which we ought to be thankful.

Goal and Purpose of Sermon.—To recognize God's gifts in creation as also coming from Him; to praise Him as the bountiful Creator; to go forth to work joyfully for a life of useful service.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Not merely the sin of atheistic or even theistic evolution that imagines a godless nature, or a nature that runs itself while God remains *in absentia*; but also the thankless indifference of those who are Christians. If the young lions seek their meat from God (v.21), surely man should. Both a joyless pietism that labels God's good gifts as sin and a materialistic view that regards work solely as making a living are perversions of the doctrine of creation.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—In the phrase "for the service of man" (v.14) we have a picture of God's serving love. This is why God has given all gifts, physical and spiritual; why He gave us the best gift, His only Son. The manifold works of v.24 stress the superabundant grace of God, which is restless until He gives us all. The "wisdom" of the same verse reminds us of the wisdom of Prov. 3:19. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:30. The KJV "riches" might remind us of the Christmas verse: "We are rich, for He was poor, Is not *this* a wonder?" The greatest of wonders is Christ given to *us*, for *us*.

Illustrations.—The pictures of the text: the panoramic fields of the world; the hospitality and conviviality of our groaning tables; the mountain height with its cedars and fowl and nimble goats; the planets and luminaries that will strike the imagination of any child who views TV; the night scenes of the forest; the father of the house

HOMILETICS

939

kissing the little ones good-by at 7 A.M. and catching them up at 5:30 P.M. All these are from the good God so that in Christ we might lead useful lives for Him.

Outline

Praise the Good Creator

- I. God gives good gifts abundantly
 - A. Christ the best Gift
 - B. God's spiritual gifts
 - C. God's abundant gifts in creation
- II. God has a purpose with these gifts
 - A. Enjoy these gifts
 - B. Use them in God's service
 - C. Praise God for His gifts
 1. Beyond enjoyment and use we thank God
 2. The example of animals
- III. In Christ we truly praise God
 - A. Recreated in the Savior
 - B. Our eyes and lips are opened

St. Louis, Mo.

HENRY W. REIMANN

LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

PSALM 50:1-6

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Here is a dramatic, impressive, and powerful Scripture with which to bring the Epiphany season to a close. With poetic rapture the Psalmist, identified as Asaph, points forward to the great Day of Judgment, the final epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ. If the use of this text for this Sunday will only lead us to appreciate this great Psalm more for our own personal life, that use will be justified. God in the glory of His full majesty gives testimony to the whole earth, to the church in particular, and to each of us Christians, that the Day of Judgment and final revelation of glory will come. V. 1 stresses the basis upon which this great fact is established, namely, His changeless and majestic Word. V. 3 sets forth the certainty of this ultimate coming and the nature of the events which will accompany it. V. 5 demonstrates in a practical manner that this will be a final test of the quality of our faith in Christ as our Savior and that there is a special glory awaiting those

who have found grace and glory in Christ's redemption. To comprehend the sweep and scope of the dramatic picture, we might read Spurgeon's notes on this psalm. One must try to paint the picture for oneself in vivid, sharp colors and in bold, startling relief.

The Day and Its Theme.—"God Reveals Himself in Glory" is the service theme for the day. Old-line lessons for the day direct attention to the glory of Christ in its revelation on the Holy Mount and through the medium of His Word. A consideration of the full Epiphany thought is hardly complete, however, unless specific attention is given to the revelation of that full glory to all the world, to unbelievers, to the godless, to the enemies of the Cross, to the redeemed and the ransomed of God, on the great Day of Judgment. The theme in *Parish Activities*, "Training Missionaries," becomes urgent and pertinent in its highest degree in terms of the coming of our Lord in glory. The time is short. The objective is clear. The Gospel must be preached to all men before the end comes that all men may learn to stand in the judgment. There is an eternal purpose behind the preaching of the Gospel.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To impress upon the Christian how glorious it is to look forward without fear to the great Day of His coming in glory and to give testimony concerning it during the time of waiting and expectation in his whole attitude, conduct, and life.

Sins to be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Hypocrisy and sham, complacency and indifference, in spite of the prospect of His coming; disregard of the clear truths of God's Word in regard to things yet to come.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—V. 5 of the text is well suited to this purpose: stressing the assurance of those who are truly "saints of God," showing how they became such "saints," how they are kept in faith by the Gospel, what it means to have assurance.

Illustrations and N. T. Parallels.—The preparations which are being made in our country and among the nations of the world to prepare for atomic attack: radar networks, Nike installations, research and study, civil defense. Yet it may never come. We hope it won't. But the Day of His coming is certain. Fresh thoughts will come by reading many of the stirring passages in Thessalonians, Timothy, Peter, and Revelation dealing with the Day of His coming; not to overlook, of course, the abundance of material to be found in the signs portending the coming of that Day.

Outline

The history of the world and of our country is replete with great days. Single out several and picture in dramatic, bold detail why they were and are great. Many days were great because of comparatively simple happenings; others because of their profound influence; still others because we played a part in them. One great Day is yet to come. Others are trivial by comparison. It is the Day to end all days, the Day of our Lord's final coming, His final epiphany.

Our Expectation of the Final Epiphany of Our Lord

- I. Such expectation is well founded
 - A. Described with poetical grandeur and certainty in text.
 - B. Common to the whole of Scripture.
 - C. Essential to our full redemption.
- II. Such expectation should govern our whole lives
 - A. Inspire strong loyalty and faithfulness to Christ as our Lord.
 - B. Move us to see the sublime eternal objective and purpose of our whole experience.
 - C. Control our actions and deeds in every detail.
 - D. Move us to proclaim the Gospel to the world.

Conclusion.—When our children know that a day is coming, their birthday, Christmas, end of school, a holiday, their expectation is wondrous to behold. Very often the expectation is more wondrous than the reality. As children of God through faith in Christ our expectation of His coming in glory should be a bright, a glowing, radiant, and holy thing. We live in a spirit of eagerness for its dawn. And the reality will be far greater than our anticipation of it.

St. Charles, Mo.

ERICH V. OELSCHLAGER

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

PSALM 18:1-6

The Text and Its Central Thought.—The text has its exact parallel in 2 Samuel 22. For historical background study 1 and 2 Samuel. After reading the entire psalm we might ask: "I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself or of some other man?" Does David here speak only of and for himself, or is this also a Messianic psalm? Augustine says it treats of Christ and His body, the church. Luther favors this view. Cf. St. Louis Ed., IV, 1038 ff. It is a psalm in praise of God's deliverance of His people, with specific reference to

David's experience and general reference to the church and its members. The title warrants this interpretation. This psalm is a liturgical chant to fit and to be used by every generation in the church. David's experiences were the occasion which the Holy Spirit used for inspiring this psalm. "I will" in the King James is to be interpreted not as something that David intends to do in the future, but rather as something he has been doing, does now, and will continue to do. "I love Thee, O Lord" are the words of a *Wiederauferstehender*, says Luther. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). "I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised" is the keeping of the Second Commandment. Cf. Ps. 35:28. Cf. "I shall be saved from mine enemies" with Luther's explanation of the Second Article. Why do we love the Lord, call upon Him with praise, and trust confidently in His salvation? The answer lies in v. 2. The Lord is our "Strength," that which stands fast and cannot be moved. Our "Rock," figure of an inaccessible refuge. Our "Fortress," our Stronghold. "Deliverer," as He delivered Israel from the hand of Pharaoh. Our "God," the Maker of heaven and earth. "Strength," a stronghold which cannot be penetrated. Our "Buckler," or Shield, to protect us in the fray. "The Horn of my salvation." Cf. Luke 1:67-71. Our "high Tower," our sure Victory, which "causeth us to triumph in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:14). Vv. 4, 5 describe the total effect of the forces of evil. "Sorrows," better translated as "cords." Consider the full meaning of "Belial." RSV translation of v. 5 is the best. Consider vv. 4, 5 in connection with Ps. 6:5. V. 6: The believer's confidence that the Lord hears and answers our prayers. Cf. Is. 65:24 and 1 Peter 3:12. The central thought of the text: "The certainty of God's deliverance [salvation] prompts love, praise, and confidence."

The Day and Its Theme.—The Introit for Septuagesima comes from our text (vv. 1, 2a, 4a, 5a, 6a, 6c). The Introit might well serve as the text because its arrangement lends itself to sermon treatment. Note that in the Collect we pray for merciful deliverance from punishment "for the glory of Thy name." Cf. v. 3a. In the Epistle, 1 Cor. 9:24—10:5, the Apostle points us to the church's source of strength, namely, "that spiritual rock," which is Christ. The Gradual reiterates the confidence that David expresses in the text. The theme of the day, the Propers, and the text form a well-rounded unit of worship. Make the most of it.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To motivate and increase the hearer's measure of love for God, praise to God, trust and confidence in God, our Savior.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Trusting in men, wisdom, wit, machines, etc., for security. Fine idolatry is always a prevalent sin. Despairing in the day of trouble. Doubt as to God's ability to deliver in any time of trouble. Doubt as to God's ability to save ("Can I really be sure?"). Doubt as to whether God really hears the prayers of the righteous. Basing the assurance of God's deliverance on personal experience rather than upon the truth of the Gospel. Not loving and trusting in God above all things. Not using God's name in praise.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The description of the Lord in v. 2 is Gospel, good news. We cannot help seeing these attributes of the Lord in the light of Calvary and the open tomb. Nor can we preach this sermon outside the context of the Cross of Christ.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—Illustrations aplenty from the Old Testament: The deliverance from Egypt, the smoke and fire on Mount Sinai, the opening of the earth to swallow the sons of Korah, the conquest of Sisera (Judg. 5:20), the thunder upon the Philistines (1 Sam. 7:10). In the New Testament see Luke 19:37; Heb. 2:11-15; 2 Cor. 1:10; 1 Tim. 4:10. Beware, however, lest your illustrations confine your hearers' understanding to deliverance from temporal ills. Above all, your illustrations must point out "so great deliverance" from sin, death, and hell. Make use of outstanding expressions of love and confidence which you encounter in your ministry without, of course, revealing confidences.

Outline

God's Salvation Inspires Love and Praise

- I. We face fear and despair from within and without
- II. When we call, the Lord hears and answers
- III. The Lord is our Salvation
- IV. Therefore we love Him above all, trust Him completely, and praise Him forever

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