

5-1-1956

## Homiletics: Studies on Free Texts from the Old Testament

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### Recommended Citation

Burroughs, Albert C. (1956) "Homiletics: Studies on Free Texts from the Old Testament," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 27, Article 29.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol27/iss1/29>

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# HOMILETICS

## *Studies on Free Texts from the Old Testament*

### FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

### PSALM 13

*The Text and Its Central Thought.*—Guilt and fear drive us humbly to our knees pleading the mercy of God. When we are in this position God can reach us more easily than when in our self-sufficiency we keep Him at arm's length. "Christ's mercy is ever ready to flow into every heart that is lonely, as water will to all low levels" (Maclaren). David in our text experiences this fact. He was probably speaking of the time when he was persecuted by King Saul. This was an experience so distressing that he thought God had abandoned him (v.1). Our grief is sometimes so intense and our gloom so thick that it hides the face of God (v. 1b). He was so lonely that he turned inward for counsel (v.2). His sorrow seemed to be endless (v.2). In time of trouble, when we try to look too far into the future, it may seem as if there were no end. Thereupon worry often turns into depression, anxiety, despondency. Fear is a temporary state of mind as when the disciples were frightened in the storm. But when it continues unbroken, we are in the grip of an obsession. This reveals the sinfulness of our nature, which fears God, whom we have offended, anticipates punishment, and likes to play into Satan's hand by tempting us to despair.

When this happens, the Christian, like David, turns to God in confession of his helplessness. Laid low at the blank wall of self, we prostrate ourselves at the throne of God and plead His mercy (v. 3). And God never fails. He delivered David. With firm confidence in God's salvation, of which he had suddenly become convinced (v.5), his fears are allayed. He praises the goodness of God (v.6) and finds peace in His everlasting arms. "The Lord is good, a Stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knoweth them that trust in Him" (Nah. 1:7).

*The Day and Its Theme.*—"God's mercy our help in fear and death" is the theme for this day's worship. The Epistle (1 John 4:16-21) speaks of God's perfect love inspiring confidence and casting out fear. The Gospel (Luke 16:19-31) speaks of the rich man and Lazarus, one spending eternity in hell and the other in heaven. The Introit, using some of the wording of Psalm 13, our text, speaks of finding



mercy and salvation in the Lord. The Gradual likewise is a sinner's plea for mercy in Christ and an expression of confidence in God's help. All of these facets are crystallized in the gem of divine truth: God's mercy is unfailing in fear, trouble, death. For this David prayed, and this he found to be a solid anchor in the storm. God's mercy through Jesus is also the resource for carrying out the *Parish Activities* theme of the month, "The Church Trains and Uses Its Members." Christ gave Himself for us on the cross. He also gave each of us particular gifts. Moreover, He continually comes to us in mercy through Word and Sacrament, motivating us to use our talents in His service.

*The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.*—To motivate the hearer to turn to God with boldness and confidence in all trouble, physical and spiritual, and finding in God's mercy an unfailing help, to dedicate his life to the Savior's service.

*Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.*—Worry, doubt, pessimism, depression, gloom, despair of God's mercy, which David manifested, are part of our own nature. These are not merely negative emotions, but sins which God laid on Jesus. David's fear arose as much from consciousness of guilt as from outward circumstances instigated by Saul. Here is the taproot of our trouble: sin and guilt. "I have had more trouble with myself than with any other man I ever met" (Moody). Let us daily confess these things before God so that the new man can come forth and arise.

*Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.*—We have passed through the festival half of the church year and have once more beheld the great acts of God's mercy in our behalf: Jesus in the manger—Christ on the cross—the risen Savior on Easter morning—the ascended Lord, who has prepared a place for us—the Holy Spirit, active at Pentecost. This same God is ever active in our behalf today, stirring us to a confession of guilt; forgiving our sins for Jesus' sake; leading us out of the darkness of dejection; renewing our faltering faith; filling our hearts with songs of gratitude for His unfailing mercy. The Bible fairly exhausts human language in trying to give us the assurance of God's mercy and help (Ps. 46:1; 34:4; 107:1; Is. 54:10; 1 Peter 1:3; 1 Tim. 1:15, 16).

*Illustrations from New Testament.*—The publican in the temple, the thief on the cross, the blind beggar at Jericho, the Roman centurion—these confessed their helplessness, threw themselves at the feet of God's mercy, and, like David, found the wonders of God's deliverance.



**Outline**

**A Prayer for God's Mercy**

**I. Confession**

**A. In the face of the enemy's persecution David confesses his**

**1. Hopelessness (v. 1)**

**2. Loneliness (v. 2: counsels with himself)**

**3. Worry and depression (v. 2)**

**B. Sorrow was so intense that he thought God had abandoned him . . . "Forever?" (V. 1.)**

**C. This was a confession of his sinfulness, which caused his grief and fears.**

**II. Supplication**

**A. Complaint changes to pleading at the throne of mercy (v. 3)**

**B. He expresses his personal faith, "My God" (v. 3)**

**C. He pleads the honor of God (v. 4)**

**III. Thanksgiving**

**A. God's mercy stirs up his trust and gives him peace (v. 5)**

**B. He expresses joyful confidence in God's salvation (v. 5b)**

**C. This anticipated deliverance fills his heart with praise to God (v. 6)**

**Topeka, Kans.**

**ALBERT C. BURROUGHS**

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**SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**

**PSALM 32**

***The Text and Its Central Thought.***—This is the drama of a soul. Its background is David's sin of adultery and murder. (2 Samuel 11, 12.)

**Act 1.** A conscience in torment (vv. 3, 4). Uriah has died a hero's death. All should be well. David possesses everything his flesh desired, and sin is artfully concealed. But conscience remains, and it will not be silent. David may rationalize—how small his sin compared with deeds of neighboring kings! He may try to cover past evil with present good—how fiercely he demands justice for the weak (2 Sam. 12:5)! He may try to forget, but day and night he cannot rest. No man ever escapes guilt; a man's past always catches up with him (Matt. 10:26).



**Act 2.** The discovery of grace (vv. 1, 2, 5, 6). Guilty man assumes that the one thing he must never do is confess. To admit fault is to fall into contempt, judgment, wrath, hell. Even when wrong, one must fight desperately to appear righteous. But David reaches the point where he can fight no more. He is sick of his own guile. The voice of Nathan breaks his spirit. There is no plea for compromise, no effort to bargain for terms. The surrender is absolute. God is altogether right; he is altogether wrong. Let the condemnation fall—he richly deserves it! Cf. Ps. 51:4. But the despair of such confession brings the discovery which must be the source of amazement to every Christian—there is no condemnation! Surrender to God's holiness brings not destruction but salvation, not wrath but grace. The Lord has put away sin and death (2 Sam. 12:13). God, the dreaded enemy, "forgives," "covers," "does not impute," sin. Here is cleansing for the guilty soul, blessed relief from the awful burden of living a lie. Here is the blessed man "in whose spirit there is no guile" (v. 2).

How foolish that a man should fight repentance! David pleads with his people to share his discovery before it is too late (v. 6).

**Act 3.** A new life (vv. 7-11). True repentance has acknowledged without reservation that God is right in every demand of His holiness and in every judgment upon sin. It is a painful lesson, and yet the forgiving grace of God makes it an experience of joy, like a visit to the dentist, so fearful in prospect, in retrospect an overwhelming relief from much greater pain. Once the lesson is learned, all of life is transformed. Yes, God is always right, and the joy and privilege of man is to participate in the rightness of God. Many a time human judgment may argue that God must be wrong; the old determinants of conduct—expediency, fear, avoidance of suffering, pride, and selfishness—insist that obedience is too expensive. But faith (v. 10) yearns for nothing more than to learn what God instructs and teaches and to watch the slightest signal of God's eye for an indication of His will (v. 8). The passion of the soul is to know and to do the will of God, for God is always right, and he who is on God's side cannot be wrong. Though the world collapse about him, he must emerge victorious (v. 7).

The text contrasts also the wicked. These may conform outwardly to God's will, but only under compulsion of external pressures of "bit and bridle" (v. 9), which God artfully exerts through government, society, economic necessity, and other devices. Of their "many sorrows" David can speak from rich experience.

For the central thought see the outline.



*The Day and Its Theme.*—Compare the Introit with v. 7 of the text; the Collect with v. 8; the Gradual with vv. 10, 11; the Gospel (Luke 14:16-24) with v. 6. The Epistle (1 John 3:13-18), in line with v. 8, emphasizes that redemption produces sanctification, not of words only but "in deed and in truth." A unifying theme could be stated as "God's gracious purpose effected in men." Note the significance of v. 5b as it appears in the liturgy.

*The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.*—Nothing is more intolerable to natural man than the prospect of being discovered in guilt, especially in sins long cherished and defended as right. Even Christians are too ready to escape guilt by concealment and self-deception rather than by honest repentance and reliance on grace. The goal is true repentance, of which the new life is the inevitable by-product.

*Sin to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.*—One great sin, guile of spirit (v. 2), is manifest in two ways: (1) in the hiding of iniquity (v. 5), the attempt to establish one's own goodness, the abhorrence of repentance; (2) in the separation of "justification" from "sanctification," so that Christian confession is not followed by transformation of life.

*Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.*—The Gospel is explicit in the text. Add only the price of redemption, Christ.

*Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.*—The prime source of illustration is the imagery of the text itself. Each word picture requires loving development: "covered," "imputeth not iniquity," "bones waxed old," "roaring," "day and night," "hand heavy," "moisture turned to drought," "floods of great waters," "hiding place," "surrounded with songs," "with Mine eye," "horse and mule."

Remarkable that God, once conceived as a terrible enemy from whose holiness the sinner must flee, should now be our "Hiding Place." Remember Samson's riddle (Judges 14). As the roaring lion himself becomes food for others, and he who filled hearts with terror now fills stomachs with sweetness, so the God of judgment and condemnation is offered as the Victim of vicious men and becomes the "Bread of Life whose flesh we eat" (John 6:51), the Source of all the sweetness and joy of living. This paradox is the joyous discovery of true repentance.

That sin cannot be concealed forever, but must finally be exposed, can often be illustrated from current news. The ultimate exposure of all guilt will come in God's Judgment. This the "flood of great waters" (v. 6). Therefore learn honesty while there is time to know grace.



*Outline***When Is a Man Righteous?**

- I. When, acknowledging that God is always right, he confesses his own wrong and thereby discovers the joy of God's forgiving grace.
- II. When, acknowledging that God is always right, he searches out God's will for him and thereby discovers the joy of victorious living.

New Orleans, La.

PAUL G. BRETSCHER

**THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY****JONAH 4:6-11**

*The Text and Its Central Thought.*—The Book of Jonah is a tightly constructed narrative describing God's chastisement of a reluctant prophet to the end that he might speak God's Word to men. The episode of Jonah's shipwreck and being swallowed by the fish ends in the penitent prophet's turning from his flight to preach the message to Nineveh. The text goes over the same ground again, this time not over the sweep of the miles toward Tarshish, but in the recesses of the heart of the prophet as he sits on the east side of the city grumbling over the mercy that God showed to penitent sinners.—V. 6: God devises an expedient for chastening Jonah, turning his eyes inward to audit the poverty of his own love and its distance from the pattern of God's mercy. First comes comfort and complacency.—Vv. 7, 8: Now comes chastisement, again through perfectly "natural" means, but God is in control—cutworm, sun, and hot wind. But the point is not the design of trouble; it is that in the heart of Jonah life becomes bleak, not worth living. 2:7 he once had prayed: "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord"; but now all he can think of is Jonah, and he sees no purpose in living.—Vv. 9-11: Through an inner conversation God puts the interpretation upon the discomfort and with it gives a diagnosis of what is really going on under the surface of Jonah's petulance. He makes Jonah again confront the bitterness of his heart—"I do well to be angry, even unto death." He makes it clear to him that his pity for the gourd is actually a pity for himself. But pity is actually far from his heart; for he has no pity on people. He had pity and concern over a plant for which he had made no investment; but God is concerned with Nineveh, its teeming masses, its 120,000 children, its cattle. The implication is complex:



You have pity concerning one plant; you have no pity concerning hundreds of thousands of people and their cattle. You have pity for a plant; you see no reason for sensing God's own kind of pity for the hundreds of thousands of beings which He has made and whom He sought to save through the message of repentance which He had bidden Jonah preach.—The central thought, strictly speaking, is wholly negative: The evil of the selfish and pitiless heart. In its broader frame a more positive central thought emerges: "God is deeply concerned that His people respond with pity to the needs of men."

*The Day and Its Theme.*—The Epistle concerns watchfulness against spiritual obstacles for fulfilling our purpose in this world. The Gospel tells the parables concerning compassion and concern for the lost. The worship of the day splendidly fills out the goal of Christians to be responsible for the welfare and salvation of others and of their care to preserve this sense of responsibility. *Parish Activities* discusses the church's training and employing its members for church work; application of this text, with its special concern for the task of bringing the saving message to others, are obvious.

*Sin to be Diagnosed and Remedied.*—This is the explicit message of this text, and in fact of the entire Book of Jonah: even men under the call of God to bring the message of mercy to needy mankind are apt to lapse into pitilessness toward people; and with it comes a chain reaction: rebellion against the plan of God, sulking and thanklessness toward God, blindness to the great warm tide of God's love to man, in which the witness of God's grace is to play a part. Jonah was a called prophet; yet every Christian has a stewardship to exercise over his gift of the Holy Spirit; and when he withdraws from it, he imperils his possession. Cf. Matt. 25:29.

*Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.*—Not just to stimulate the hearer to witness to others, although that is involved; but especially to respond to God's plan with a sense of pity and responsibility for those to whom he can bring his message.

*Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.*—The cues lie in the terms "pity" (v.10) and "spare" (v.11). Jonah needed better to ponder the pity of God, its meaning and method. The syllogism in vv. 10 and 11 is unexpected; we look for: "If you had pity on the gourd, why not on Nineveh"; but God's Word is: "If you had pity on the gourd, why shouldn't I, God, have pity on Nineveh?" The goal of the sermon is to enlist the hearer in the agency of setting forth God's pity to men;



to do this he has to be aware of that pity for himself and through himself. Direct N. T. motivations occur in 1 John 4:10 ff.; Matt. 18:21-35. This will to love and to be pitiful is the direct outgrowth of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

*Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.*—Instructive parallels and contrasts occur in the preceding materials of the Book of Jonah itself. The most direct N. T. parallel, down to the analysis of the latent envy and the prescription of the Gospel Word of God's fatherly concern, is the parable of the Prodigal Son, especially in its climax of the Elder Brother (Luke 15:28-32); also the preceding parables suggest cues for preaching the Gospel to cure the malady of ill will toward the penitent.

### *Outline*

**God Is Deeply Concerned that His People Respond with Pity to the Needs of Men (Christians, Rejoice when Men Repent!)**

**I. God has pity for needy men (God wants men to repent).**

A. The need of men is that they turn away from God. Nineveh. Today.

B. God has pity for their need; His love in Christ.

C. God's act of pity: to send His people to tell them of His love.

**II. God's people are apt to respond with reluctance. (Do you joy in the repentant?)**

A. They respond with reluctance to the task of bringing the message.

B. They are reluctant to rejoice over those who have repented because of the message.

C. The underlying damage: Their pity for men is growing cold, the life of God in them is becoming stifled by absorption in self.

**III. God is deeply concerned that His people respond! (Rejoice when men repent!)**

A. God nevertheless must use His people to bring His message.

B. Hence He tests, chastens, lays bare, the self-absorption of His people, through difficulty great and small.

- C. He comes to His people with the constant reminders of His mercy to them as well as others, His place for His people in the plan of bringing the way of salvation in Christ to all men.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

#### FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOSHUA 24:14-22

*The Text and Its Central Thought:* The scene of this text is one of the most memorable in the Old Testament. Having just entered the Holy Land, the Children of Israel were assembled at Shechem, on the slopes of Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. In the valley between them stood their aged leader (Joshua 24:29), Joshua, calling to them: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." Having recited the great things God had done for them (vv. 1-13), Joshua urges the people to dedicate themselves to fear the Lord inwardly and to serve Him outwardly (v. 14). To demonstrate their sincerity, they were to put away their heathen gods (v. 14). On this point Joshua had made his decision (v. 15). Mindful of the blessings God had showered upon them in delivering them from their enemies and providing for them (vv. 17, 18), the people declare: "God forbid (lit., profane be it to us to forsake) that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods" (v. 16). In order to impress upon them the seriousness of their resolve and to keep them from making a rash, ill-considered promise, Joshua reminds them of the responsibilities attending their decision (vv. 19, 20). "Ye cannot serve the Lord," i. e., by your own resolution only and without the assistance of divine grace. For God is holy and jealous, so that He cannot endure any rival deities (Ex. 20:5; Deut. 4:24). In vv. 19, 20 Joshua shows the people the dire consequences which will follow upon their breaking of their vow. Then the Lord will not forgive them, but will consume them. Realizing full well the seriousness of their pledge, the Israelites repeat their vow, "We will serve the Lord."

This text, then, is one which calls upon Christians to rededicate their lives to the service of Christ, both by showing them the fearful consequences of forsaking the Lord and by pointing out the motives which ought to encourage them to declare: "We will serve the Lord."

*The Day and Its Theme.*—Our text fits admirably the theme for the day, "Serve the Lord with a Pure Heart." The Epistle (Rom. 8:



18-23) reflects the motive which ought to prompt us to serve the Lord. On the other hand, the Gospel (Luke 6:36, 42) describes how the Christian can serve the Lord in his daily life. Again, the Introit for the day reminds us of the sustaining power and grace of God which delivers us from our enemies. In the Collect we pray that the course of this world may be so ordered that we may serve the Lord.

*The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.*—The goal of the sermon is to lead the hearer to join Israel in the resolve: "We will serve the Lord" by indicating both the folly of serving other gods and the blessedness of serving the Lord.

*Sin to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.*—This text gives us occasion to illustrate gross and fine idolatry. The idol shrines which we must continually tear down are those built to self, to money, and to pleasure. The text also clearly sets forth the wrath of God upon the sinner (vv. 19, 20).

*Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.*—Israel had enjoyed the protection and preservation of God, not because they were better than others but because God in grace had chosen them to be His people. Similarly, when we stop to reflect upon the favor God has shown us, our eyes are directed not only to God's provident care but also to His forgiving grace, manifested in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.*—The text affords opportunity to illustrate types of idolatry to which Israel was exposed. At the same time the Bible teems with examples of types of idolatry to which also we are exposed. Cf. Judas, Peter, the rich young ruler, the rich fool, Demas, etc. Joseph, Mary of Bethany, the good Samaritan, and others demonstrate the fear of God and service to God which should characterize the Christian life.

### *Outline*

*Introduction:* Every day we are called upon to make choices. Some choices affect our entire future, as, for example, the choice of a spouse or of a vocation. The text calls upon us to make the greatest choice of all. Let Israel's resolve be ours:

## We Will Serve the Lord

### I. The motives for service

#### A. The blessings God had given Israel (vv. 17, 18)

1. Led them from bondage to liberty
2. Preserved them in the wilderness
3. Drove out their enemies

B. The blessings we have received should prompt us to serve the Lord

1. The physical blessings we have received
2. The spiritual blessings God has given us in Christ

II. The implications of serving the Lord

A. We are to put away strange gods

1. Israel had its gods (vv. 14, 15, 22), and we have ours (self, money, pleasure)
2. These we are to put away (Matt. 6:24; Col. 3:9)
3. To serve them is to incur the wrath of God (vv. 19, 20; Heb. 10:26, 27)

B. We are to fear the Lord and serve Him (v. 14)

1. Fear is the inward response of the Christian
2. Service is the outward response (1 Peter 2:9; Eph. 2:10; 1 Cor. 6:20)
3. Such a dedicated life has the promise of God's blessing (1 Tim. 4:18; 2 Tim. 4:7, 8)

Springfield, Ill.

HENRY J. EGGOLD

## THE NATIVITY OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

(June 24)

Is. 40:1-5

*The Text.*—This is the Old Testament prophecy cited by John the Baptist (John 1:23) as divine authority for his work as forerunner of the Messiah. See also Matt. 3:1-3; Mark 1:2-4; Luke 3:1-6; Mal. 3:1.—V.1. Coverdale: "Be of good cheer, My people!"—V.2. "Comfortably" is archaic in this sense. RSV: "tenderly." Luther: *freundlich* (cf. "friendly," Ruth 2:13). Literally "to the heart," "kindly" (Gen. 34:3; 50:21). The word includes love, warmth, earnestness and sincerity, comfort, encouragement, hope, and reassurance. Coverdale: "Comfort Jerusalem!" See also 2 Sam. 19:7; 2 Chron. 30:22; 32:6, 7; Hosea 2:14. "Warfare" leaves something to be desired, but it is not easy to find a better term. Coverdale: "travail." RSV footnote: "time of service." Luther: *Ritterschaft*. Douay: "evil." The basic thought is that of a difficult or strenuous, or wretched and miserable, condition, as indicated by the context of the term (translated "appointed time") in Job 7:1 (RSV: "hard service"); 14:14; Dan. 10:1 (RSV: "great conflict"); see also the word translated "war" (RSV: "host") and its



context in Job 10:17. "Accomplished": finished, completed, done, over; RSV: "ended." "Double": literally "a double doubling." The same thought is in Rom. 5:20: "Grace did much more abound."—V.3. The RSV begins the quotation with the words "In the wilderness. . ." This preserves poetic balance. "Prepare": bring order out of confusion; take things out of the way; clear a way; get ready; also used of putting a house in order; see Is. 57:14; 62:10; Mal. 3:1. "Make straight" does not simply mean to take all the turns and curves out; it rather means in general to do whatever needs to be done to make the "highway" what it should be.—V.4. "Exalted" is archaic in this sense; rather "raised," or "elevated." RSV: "lifted up." "Crooked." RSV: "uneven ground. Luther: *ungleich*. "Straight," a plain, level country. RSV: "level." Luther: *eben*. "Rough places," lit. "bound up places," i. e., rugged, difficult to pass. The same word is in Ps. 31:20: RSV: "plots of men."—V.5. "All flesh," specifically the whole human race. See Gen. 6:12; Ps. 65:2; 145:21; Is. 40:6. "Together": compare Ps. 14:3; 1 Chron. 10:6. LXX has "the salvation of God" (see Luke 3:6) instead of "it." Bengel: "All flesh shall see *that* the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken it."

*The Day and Its Theme.*—The traditional day for observing the nativity of John the Baptist is June 24; this makes him six months older than Jesus. See Luke 1:26; Fahling, *Life of Christ*, pp. 79, 85, 99. His is one of the only two earthly birthdays celebrated by our church. It is fitting that on this day we set his memory before us, that we may follow his faith and good works (AC XXI).—John the Baptist was born in "the hill country of Judea" (Luke 1:39, 65), a descendant of Aaron, the first high priest, through both of his parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5). The angel Gabriel announced his birth, name, and office to his father in an hour of temple service with which a priest was honored only once in his life (Edersheim, I, 134). Besides, John was to be a Nazarite and filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15). Other details (Zacharias' doubt; his dumbness caused by the Lord as a sign; etc.) are in Luke 1:18-25. The Holy Gospel for the day (Luke 1:57-80) tells of John's birth, circumcision, giving of his name, speech restored to Zacharias, the latter's song of praise, John's growth in years and in spirit, and his living "in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel." "In the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar" (Luke 3:1) John began his ministry in the wilderness of Judea and the Jordan valley, "preaching the Baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Matt. 3:1;



Luke 3:3). Word of this spread rapidly far and wide. Jesus also came and was baptized and was publicly pointed out by John as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21, 22; John 1:29-34). Continuing his work, John also rebuked Herod Antipas for taking his brother Philip's wife (Matt. 14:3-5). For this he was put in prison. From there he sent two of his followers to Jesus with the question: "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" (Matt. 11:2 ff.) Jesus' answer directed them to the Book of Isaiah, with which John had begun his ministry. When John's work was finished, he left this world through the door of martyrdom (Matt. 14:6-11). "And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus" (Matt. 14:12).

*Sins to be Dealt with in the Sermon.*—Impenitence and unbelief. John's language was plain; and he dealt not only with the sins of the heart but also with their evil fruits in life (Matt. 3:7-12, Pharisees and Sadducees; Matt. 14:3, 4, Herod's adultery). Nor should we mince words in such matters. Unbelief damns. Son of man, warn the people (Ezek. 3:17 ff.; 33:7 ff.).

*Explicit Gospel.*—Repent, and believe the Gospel! This is "the Gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14, 15). Herein lies the ageless "comfort" of God's people (text, v. 1). The Gospel is not an exclusively New Testament doctrine. See, e.g., Is. 1:18. Explain Is. 40:2 with the help of the above notes on the text. Notice especially that "double for all her sins" means a superabundance of divine love and grace, mercy and forgiveness (Rom. 5:20). These rich and undeserved blessings, including heaven itself, are also ours through saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Illustrations.*—When we drive along the highways of our land, we are sometimes confronted with the sign "Road Closed." This may mean that we cannot reach our destination until the way is prepared. The Lord wants to enter every heart, and He has the right to do so on a good "highway." Let us not delay Him by offering Him a poor approach, with obstacles in the way, or even block His coming entirely with a "Road Closed" sign!—When the King or Queen of England goes to visit a part of the realm, every inch of ground on which they will set foot is carefully examined and prepared in advance to make for a welcome reception. How much more should we prepare the way for the coming of the King of kings into our heart and life! Hymns 61, 63, 75, 272.



**Outline**

**Introduction:** a brief approach to the day and occasion, including a short sketch of John's life. See "The Day and Its Theme" above.

**John the Baptist—a Faithful Preacher of Repentance**

I. In word (Is. 40:1,2; John 1:29; etc.)

II. In deed (Is. 40:3,4; Matt. 3:3; 14:3,4,10; etc.)

**Conclusion** (Is. 40:5): The Lord's grace and blessing rested upon this man of God, and His glory was revealed through him and to him. As we follow his faith and good works, we also shall see the glory and salvation of our God. God grant that in us and through us others also may come to His light and to the brightness and glory of His rising! (Is. 60:3.)

***A Collect for the Day***

Almighty God, who by the mouth of Thy prophet Isaiah didst comfort Thy people of old in the Messiah, who was to come, speak peace also to our hearts, we pray Thee, lead us in the way of righteousness and holiness all the days of our life, and grant that we may see Thine everlasting glory, through faith in Him whose way John the Baptist prepared, even the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Pitcairn, Pa.

LUTHER POELLOT