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Homiletics: Studies on the Old Testament Texts

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HOMILETICS

Studies on Free Texts from the Old Testament

EASTER DAY

Ps. 118:17-24

The Text and Its Central Thought.—This is closely bound up with the whole psalm, whose Messianic implications no one can deny. And while Bible students may disagree as to whether the Psalmist, the Messiah, or the Christian is speaking in this psalm, we believe that much of its richness will be lost unless you make it your own, as Luther did, and hear yourself speaking through all its verses.

Calling upon all to give thanks to the Lord for His goodness and mercy (vv. 1-4), the Christian draws upon his own experience of God's mercy and help (vv. 5-7) and arrives at the grand truth that "it is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man" (vv. 8,9). With that truth clearly fixed in his mind, what else can the Christian do but determine to face all enemies, hazards, dangers, and temptations "in the name of the Lord" (vv. 10-12)? You yourself have experienced that your strength and salvation lie with the Lord (vv. 13,14). Nor need you depend only on your own experience. V. 15 recalls for you what the righteous people sing in their tabernacle. And here is where our text should really begin, for it is all a part of the song of rejoicing that is heard in the tabernacles of the righteous. And what is it that the righteous rejoice over? It is hinted at in v. 16 and clearly set forth in vv. 22, 23: The rejected Stone has become the Headstone. The crucified Jesus has become the risen and saving Christ. It is this marvelous saving work of the Lord over which the righteous rejoice. And while vv. 17 and 18 explain what it means to the Christian's living and dying, vv. 19, 20, 21, and 24 leave no doubt as to what he intends to do about it.

The Day and Its Theme.—Since the Day is Easter, the theme must revolve around v. 22. Nor could the meaning and significance of Easter be better illustrated. The rejected stone becomes the Headstone! The crucified Jesus becomes the risen and exalted Christ! The despised One becomes the sole Hope and Support of life! No wonder that the Easter Gradual is taken from this psalm, assuring all "that it is a day which the Lord hath made."

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—This can be only one if the preacher stays with the text. It must bring home to the listener that

the rejected stone has really become the Headstone of life; that the resurrected and living Christ has become the only Stay for this life and that which is to come.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—There is no obvious sin to be reproved unless it be man's natural reluctance to accept the Easter Gospel and its implications for life. The whole psalm breathes a helplessness that can only rejoice over "the Lord's doing that is marvelous in our eyes."

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—These flow from every verse of the text, with their main source in v. 22. The whole text marvels over what God has done.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—There is none better than that suggested in v. 22, which is recast in Matt. 7:24-27; 1 Cor. 3:11.

Outline

This Is the Day Which the Lord Hath Made. We Will Rejoice and Be Glad in It

I. What the Lord hath done

A. The Easter Gospel! He has made the rejected stone the Headstone (v. 22).

He has raised the crucified and dead Savior (Acts 10:40, 41).

He has turned defeat into victory.

B. He has given man a sure Foundation on which to build his life (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22, 23).

II. What it means to us

A. It sheds light on the crisscross pattern of daily living (v. 18; 1 Cor. 11:32; 2 Cor. 6:9, 10; Heb. 12:5-12).

B. It sheds light on what we call death (v. 17; 1 Cor. 15:55-57; 2 Tim. 1:10; John 11:25, 26).

III. What we shall do about it

A. We will rejoice and be glad in it, believe it, trust in it (v. 24).

See *Parish Activities*: The body of Christ worshipping together.

B. We will praise the Lord and tell of His goodness (vv. 19, 20, 21; Mark 16:7, 15).

Tacoma, Wash.

ARTHUR W. SHELPS

QUASIMODOGENITI

EZEK. 37:9-14

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Our text is a picturesque portion of Holy Writ which will catch the hearer's attention immediately. It is one of the many vision symbols which came to the prophet Ezekiel during the Babylonian Captivity (Ezek. 37:1). It grows out of the vision of the valley of dry bones and lies deeply buried in the heart of the book. We might call it Jehovah's promise of deliverance to Israel through the Spirit.

Obviously the first task of the preacher is to acquaint himself with the setting of this allegory by a general review of Ezekiel. And certainly this material should not remain hidden in the mind of the preacher, but should find its proper place in the sermon. If the text and its lesson is to live, the hearers should not hear the sermon in a vacuum. The symbolism is so vivid as to challenge the imagination even of the children. What an opportunity to spell out the mighty doctrine of the Holy Spirit under such a framework!

The symbolism itself is not difficult if the preacher will hold to the point of comparison. The trappings may be material, but the lesson for our day is spiritual. As usual, the meaning of individual words is important. "Prophecy unto the wind [breath]" does not mean that Ezekiel should raise his face to the sky and shout to the east wind blowing through the valley; it is simply the Spirit's way of telling him to speak the life-giving Word to the nations. Ezekiel presents a play on words by his consistent use of the word רִיחַ, translated variously "wind," "breath," "spirit," by the versions (cp. John 3:8). The word might have been translated by "wind" and "spirit," depending on the context. "Breath" and "breathe" (vv. 9, 10) refer to the Holy Spirit. Cp. Gen. 2:7; John 20:22. "These slain" refers to Israel in captivity, a picture of the judgment of bloody warfare poured upon apostate Israel. "Bones" in verse 11 (cp. v. 1) represents Israel's spiritual destitution, a picture of sinful human nature. By nature man is like a dry skeleton in a wind-swept valley (v. 11b). The concepts "exceeding great army," "whole house of Israel," and "four winds" form a prophecy of the Church Universal, of which Israel is the nucleus. The term "graves" again speaks of spiritual depravity and death. Israel is pictured as a people buried in another nation away from the Promised Land, where the Seed of the Promise should be born.

On the face of it, it may seem that the text speaks of the national restoration of Israel to Palestine. Most commentaries swerve in this

direction, even, giving the vision a double meaning. This is not the point of comparison or the original intended purpose of the text. While it is true that the promise is connected with the land, this is only the scaffolding for the promised Messiah and His Spirit. We must take our cue from Paul's interpretation of the promise to Abraham in Romans 4, "heir of the world" (v.13). Any other approach will result in more dry bones. The burden of this vision is *spiritual*. It speaks of Jehovah's great Gift to the church—the Holy Spirit. This Gift comes through prophesying. From the broader context and many New Testament parallels we know the Spirit comes through Christ, the divine Logos. Throughout the preparation of this sermon the preacher should keep in mind the beautiful correlation between Word, Spirit, Christ, church. (NOTE: It is very doubtful that this vision has any direct reference to the resurrection of the body, although this is taught in Scripture [Rom. 8:11]. Cp. Luther, Third Article.)

The Theme of the Day.—The liturgical theme for the day is that Christians possess the Spirit of God in Christ. The Gospel reveals how Jesus gave the Holy Comforter to His needy and shaky disciples in the closed room on Easter evening. The Epistle witnesses the victory of faith through rebirth. (NOTE: Without the interpolation in vv. 7, 8, the Epistle as a whole witnesses the work of the Holy Spirit.) Closely connected with this is the *Parish Activities* theme of the month—"The Worship of the Church."

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To re-emphasize to the hearer that as a Christian he has the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit and what this means for his temporal and eternal life.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The greatest sin of all is unbelief or resisting the Holy Spirit. The old man even leads Christians to resist the promptings of the Spirit if they neglect Word and Sacrament, through which God comes to man. Only the Holy Ghost, coming with the precious Gospel, can comfort sinners. The church itself at times fails to emphasize the Third Article. Neglecting the Spirit is a sign of our times.

Opportunity for Gospel.—The preacher may ask, "Where is Christ taught in our text?" He is there—everywhere, even in the very term used for God. He is the Center of it all. The eternal Word, who bestowed His Spirit on Israel, is the same who lives in His body, the church, today. The Holy Spirit brings the forgiveness of Christ. He connects the Cross and the Christian. He is the Guarantee, the

Earnest, of the full inheritance. No one can believe that Jesus is Lord without the Spirit. The preacher dare not, cannot, preach Spirit without the Cross or the Cross without the Spirit. This means that the preacher will "preach the text" but with the New Testament church and the Gospel fulfillment in view.

Sermon Illustration and Parallels.—The preacher, with such a striking, picturesque text before him, will do well to make use of the visual aids furnished by the Spirit before resorting to lesser pictures. In addition, the following items are suggested: (a) Nicodemus, John 3; (b) ἀρραβών, Eph. 1:14; (c) intercession of the Spirit, Romans 8; (d) victories of the Spirit on our mission fields; (e) N. T. parallels such as Eph. 2:10; Revelation 20; 2 Corinthians 5; Ephesians 5; and, above all, the Gospel and Epistle for the day.

Outline

Introduction: For this sermon the preacher should consider setting forth the historical setting of the vision.

God's Great Gift to Man—the Holy Spirit

(Alternative: God Gives What Man Most Needs—The Holy Spirit)

- I. Who the Holy Spirit is
 - A. The terms in the text.
 - B. New Testament parallels.
- II. Our great need of this Gift
 - A. The helplessness of Israel in Captivity.
 - B. The utter inability of man to believe.
 - C. The daily strength the Christian needs.
- III. How this Gift is bestowed
 - A. Through Christ.
 - B. Through the preaching of the Word ("prophesying").
- IV. What this Gift means for the Christian
 - A. Gives spiritual life (Israel revived).
 - B. The fruits of faith.
 - C. True worship of our Lord.
 - D. Mission work (Spirit builds the church).
 - E. Guarantee of salvation (climax).

Springfield, Ill.

LORMAN M. PETERSEN

MISERICORDIAS DOMINI

EZEK. 34:11-16

The Text and Its Central Thought. — Ezekiel, a member of a priestly family, was taken into Babylonian captivity with King Jehoiachin to perform his task as prophet in order that the covenant people be not altogether forsaken. As long as the temple still stood, he had to tell the people of the wrath of God that would not subside until the holy city be destroyed and the inhabitants scattered abroad. After this dreadful event he was permitted again to comfort the people and to point to a future filled with light and salvation for them. Our text is taken from the second part of the message of Ezekiel, the message of comfort. The preacher will therefore do well to portray to the hearers the hour in which the exiles received the sad intelligence of the complete destruction of Jerusalem and the magnificent temple of Solomon. This devastating news well-nigh overwhelmed the exiles. All their hopes were dashed to the ground, for their sanctuary was profaned, their country taken over by enemies, and they had become a people without a future, a people that was threatened with the loss of its identity. It was to such a hapless, discouraged, and despairing people that the prophet now brings true consolation.

In vv. 1-10 of this chapter the Lord takes the false and faithless shepherds of Israel severely to task for their cruel selfishness, their greed, and their indifference to the welfare of their flock. He is against these shepherds and will require His flock at their hands, will deliver it from their clutches. With this promise our text begins (v. 11). Behold, I, even I, the Lord Jehovah, will do the work Myself that these faithless creatures have neglected. I personally will both search My sheep and seek them out. Two synonyms are used for emphasis, denoting untiring efforts that end successfully.

V. 12: "As a shepherd seeketh out his flock." His actions compare to those of a good shepherd (John 10:12). The sheep may have strayed into other folds, may have been driven away by wolves. A panic has ensued while faithless shepherds serve their own interests. It was a day of gloom, of clouds and darkness for Israel, a day of God's judgment upon their sins.

V. 13. He would now again bring them home to their original fold and feed them upon the mountains of Israel (Jer. 23:3). Vv. 14, 15. "I will feed them in a good pasture. . . . I will feed My flock, and I will cause them to lie down." Our Lord is bounteous. He never stints, but showers blessings upon His own (Ps. 23:2; Is. 40:11).

V. 16. That which was lost I will seek, and that which was driven away I will cause to return; the broken will I bind up (Ps. 23:3).

The loving Shepherd's tender care will alleviate all sorrow, all ills of body and soul. The Lord, however, has no compassion on the fat and the strong, the self-righteous and the oppressor (16b). "He that has rest for the disquieted saints has terror to speak to presumptuous sinners."—Thus the central thought of the text is the shepherd love of our Lord Jesus.

The Day and Its Theme.—The Introit speaks of *miser ricordias Domini*, exclaiming: "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord!" The Gradual points to the risen Lord and quotes His statement "I am the Good Shepherd." In the Collect we ask for perpetual gladness for the faithful and eternal joys for those whom God has delivered from everlasting death. The Epistle tells us that we were as sheep going astray, but have now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, while the Gospel has the Good Shepherd prove to us His right to claim that exalted title by saying: "I lay down my life for the sheep, and other sheep I have which are not of this fold. Them also must I bring." The theme of *Parish Activities*, "Worshiping Together," suggests our occupation in the one fold under one Shepherd.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The preacher's message should impress upon the hearers the greatness of the love of their Shepherd, how He rescues them from sure destruction, how He cares for their spiritual and temporal needs, sparing no effort and no sacrifice to bring them to their coveted goal.

Sin to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The very nature of sheep, their stupidity, their helplessness, points to original sin. Their sorry plight, like Israel's, is the result of their own folly: their stubborn refusal to listen to God's Word, their willingness to follow leaders that tell them what they love to hear rather than the truth. "It is an evil thing and bitter to forsake the Lord God."

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The whole text is replete with good news, with the comforting assurance that a merciful God is at work to rescue the fallen, to reclaim the erring, to feed on the green pastures of His Word and to lead to the refreshing waters of life those whom He has redeemed and made His very own.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—The picture of the shepherd and his sheep, of false and true shepherds, offers ample illustrative material. Jehovah, the Shepherd of Ezekiel, is the Good Shepherd of the Gospel for the day, which furnishes additional material for amplification, as do the closing words of the Epistle.

*Outline***The Shepherd Love of Our Lord**

- I. He seeks and delivers His sheep
 - A. The sheep were scattered because of their sin (Israel, we).
 - B. Like a Good Shepherd He goes after them and brings them home.
 1. Israel from Babylon.
 2. The world of sinful men through the redemptive work.

II. He feeds them and cares for them

- A. On the green pastures of His Word He feeds them.
- B. He cares for the needs of the individual (Thomas, Mary Magdalene, Peter, the erring, the dejected) Is. 40:11.

Conclusion: Thus we have been privileged to glance into the heart of our Good Shepherd, whose love prompted Him to lay down His life for His sheep, who sought us out and found us, and who graciously provides for the needs of the individual. As we permit Him to feed us with His Word, we shall see the glorious promise (John 10:27,28) fulfilled in us.

St. Louis, Mo.

PAUL KOENIG

JUBILATE

Ps. 119:49-54

The Text and Its Central Thought.—“The golden ABC of the praise, love, power, and use of the Word of God,” as the German Bible terms it, presents in highly artistic form (22 octaves set up as an acrostic on the Hebrew alphabet) the reflections of the suffering and persecuted believer on the power and praiseworthiness of the Word of God. “Word,” “Law,” “judgments,” “statutes,” are four of the ten synonyms for the Word of God which pulsate through the psalm. V. 49: It is “the Word” which the Psalmist ponders, and he prays that God Himself would cause him to remember it and to find it coming true. God does that as He works hope in the believer’s heart. Particularly in affliction the believer is led to trust that God will help, and God’s Word is the promise and the power of that help.—V. 50: That which comforts the believer in the midst of his affliction is the realization that God’s Word has quickened him already in the past. When Christians are thankful and remember God’s goodness in praises, they are actually taking God’s own means of strengthening them into their hearts.—V. 51: The proud and frivolous, who think they need no God, may have derided the believer; but he

does not bend away from the will of God conveyed to him in God's Word. Here "Law" is not the condemnatory revelation of God's wrath of Galatians 3 or 1 Timothy 1, but the pattern of God's will for action of Romans 13 or even more accurately Jer. 31:33, an active principle for action.—V. 52: The believer's great comfort lies in remembering God's "judgments of old." Here is one of the great Gospel words of the text. For that God should judge ought to be the least comforting, the most menacing thing in the world, Ps. 130:3. But actually God's judgments are a source of comfort, for in them he reveals Himself seeking the righteousness of His people, coming to them with mercy, forgiving their sins (cf. Ps. 103:6). In this psalm cf. vv. 20, 39, 43, 137, 149, 156, 164 (a note of praise), 175 (the concept of the "judge," like Joshua, being a source of help).—V. 53: Horror, indignation, seizes the believer as he remembers the wicked who turn away from the Law. They not merely go against its provisions; but they cut themselves off from the power of God's Word to move and save them.—V. 54: The believer ponders the statutes, ordinances, and provisions of God, and we might imagine that they would signal drudgery and death. But actually they become songs which hearten and encourage him in the earthly journey. The latter is described as the "house of his pilgrimage." Here he has no abiding city; yet the longer he lives in this temporary abode, the more stimulating and refreshing the Word of God is to him—a Word directed specifically to his living and to his faithfulness in the midst of sorrow and persecution.—Almost anywhere a handful of verses from this psalm would serve as a powerful text. As these are excised, they cast special accent on the gladness and comfort that is in the Word of God against the foil of discouragement and derision. Hence a possible central thought: "We can sing through the power of God's merciful Word."

The Day and Its Theme.—Jubilate Sunday is not designed to have only one color, of jubilation; it has perspective and chiaroscuro in the sober collect for Christians who have fallen and for those who are true; in the Epistle, with its plea for clean witness even under persecution and right in citizenship; and in the Gospel, which promises sorrow to the disciples, but then joy because of the revelation of His perfected salvation. *Parish Activities* suggests the accent on worship, and elements of this sermon can underscore the purpose of thanksgiving for the redemptive works of God. The theme for the whole day, in the light of this text, could be phrased: "God Is Our Help on Our Pilgrimage."

Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—Much depends on the shaping of the sermon for Cantate, which may wish to deal with the Christian's praise and thanksgiving. If it does, then this sermon can stress the power of the Word of God in affliction and can be summarized: "In God's Word Let Us Find Power for Hope and Joy." If, however, this sermon should receive the particular accent of thanksgiving and joy in worship, v. 54 may be made central, e. g.: "Let Us Joyfully Sing the Praises of Our Merciful God." V. 54 itself might serve as a theme in that instance.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The preacher should beware of imagining the references to the proud and the wicked to be cues for adequate Law preaching; for they suggest an analysis of people who are not present and hence no pondering by the hearer of his own situation. V. 50 suggests that in affliction the hearer may not grant himself the carnal luxury of unhappiness and hopelessness; or v. 54 that in the plodding routine of living our lives as sojourners, not accepting the compensations of worldly living and yet not arriving at the release of heaven, we may not become songless and lackluster, nor look upon God's revelation and "Law" as menacing and cold, hampering and formal, rather than a sign of the speaking God.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The basic concept of "Word," "comfort," and particularly "judgments of old," provide the Gospel cues. This is another text on Luther's tower experience: "The righteousness of God is that gift of God by which a righteous man lives . . . (like the analogies in other phrases), the work of God by which He makes us strong, the wisdom of God by which He makes us wise, etc." The judgments of God can be traced as His merciful deliverance of His people and His promise to redeem them, climaxing in the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—Paul and Silas in prison (Acts 16:25); or the rejoicing of the Apostles (Acts 5:41); the setting of the Gospel for the day in the Upper Room just before the crucifixion of Jesus; the Epistle for the day, the setting of 1 Peter and of the scattered Christians in their time.

Outline

God's Word Is Our Song

Introduction: We are in favor of singing, but our sacred songs get dreary. Our life under God gets perverted into "trying to keep His commandments." Our afflictions and duties add up to drudgery. This text helps us to put God back into our song.

- I. We need songs on our journey
 - A. We need a high heart for our pilgrimage of life.
 - B. But we need the songs from the heart where God dwells, not the world.
- II. God supplies the song
 - A. His Word is unto us: He has made us; He has redeemed us; He will save us.
 - B. As we remember that Word, we get joy and hope and can withstand the godless.
- III. Hence sing the song
 - A. Say it again: God tells us of His love, through Jesus Christ, the Redeemer.
 - B. Say it right in the face of affliction and sorrow.
 - C. Don't stop saying it.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

CANTATE

PSALM 98

The Text and Its Central Thought.—The unnamed Psalmist encourages the believers to praise God for His work of redemption, accomplished through the Messiah. "A new song," "a joyful noise," "a loud noise," "sing praise," and similar expressions indicate the nature of the Christians response to God's love. Of all the marvelous things done by the Lord (the creation of the world, the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea, the sending of the great Flood, etc.) none is greater than the victory of the salvation procured by His power (v. 1). He has made this salvation known to all men (1 Cor. 2:9, 10; Eph. 3:5, 6). Note that the salvation and righteousness of God are often united in Scripture, showing that salvation gives the sinner that righteousness which God accepts (Ps. 51:14; 71:13-15; 85:9-13; Is. 45:8; 46:12, 13; 51:4-6; 61:10; Rom. 3:21-26). In sending the Messiah God proved Himself mindful of His promises, which mercy prompted Him to make and truth required Him to perform (Jer. 33:14; Mic. 7:20; Luke 1:67-75). Since this salvation of our covenant God has been made known to all the world, all believers are urged to praise Him. They are to sing unto Him a new song from a joy-filled heart (v. 4) and are to use their instruments for joyful music of praise (vv. 5, 6). The sea, the floods, and the hills joining in praise indicate the universality

of it (vv. 7, 8). If these inanimate objects are called upon to praise God, certainly no thinking human being should remain silent (v. 7b). The song of praise we sing here is but a prelude to that grander song we shall sing after the victorious Messiah returns to judge the world (v. 9). Cf. Rev. 14:3; 15:3.

The Day and Its Theme.—The theme of Cantate, the 4th Sunday after Easter, is the praise of God for the completion of His redeeming work through the resurrection of His Son from the dead. The Epistle reminds us that God is the Source of every good gift, especially the soul-saving Word, which we are to believe and follow. In the Gospel for the day Christ promises, after His return to the Father, to send the Holy Spirit, who will guide His followers into all truth. The Introit, the opening verses of this psalm, calls on believers to sing praises to the Lord for His marvelous victory through Christ. The Gradual exalts the power of God which raised His Son from the dead and gave Him the complete victory over death. It should not be difficult to insert the keynote of praise into the theme of the month for *Parish Activities*: "The Church, the Body of Christ, Worshiping Together."

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To move the worshipping congregation to praise God for His redemptive work, accomplished by the victory of Jesus Christ over death.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The failure to recognize our lost estate; the resulting indifference to God's wonderful salvation; our love of things we can see and touch, and of the world, which destroys our taste for things spiritual—these sins must be confessed if we are to be moved to praise God for the spiritual blessings spoken of in this text.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—Jehovah, the covenant God, achieved this *victory*, which consists of *salvation* and the *righteousness* which God gives (v. 2). God did this in remembrance of His *mercy* and *truth* (faithfulness in keeping promises). His power (v. 1) helped those unable to save themselves; and His mercy (v. 3) saved those unworthy of salvation.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—Songs of praise in Scripture: Israel, after deliverance at Red Sea (Exodus 15); Mary, "in remembrance of His mercy" (Luke 1:46-55); Zacharias, for performance of "mercy promised to our fathers" (Luke 1:67-75); the redeemed in heaven (Rev. 14:3; 15:3). God remembered Noah (Gen. 8:1); Abraham (Gen. 19:28); and us.

Outline

Our Post-Easter Hymn of Praise

I. The nature of it

- A. A hymn of praise — Easter means victory (v. 1).
- B. A hymn of joy (v. 4).
- C. A hymn using every means available (vv. 5, 6).
- D. A universal hymn of all believers (vv. 7, 8).

II. The occasion of it

- A. The Lord calls us to it (vv. 1a, 4a, 5a).
- B. The Lord has done marvelous things for us.
 - 1. His power gave us the Easter victory (v. 1b).
 - 2. He has made the blessings of Easter known (v. 2).
 - 3. He has made it possible for all to be saved (v. 3b).
 - 4. He has proved the truth of His promises (v. 3a).
 - 5. He has promised to let us sing a grander song in heaven (v. 9).

Riverside, Calif.

WM. GRAUMANN