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Homiletics: Outlines on the Nitsch Epistles

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Nitsch Epistles

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

HEB. 12:7-13

A father and a son sit on a pier and fish. Suddenly the father says, "Here, let me have that rod a moment!" and snatches it out of the boy's hands. "Let me show you, son, why you're not catching any fish." Deprived for the moment of the pleasure of fishing, the boy feels abused. He tries to listen to his father's explanations but resents it all. A few minutes later he realizes that his father has not abused but helped him. His intentions were not to take away pleasure but to add to it. It is the father's way of being a father. The text calls it *discipline* (chastening, A. V.). The discipline of an earthly father is a weak illustration of the discipline of God.

Discipline

I. *Who dispenses it?*

A. God the heavenly Father. If you are His child, you expect it of Him. V. 7: "It is for discipline that you have to endure [stay and hold still]. God dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the [better, "a," no article] father chasteneth [disciplines] not?" As your Father, God gives you many things. Text singles out one item a father gives his children: discipline. Are you ready at all times to recognize and expect God's discipline in your life as something that He dispenses because He is your Father?

B. Suppose the heavenly Father withheld discipline. V. 8: "But if ye be without discipline whereof all are partakers [every child that is one gets it], then are ye illegitimate children [A. V., "bastards"], and ye are not sons." If a father quits giving discipline, he no longer is a father, and the son has lost his sonship. It is a tragedy when a father is not active in this respect. He is not giving what should be coming from him.

C. Therefore learn to say: I want God to discipline me at all times because as my Father He provides for my needs, even when, like the father on the pier, he takes or withholds from me what I prize so highly at the moment. (Prov. 3:11, 12; Ps. 73)

II. *Who gets it?*

A. Only the children. A father disciplines only his own children and not the neighbor's. God's disciplining of you proves that you are His child and are under His fatherly care.

B. We receive the Father's discipline because we need it. He knows us and never makes a mistake in any disciplinary action, as human fathers at times do. (Vv. 9, 10)

C. As God's children we receive His discipline and not His punishment. His only-begotten Son, innocent and holy, suffered every stroke of retribution that we had deserved; "the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all." He got what was coming to us. What a stupendous Gospel! Now say, "Our Father," and look to the Father, who afflicted His Son; look to Christ the Afflicted. Look at the Father again with Christ beside you, and say, "Our Father." Now who really got it? Not you, but He.

III. *The good of it*

A. It all seems to be bad. V. 11: "Now no discipline for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous." While you are in it you are wretched. Yes, admit it: the hands get slack (v. 12), knees wobbly; lost in the woods. (V. 13)

B. Don't become disgruntled and resentful. Discipline is not for your harm but your good. V. 9: "be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and *live*"; v. 11: "but afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." It may hurt, but it hurts for our good.

C. Job did not understand why God was depriving him of so much, but in the end he learned that God takes away to give you more. God cuts to make whole. God stings to make life pleasant. God kills to make alive. The time will come when we, too, will know how everything in our lives served God's gracious purpose of helping us.

Concl.: People say: "What comes, comes. Take it as it comes." This is correct only if you add: "God the Father knows what He is doing. It is all, all, to the good." These three things I know: He gives it, I get it, it does me good. That's discipline.

Schaumburg, Ill.

F. A. HERTWIG, JR.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JAMES 5:7-11

It is the old, oft-recurring question. "Why must the righteous suffer?" "Why do the wicked and ungodly seem to prosper while

God's people have to pick up the broken fragments of their lives and go on—burdened, wearied, sick at heart, laboring and heavy laden, with the crosses, trials, and tribulations God gives them?" The people of God endure many trials and tribulations; the wicked and the ungodly seem to get along so well. Why? Asaph (Ps. 73) wrestles with this same problem and arrives at the same answer as the apostle James. Their answer:

Carry Your Burdens with Patience and Trust

I. *Wait on God with steady, unwavering patience*

A. Take the long view. Look to the end of life, and you see a corpse. Formerly within that corpse was either the soul of a child of God through faith in Christ or a soul uncleansed, unnourished, now lost and miserable in the torment of hell. In the moment of death, wealth, possessions, prestige, power, and all other worldly treasures can be viewed in the right perspective. In that moment all earthly treasures vanish and nothing is of importance except the presence or absence of faith in the Redeemer. In the light of that moment when death calls we can be patient if God leads us along a difficult trail now.

B. Take the farmer's view (v.7). The farmer works his soil. He labors diligently to prepare the ground. He plants his wheat. Then he waits and hopes and prays for rain. He needs the early rain to germinate the seed; the late rain to fill the heads with grain. His is a long wait, but the harvest is worth waiting for. The spiritual harvest is worth far more. It often takes spiritual harvest much longer to reach maturity. To produce a bountiful harvest, God may send the rains of troubles, the storms of adversity, the long dry spells of want, misery, and anxiety. But in due season, in God's hour, the fruit will be harvested.

C. Take the Lord's view (vv. 7, 8). "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh." Jesus assures us, "Behold, I come quickly." The hour when He returns visibly marks the beginning of a joyful jubilee for His followers. "Lift up your heads, O ye people, for your redemption draweth nigh." Why must we suffer? The time we suffer may seem long, but with God a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day. He says (v.8), "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh." These words of the text were written for our encouragement. They enable us to lift our heads above trials and tribulations; to look up to Him through whom redemption comes. Because of that ultimate victory we can be steady and unwavering in patience. Because He made our journey into death and then passed from death to life, we can be certain of eternal glory with Him. No matter how dark or

dreary the path we follow, how heavy the cares and troubles we bear, how prosperous the wicked seem to be, how many apparent blessings are enjoyed by the ungodly, we can be steady and unwavering in patience. We can carry our burdens without complaining, and we can

II. *Take courage from the examples of God's people*

A. Take courage from the prophets (v.10). They stand for all time as "an example of suffering affliction and of patience." The prophets suffered many things. They endured trials because of their faithfulness as they preached "in the name of the Lord." (Cf. Heb. 11:32-40: description of the suffering of the prophets.) We can surely take courage from their inspiring examples of long-suffering, from their faithfulness to God, and from the way they laid hold of divine strength.

B. Take courage from the patience of Job (v. 11). He lost his wife's love and loyalty, his children, all his earthly possessions, and his health. In his misery he was condemned by his friends for his terrible wickedness. Yet he left his troubles with God, he trusted in God. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." In the end, God blessed him (cf. Job 42:12-17). Why must we suffer? From the story of Job we learn a lesson that will help us bear our burdens, the lesson "that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy."

Concl.: In the light of the Lord's coming, of death and judgment, of the patience and suffering of the prophets and of Job, of God's love in Christ Jesus, our Savior, we can be sure of His love forevermore in heaven. In the light of the Gospel message of redemption and salvation, which is ours by faith, we know that the Lord is merciful and full of understanding pity for us. In the light of ultimate justice that will surely come in God's hour, we can be patient and happy even though the wicked prosper and the ungodly seem to have so many blessings to enjoy. For we are God's, and Christ is ours, and in His hour, which is near, we shall be with Him there in eternal bliss and glory. That is our Christian hope. With such a hope we can bear our burdens with patience and trust. To that end may the Spirit of God bless this message!

Omaha, Nebr.

ELMER E. MUELLER

THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 COR. 5:6-11

While we dare not tone down the prospect of universal judgment, we must win and woo people through the Gospel. As we speak of judgment and of love,

God's love in Christ will stand out as God's way to eternal life. In the Collect for the day we pray: "Show Thy mercy . . . that we . . . may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy. . . ."

While familiarity may breed contempt in some social and business relationships, the opposite seems to be true in our relationship to the "here and now." While Scripture states that our citizenship is in heaven and indicates that we are but strangers and pilgrims on earth, our nearness to, and familiarity with, the realities of the present world sometimes make us lose our eternal perspective. As God's children through faith in Jesus Christ we have eternal life here and now. This treasure that we have in earthen vessels is to lead us to an awareness of what we are and shall be in Christ Jesus. We should long to be with Jesus, to be like Jesus, and to live for Jesus.

Our Lives in the Light of Eternity

I. *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*

A. The universality and inevitability of Judgment. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat [tribunal] of Christ" (v.10). "And before Him shall be gathered all nations" (Matt.25:31). "Because He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained." (Acts 17:31)

B. Believers will be with Christ. Christ will examine the "fruit" of a person's life "so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body" (v.10 RSV). "He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal.6:8b). "For God hath not appointed us to wrath but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess. 5:9. Cf. also Matt. 25:34, 46b and Mark 16:16a)

C. Unbelievers will be condemned for their lack of spiritual life in Christ. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb. 11:6). Christ says, "He that rejecteth Me and receiveth not My words hath one that judgeth him: the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the Last Day." (John 12:48. Cf. also Matt. 25:41, 46a and Mark 16:16b)

II. *As Christians we have eternal life here and now*

A. We are in Christ. "Therefore we are always confident" (v.6). "We are confident" (v.8). "For we walk by faith" (v.7). "Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17). "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life." (1 John 5:11, 12a)

B. We are in exile. "Whilst we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord" (v.6). "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels." (2 Cor. 4:7a. Cf. also Heb. 11:13, 14)

C. We long to be with Christ in perfection and holiness. "We are . . . willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (v.8). "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven" (2 Cor. 5:2). (St. Paul in vv.6 and 8 apparently equates $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ with $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\kappa\iota\varsigma$ as in Rom. 8:13. $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ is regarded as "the seat of mortal life" and "subject to sin and death." Cf. listing in Arndt-Gingrich Lexicon under $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$; also Phil. 1:21 ff.)

III. *We strive to please Christ in this life*

A. By striving for perfection. "Wherefore we labor [strive earnestly, aspire, have as our ambition and aim] that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted [pleasing, acceptable] of Him." (V.9)

B. By maintaining our life in Christ through Word and Sacrament. To maintain eternal life we must continue to draw from the source of eternal life by practicing the presence of Christ in Word and Sacrament. Only the love of Christ as expressed in the giving of His body and blood for us on the cross can maintain us in life.

C. By attempting to share our life in Christ. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord"—since we ourselves have come to reverence and stand in awe of our Maker and Judge, or "since we know what it is that causes the fear of the Lord"—"we seek to persuade others" (v. 11). We know what terrors fill the hearts of unbelievers when they consider the Judgment. We ourselves have experienced love and peace through Christ. Christ would have us attempt to share with unbelievers the life He has given us.

Concl.: "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Phil. 1:21)

Swissvale, Pa.

ARTHUR F. GRAUDIN

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 COR. 4:13-18

Affliction is like the blows of a great hammer. It can smash and destroy, or it can build or beautify. It all depends on how we face our affliction. If we face it alone it can lead to despair and to utter defeat. If we face it with faith its results can be amazingly beneficial and worthwhile. This is the substance of our text:

Face Affliction with Faith

I. *We are often beaten down by our afflictions*

A. We have afflictions. They strike us from every side and take many different forms. Yours may be a humiliating failure in some endeavor that you had undertaken. It may be a crippling, mutilating injury or a devastating personal disappointment. It may be a nagging unhappiness, a painful, deteriorating disease, or even death itself may have taken a loved one or may threaten to take you. In the verses preceding our text (8-11) St. Paul enumerates the afflictions he encountered in his missionary work. Few of us are called upon to suffer so grievously in connection with our Christian service; nevertheless we have plenty of afflictions.

B. Afflictions beat us down. When affliction strikes it can stun and wound and destroy. Many a strong and promising individual has been overwhelmed by his troubles. To see your life and future battered down by forces beyond your control is at times more than you can take. You become depressed and embittered. You may feel like quitting altogether or like turning to some dangerous and evil solution. Your spiritual vitality sags. Hope disappears.

C. This happens because we are looking only at the shattering, painful side of it. We are watching "the things that are seen" (v. 18) and "the outward man" (v. 16). As this present creation creaks and groans in its corrupted state, our present existence becomes futile and frightening; as our present bodies waste away, we stand by in horrified fascination. Our complete attention is engulfed by the sight, and it leaves us weak and trembling.

II. *We should view affliction through the crucified and risen Christ*

A. Faith is our resource for surviving affliction (v. 13). It fastens on the crucified and risen Christ. It keeps Him uppermost in our minds at all times. It sees the tremendous blessings which resulted from His supreme affliction—forgiveness for us sinners, comfort, joy, and everlasting life. In faith we accept these blessings as our own and thank Him who obtained them for us.

B. By faith we can see similar blessings emerging from our own affliction. The same process of suffering, death, and resurrection is being repeated in us who belong to Christ. Though we still are only in the affliction stage we can see what is to come by looking at our Lord and what happened to Him.

III. *To the believer affliction is beneficial*

A. Our affliction can be an opportunity for extending God's grace to others (v. 15 RSV, vv. 10-12 preceding text). If we bear our affliction patiently and courageously, we are a demonstration of what God can do for a person. We are a recommendation of the Gospel to other people. The salvation that Christ gained through His affliction can be offered to others through our affliction. This, in itself, would make affliction worthwhile.

B. Our affliction can be borne to the glory of God (v. 15). In the manner that we endure our afflictions we can be a credit and a tribute to the One who sustains us. Furthermore, by gaining others through our witness in affliction we can add to the praise and thanksgiving which reach God's heavenly throne.

C. Through affliction we ourselves can be renewed spiritually (vv. 16, 17). Affliction makes us strongly aware of our need for God and for His help. It can lead us to turn to God more earnestly and to accept His blessing more eagerly. Instead of destroying us affliction can actually improve and strengthen us spiritually.

Concl.: Affliction is a hammer, and it strikes heavy blows. However, it is not in the hands of a maniac. Us who believe, affliction is not able to hurt and to kill. By faith we know that affliction is a hammer in the hands of a great craftsman and artist. When the blows fall they are designed to build and to beautify. This is not always clearly apparent. Often the dust and smoke and sparks of the pounding obscure the good purpose of it all. To find reassurance in this situation we need only look to our crucified and risen Christ and to the glory which followed His affliction. The same glory will be ours.

St. Louis, Mo.

MILTON L. RUDNICK

THANKSGIVING DAY

COL. 3:17

We are here today not just to pay our respects to God, to go through the annual routine of tipping our hat to Him. Rather we are interested in praising His name and drawing strength from Him through His Word for

The Christian's Thanksgiving Life in Christ

I. *We are speaking of the Christian's life*

A. Text: "Ye," ye Christians at Colossae, Chicago, Quincy, etc. The unbeliever cannot really lead a thanksgiving life, a life permeated by

thanksgiving. He is happy over the good things. He merely endures or resents "bad luck."

B. Are you a Christian? Here, avoiding clichés, I would summarize what it means to be one. I would not take too much for granted. Paul's fine phrases "in Christ," "children of God by faith in Christ Jesus," "if any man be in Christ," etc.

II. *It covers the whole range of living*

A. Not just churchgoing, contributing, Bible class, etc., are "religious." Religion for the Christian should not be a hermetically sealed compartment of life.

B. What is often called secular (text: "whatsoever . . . word or deed") is sacred and is the object of the thanksgiving life—washing dishes, operating factory machine, selling, teaching, farming the land, laying bricks, etc.

III. *It is accomplished by*

A. Doing everything "in the name of the Lord Jesus," doing it within the framework of reliance on Him as Savior and Mediator, and doing it by the strength supplied through His Spirit.

B. Doing everything, and experiencing everything, all the time, in an attitude of thankfulness. Text: "Giving thanks to God." Eph. 5:20: "Giving thanks always for all things."

Concl.: Be in Christ. Be sure you are. Then be thankful for this merciful redeeming and converting act of God. Secondly, walk in Christ, doing everything thankfully and in His name. Finally, pray that He who has given you so much will also give you one thing more—a thankful heart.

Quincy, Ill.

EWALD J. OTTO

Outlines on the Synodical Conference Gospels *Second Series*

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LUKE 17:20-25

Pastors and people sometimes have trouble with the season of Advent. They find it hard to keep their eyes focused on a consistent purpose. Like Hymn 74 ("Once He came in blessing," Roh-Winkworth, *Lutheran Hymnal*) we try to think of three "comings" and simply to endure in faith. Much of the time we spend "getting ready

for Christmas" and so seem to deserve the same complaint which we level at merchants that they start the Christmas season too soon. This text pulls the great theme of Advent into one,

Let Us Seek the Kingdom of God

I. *What it means to seek the kingdom of God*

A. Many pious Christians are content by this phrase simply to think of wanting to go to heaven, of yearning for Judgment Day. For what purpose? to get out of trouble? to avoid going to hell? Our Lord suggests in this text that Judgment Day has something to do with it (v. 24), but that isn't the whole story.

B. In late 19th-century America the idea became current that the kingdom of God was a sort of realm and community, comfortable and beautiful, where people behaved themselves and were happy; a sort of heaven on earth. But that misuses the word "kingdom of God"; for that word means not so much the people who are ruled over as the rule and kingship of God Himself. The kingdom of God is God ruling. Thus some interpret v. 21, God Himself must be ruling inside of people. And that rule may be not comfortable and pleasant but difficult and painful; it means war between flesh and Spirit (Gal. 5:17); it means conquering the desire for fleshly advantage (Matt. 6:31-33)

C. Dispensationalist religion assumes that our Lord will come to set up a government on earth for a thousand years, prior to Judgment Day, and this will be pleasant and comfortable; more, we should be able to predict just when it will happen. Our text suggests that such a "seeking" is quite the opposite of a true yearning for the kingdom of God; for when Christ comes again, it will be with a universal judgment (vv. 23, 24). For His kingdom doesn't come by the simple exercise of His power at all. That is one of the temptations of the devil over which Jesus triumphed. (Matt. 4:8-10)

D. To seek the kingdom of God means to desire urgently that God may come to set up His rule in our hearts. This is to be a major plea of our every prayer (Matt. 6:9, 10, 33). And yet so many things compete with this desire (cf. Matt. 6:19, 23-25), the desire for physical satisfaction; text v. 20: desire for political advantage. Hence—and this applies to the whole Christian life to the very end—every Christian needs constant help not merely that the Kingdom keep on coming to him but that he keep on seeking its coming. This takes new birth by the Spirit of God (John 3:5), and it takes the support and maintaining of this new birth by the selfsame Spirit.

II. *What the power is for seeking the Kingdom*

A. The King Himself must be, and give, the power. The "within you" of v.21 is often interpreted "within your midst" (evidently preferable, for the opponents to whom Jesus spoke were hardly people "in" whom the Kingdom already was), namely, in the form of Jesus Christ Himself. If this is not the intention of v.21, it is plainly the meaning of Jesus in Matt. 12:27. He Himself was the Lord, the Christ of God, invading the world to put down the rule of devil and death.

B. That Christ will come to make a final end of all opposition to God (v.24; cf. Matt. 25:31,41). It is folly to wait to seek Him and His power till that Day; then it is too late (v.22), for that will be a day of doom for His opponents.

C. But He is the tool and agent of God's kingdom, Himself King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:9, 11, 13, 16) only because He is first the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world (text v.25). The suffering and death of Jesus is not an unpleasant interlude in His progress to glory, but it is the source of His power, the means of God's rule over the hearts of men. (Phil. 2:8,9; cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-21)

D. Hence the constant refreshing of the heart that would seek the Kingdom must be the pondering of that Word of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:21); the looking not afar or in the worldly orbit for political signs and tokens of God's rule in Christ but the yearning for the return of Christ as Lord, the final coming of the Kingdom, only because He has already come as Lord in the redemption. (V.25)

Concl.: He becomes poor that we might be made rich. He becomes rejected by earth-born men that we might be seized by Him to be twice-born men. We show forth His death—and resurrection—till He come, that we might remain faithful in our citizenship in His kingdom, till we enter into the glory of it. Hence we pray evermore: "Keep the Kingdom coming!" The whole waiting time this side of Judgment Day is Advent-tide!

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER