

11-1-1958

Homiletics: Outlines on the Nitsch Epistles

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Recommended Citation

Schelp, A. W. (1958) "Homiletics: Outlines on the Nitsch Epistles," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 29, Article 61.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol29/iss1/61>

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Nitsch Epistles

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

2 PETER 1:2-9

The aim and purpose of this text is expressed in v. 2: "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus, our Lord." Peter here plainly points to a right knowledge of God in Christ as basic for spiritual health. I suggest therefore that the introduction occupy itself with this great truth: "That if once a man thinks that God's principal relation to him is to demand and to command, you will get no work out of that man; that such a notion will paralyze all activity and cut the nerve of all service. And the converse is as true, namely, that the one thought about God which is fruitful of all blessing, joy, spontaneous, glad activity, is the thought of Him as giving and not of demanding; of bestowing, and not of commanding." This will lead you directly into the theme:

The Secret of an Abundant and Fruitful Life

I. *The secret lies in the knowledge that God is a giving God, who has supplied us with all that we need*

A. V. 3. God "has called us by His own glory and virtue" (ASV reading). That means: "He hath called us by the glory, the raying out of His love, and He hath called us by (His virtue) the activity and the energy, the power in action of His great and illustrious Spirit."

B. V. 3. He has provided for us "all things that pertain unto life and godliness." "Come and look at My storehouses, count if you can those golden vases filled with treasure; look at those ingots of bullion; gaze into the vanishing distances of the infiniteness of My nature and of My possessions, and then listen to Me. I give thee Myself — Myself, that ye may be filled with all the fullness of God."

C. V. 4. ". . . ye might be partakers of the divine nature." — "It means that into every human spirit there may pass a seed of Divine life which will unfold itself there in all purity of holiness, in all tenderness and gentleness of love. 'God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.'"

D. V. 4. All these things are ours by reason of "exceeding great and precious promises" — the great and precious promises that lie in Christ's incarnation, namely, that the Divine became partaker of the human so that the human might partake of the Divine.

II. *The secret lies in the knowledge that we must apply all diligence in exercising ourselves in, and thus perfecting, the Christian graces given us in Christ Jesus*

Be sure you get the transition from Part I to Part II. God having done His part, you now do yours. God having given you all, you now make diligent use of it.

A. V. 5. ". . . giving all diligence."—Peter would say: "Because you have all these requisites for such a life already given you, see that you bring besides into the heap of gifts, as it were, that which you and only you can bring, namely, 'all diligence.'"—"If you want to be a strong Christian, a happy man, you must bend your back to the work and give all diligence" in the use and exercise of the Christian graces. There are no short cuts by way of fine emotions, good intentions, or select moments of rapture and communion.

B. Such "giving all diligence" to, and exercising ourselves in, the Christian virtues will then climb the ladder of graces as outlined in vv. 5-7. It will add to our faith, virtue—that is energy and strength. To our energetic faith it will add knowledge born out of experience. Out of this knowledge will spring temperance, a steady calm and composure. This temperance will produce the golden fruit of patience, and patience will walk hand in hand with godliness under every stress of life. And, of course, godliness will show itself in brotherly kindness that will reach out in charity, love.

The conclusion is plainly written out for us in vv. 8, 9. But carefully note, and make the most of it, how these verses again point to the one springboard that spells out either the success or the failure of life. "If these things be in you" (v. 8), it spells activity "in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." "He that lacketh these things" (v. 9) can read his failure in this, that he "hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."

NOTE: All quotations, except those taken from Scripture, are taken from Alexander Maclaren's *Exposition of Holy Scripture*, Vol. XVI, II Peter.

Corvallis, Oreg.

A. W. SCHELP

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

HEBREWS 12:15-25

(This text is so filled with allusions to O. T. history and experience that it presents a problem in two directions. If you try to make all of the references clear, you will have a fine lecture but not a sermon. If you deal with none of them, you will lose the force of the whole text.

This outline seeks a solution by dealing with the one event to which the text devotes the most space, meanwhile making passing reference to some of the others. It is an attempt to do this while keeping the spirit of the season.)

The dominant figure of Advent is John the Baptist. His warnings cut the heart. His outcries at the sight of Israel's Hope, finally come, stir the soul. In all his preaching there is a warning and (for those who take the warning to heart) a great joy. Like all warnings it is meant to help us avoid danger. It is a cry to us, in this generation, floating down the lazy river of materialism on our padded couches of plenty, that we are drifting away from the land of God's Christ and His people toward the rapids of despair and the falls of destruction. We must act quickly—

**We Must Take the Grace of God in Jesus Christ Seriously
as His New Testament People, Being Warned by the
Experiences of the O. T. People of God**

I. The experience of God's people at Sinai

A. The background—after delivery from Egypt, many miracles. Now the high point was coming. God the Deliverer would reveal His special message to His special people. Expectations must have run high—and mostly all in the wrong direction.

B. The experience itself—physical concomitants were awe-inspiring, but the message was too much. Essence of it was a description of God's holy people, patterned after Him. It was a message of death because nobody fit the description. This was signaled by physical death associated with the giving of the message.

C. The reaction of God's people—fear, trembling, terror. The gulf between God and man yawned black and wide. After a few words they needed a mediator. Shortly thereafter they forgot the warnings. This is the history of the race.

II. The experience of God's people at Mount Zion

A. Background—from among the Gentiles, with nothing to offer God, condemned by the same words of Sinai, we are called. The preaching of the new agreement in various ways has called us to Mount Zion, to the people of God.

B. The experience itself—we do not come to a physical mountain. No extraordinary physical happenings. But a voice speaks from heaven. The Spirit of the living God speaks. It is a ministry of life, telling of the forgiveness and life that is to be our gift under the new agreement. It speaks of Jesus' outpouring of blood for us and how it

is sprinkled for the removal of all that separates us from God. It does not say "Be holy" but "Be made holy" by the holiness of Christ.

C. The reaction—the only reaction to this experience—faith. Love lays hold on you, and you know it cannot and will not ever let you go. You are caught up into a community of "just men made perfect." You stand forever in the presence of the living God, surrounded by others who, like you, live on the Word of forgiveness. You do—if you take it seriously.

III. *We must take the grace of God in Christ seriously as His N.T. people*

A. The warning—we must be on guard against the things that prevent life and serious faith. We cannot take it for granted. There is no such thing as "cheap grace." We are warned against being practicing materialists, like Esau, while professing a faith that has no power in our lives. How seriously are we taking the grace of God in getting ready for Christmas? If it is not the center, it is nothing. Again, do we find the rush of the season sending down roots of bitterness that create family strife? Does the "closeness" of Christmas underline only more deeply the bitternesses that are found in congregational and family life and have affected many?

B. The great joy—a renewal of the seriousness of our faith which we once had, or a deeper seriousness than we have ever had, can make the event of Bethlehem the exciting story of Life for you. It can bring to your consciousness, into your very "normal" life, the reality of the innumerable angels, the festal gathering of the elect. It can bring you to the Mediator of the life that has no end.

All this is words until you take it with the seriousness of all your life. Listen to the warning. Lay hold of the joy.

South Weymouth, Mass.

KENNETH MAHLER

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

2 CORINTHIANS 4:3-6

"Christmas, Christmas everywhere!" The decorations in streets, stores and homes, the happy carols that meet our ear wherever we go, and the many greetings from friends and acquaintances that arrive daily could convince us that at long last the world had accepted Christianity.

But the experience of other years tells us that all this is a delusion. Even the noblest sentiments and choicest feelings will have been dis-

sipated by the time the decorations and carols are gone, and the old greed, hatred, and selfishness will be back. The truths of Christmas will be forgotten with its tinsel, tunes, and trees. It will have been a disappointment to many.

Why is Christmas such a cruel delusion to the hopeful child of God? Why is it so difficult to convince the world of the need and blessing of Christ? This has always been the world's way. The number of unbelievers has ever far exceeded that of believers, and it will always exceed it.

I. The nature of unbelief

A. Atheism, agnosticism, and skepticism are forms of unbelief, but not the only forms with which we must contend.

B. Involved also is a denial of "Christ as Lord" (v.5). "The image of God" (v.4). The denial of Biblical doctrines such as the atonement, sin, universal grace also falls into the area of unbelief.

C. This is not generally accepted today. Many people hold that truth is not absolute but relative. Also that unbelief is a matter of opinion. Pilate's "What is truth?" has many modern counterparts. But God views every unbelief seriously. "If ye continue in My Word" (John 8:31; John 14:23). The Word, the whole Word, and nothing but the Word.

II. The cause of unbelief

A. Not God, for He has given sufficient light.

1. Nature (Ps. 19:1-4; Rom. 1:20)

No mere machine is nature Wound up and left to play,
No wind harp swept at random By airs that idly stray.
A spirit sways the music, A hand is on the chords,
Oh, bow thy head and listen, That hand, it is the Lord's.

Norwegian Folk Song

2. Conscience. (Rom. 2:14, 15)

3. But Scripture, which is known far and wide and the world's best seller, is God's best light.

4. The influence of Christianity, its culture, its feasts, such as Christmas and Easter, its hospitals and other charities, its educational institutions have spread the light of the Gospel.

B. Satan, the god of this world age, has blinded them. Many ways.

1. Materialism and hedonism are among the most persistently damaging. Luxuries, creature comforts, pleasures are reg-

ularly used to keep out Christ or to impede His progress into human hearts.

2. Intellectual doubts re veracity of the Bible; the divine origin and mission of the church; evolutionism; the divisions in the church.
3. Errors. Rome; Protestant sects; cults. Reminds us of "Hath God said" (Gen. 3:1). "Another gospel" (Gal. 1:8; 2 Cor. 11:3,4). "Angel of light." (2 Cor. 11:13,14)

The god of this world age will do anything, employ every means, and work incessantly to accomplish his wicked ends. He is the author of all unbelief as well as confusion and sin.

III. *The cure of unbelief*

A. The Gospel must be applied.

1. One Gospel, whether "Christ's," "ours," "every," or "the." The good news in Christ Jesus. Not ourselves but Christ. (V.5)
2. Every word of Scripture is related to that Gospel. Law a "schoolmaster" (Gal. 3:24). Sanctification follows from Gospel. All of Bible serves the Gospel. Gospel must be discerned in Scripture to properly understand it.
3. As it is given. Palatable and unpalatable. No compromising. No additions or subtractions. No reduction "to make a sale." (Rev. 10:10; Ezek. 3:17-21)
4. No other choice since we are "slaves for Jesus' sake." (V.5)

B. This is done by preaching.

1. Professionally — pastors, missionaries, teachers. This must be continued and increased. "Sent." (Rom. 10:15)
2. By the laity too. Wherever and however it can be done. Word and life. So the early church grew.
3. Modern methods dare not be neglected. Printed page, radio, TV.

Since both in point of numbers and in percentage unbelief and paganism are growing faster than Christianity and since our Lord's return is imminent, the sense of urgency ought to be upon us.

"Wake, awake, for night is flying."

San Francisco, Calif.

ARTHUR C. NITZ

CHRISTMAS DAY

1 JOHN 1:1-7

When we read the Christmas Gospel according to St. Luke, we are reminded how much we need the interpretation of angels to understand what God has done. We would never see in the swaddling clothes and the manger the sign that our Savior has been born.

St. John is our angel this morning, telling us what we see when we look into the manger and whom we behold when we look upon the Babe. Suddenly the meanness and the lowliness of it all is transfigured into ineffable glory, even the very glory of God, because of who this is and the meaning of His coming to us. From God Himself hear the Word that creates what it says:

Merry Christmas! Thy Life Is Come!

I. *The certainty of the coming*

A. Special certainty is needed here because of the astounding nature of what is told us.

1. The coming is the very coming of God's Son in the flesh ("that which was from the beginning," v. 1).
2. The coming is the coming of the Word of Life (v. 1). This is the basic reason for being merry in what is told us: the coming is not in judgment and wrath, the coming that we have deserved and expect, but for the purpose of giving us life, life which we do not have in ourselves. Here is the meaning of the lowliness of the Babe: we need not fear but can embrace Him for our life.
3. The coming is the coming of the very life that the Son has toward the Father (v. 2) in order that that life might be our life. This is now our life toward the Father.

NOTE: It should be emphasized that this is what we behold in the Babe born of the Virgin Mary, to rid Christmas of all sentimentality and our hearts of all unbelief.

B. The witness of the apostles is direct witness.

1. All this that they claim is what they saw as they beheld Jesus Christ—here develop the repetition of the apostle which insists on direct contact with this ineffable truth in the person of Jesus.
2. The witness tells us that God was made flesh and dwelt among us so that we might see His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. We are bound for our vision of God to the

Babe in the manger: in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. We are bound for the vision of Jesus to the witness of the apostles.

II. The purpose of the witness

A. That we might be sharers with John in what was given to him to see, etc. We can be as certain as John was.

B. That we might have fellowship with the Father and the Son. The broken relationship of sin is eliminated, removed, in the birth of Christ. We did not come to God; indeed, we could not. But God came to us in the person of Jesus in order that we might again be one with Him.

C. That we might be merry on Christmas as John was (v.4). This is basic to every Christian expression of Merry Christmas, that our joy may be full in that we share it with others as they learn from us that Life is come from God.

III. The reality which this opens to us

A. God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all.

1. Far from terrorizing us as the glory from Mount Sinai, it blesses us as the glory from the manger.

2. Light is God's gift to us in Jesus so that we may break with the darkness which destroys us. It should be noted that darkness is no longer our way of life, even though we may fall into dark deeds. Faith in Jesus for what He is here proclaimed is the real break with darkness and the real life in the light of God. In His Light, Jesus, we see light.

B. God Himself establishes the fellowship of the redeemed.

1. The Son of God was made flesh in order that He might shed His blood for the cleansing of our sins. The manger already hints at the cross for the shedding of blood to wash away our sins. This is what makes us merry, because this is what gives us life.

2. God brings us back into the family which sin had disrupted. Not only does sin separate from God, it also separates us from one another. Thus in Jesus all is restored by the act of God Himself.

Merry Christmas! How weakly this comes as a wish from our lips, unable to produce what it says; all too soon flat and stale and dull by

much repetition without meaning. "That our joy may be full," "fellowship with the Father and the Son," "cleansing from all sin"—that's what God creates when He tells you Merry Christmas!

Minneapolis, Minn.

WILLIAM A. BUEGE

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

2 PETER 1:10-15

Special Accent: The word of the text (RSV) chosen for special accent and emphasis is the word "remind" (KJV, "remembrance"). The theme is "Remind One Another." After the Christmas celebration the members of the church must continue to remind one another of the meaning of the Christmas event. The word "remind" can be developed to explain the real and continuing meaning of Christmas, and it can be used to undergird genuine Christian worship and witness, i. e., reminding one another of our "call and election" in Christ. This thought also fits well with the propers for the day. The Epistle (Gal. 4:1-7) expands the meaning of Christmas by showing that by and through the coming of the Son to be born of a woman we are *called* to be sons and heirs, not slaves. In the Gospel (Luke 2:33-40) we see Simeon, Mary, and Anna *reminding* one another of the redemption of Israel found in the child Jesus, the Christ.

Our lives are full of reminders of all kinds—alarm clocks, weather forecasts, flags, policemen, gauges on the car instrument panel, etc. Children must be reminded endlessly in order to learn the ABC's, multiplication tables, family rules, etc. For weeks there have been reminders of Christmas everywhere. The world lives by reminder. The church does too, for the very purpose of its existence is to

Remind One Another

I. *Christians must constantly remind one another of their call and election in Christ*

A. The church is a mutual reminding society (vv. 12-15). Three times in this short text Peter mentions the need of reminding one another (KJV, "remembrance"). Every society or organization has a stated purpose, e. g., the Lions, Kiwanis, Rotarians, SPCA, NAACP, League of Women Voters, etc. The church's stated purpose is to remind one another of Christ, in essence to say to one another, "Look at Jesus Christ and what He did for us." That's why we had special Christmas services. That's why we worship.

B. As long as we are in the body, we must always remind one another (vv. 12, 13). Peter was about to die when he wrote this letter,

yet he kept on reminding. Refer to the *Quo Vadis* tradition. St. Paul reminded endlessly. Cf. today's Epistle.

C. We must remind one another even though we know the truth and think we are established in it (v.12). We repeat the Gospel every Sunday, every day. It's a sin to look on the Gospel as "old stuff" or to say, "We heard all that before," and neglect the task of regular reminding. The Christmas story is Gospel. It's "old stuff" that we know so well, yet we want to emphasize it anew every year. Can we ever remind one another of the truths in the liturgy too often—Kyrie, Agnus Dei, Gloria in Excelsis, Creed, Our Father?

D. "Reminding" means arousing out of sleep (v.13). Study Greek word. Use illustration of heavy sleeper who has to be shaken into consciousness. We're sleeping if we don't know the purpose of the church, if we're not faithful in worship, if we don't continue a vigorous Christian life. The purpose of our worship and mutual Christian witness is to arouse one another out of sleep.

E. Reminding one another is important now because we shall soon put off the body and the opportunity for reminder will be past (v.13). Refer to St. Peter's experience. Ponder your present age. How many of your "threescore years and ten" are already past? The rapid succession of passing Christmases reminds us of swiftly passing opportunities for reminder.

II. *The Christian call and election of which we are to remind one another, if zealously pursued, leads to heaven*

A. The Christian call and election is to faith in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (vv.10,11). God calls us by His Gospel. Cp. Luther's explanation of the third article of the Creed. *Parallel*: Matt. 11:28. Analyze the name "Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (v.11). The Gospel tells us of our *Lord*, to whom we owe allegiance and obedience, our *Savior* (Jesus), who snatches us away from death and gives us eternal life by His death and rising to life, and the *Christ* whom God anointed as the Messiah and Redeemer.

B. The Christian call must be zealously pursued (v.10). Too often there is little zeal (KJV, "diligence") in our Christianity. We falsely think of zeal as fanaticism and associate it with sects. We therefore wrongly shy away from genuine and godly Christian zeal. Rather we are to "confirm" (KJV, "make sure") our call with zeal. Cp. confirmation in the church. It requires study of the Word, a sacred promise, faithfulness. The same is required in order to zealously confirm our Christian call.

C. Thus we avoid the danger of falling away (v. 10). Don't think that Christians can't fall away. Falling away from the Christian faith is easy, unconscious. This is Satan's way. *Parallel:* 2 Peter 2:20-22. A mountain climber takes precautions to avoid falling. He uses spikes, picks, ropes, especially the trick of tying himself to other climbers. Christians tie themselves to one another by reminding one another of the Christian call.

D. The end of the Christian call, zealously pursued, is heaven (v. 11). It's the final issue of it all. Cp. Christmas, usually a little bit of heaven in our lives, already fading away this year. *Parallel:* 2 Cor. 5:1-4.

Life is full of reminders. Review some, especially those of Christmas. The church, too, is a place of reminder. Its chief purpose is to *remind one another*.

Berkeley, Mo.

HAROLD W. SCHEIBERT

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