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Homiletics: Outlines on the Old Testament Eisenach Series

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Old Testament Eisenach Series

By HERBERT E. HOHENSTEIN

OCULI

JEREMIAH 26:1-15

This text poses a haunting question:

Will This House Be Like Shiloh?

And what was Shiloh like? Once during Israel's early history, a thriving and beautiful center of worship. Eli served as priest there. Centuries before Jeremiah's words in our text, Shiloh had been made a heap of ruins. Old Testament nowhere tells of the story of its destruction. Excavation reveals that it was destroyed around 1050 B.C., possibly by Philistines (1 Sam. 4:11). Shiloh's ruins, 18 miles north of where Jeremiah was speaking these words, were to preach a silent and grim sermon to the people of his day. These words preach the same sermon to us, pose the same question to us: "Will this house be like Shiloh?"

I. This was the question Jeremiah put to the people of his time

A. The prophet put the question because God told him to (v. 2). He had no choice in the matter. This sermon must have rent his pastoral heart. No gleeful gloating here. No "can't wait until I give it to them" attitude. Rather a heart heavy and torn by anguish over the need of speaking harsh words to his fellow Hebrews. But speak he must. For God's Word was upon him, and he did not want that fire shut up and blazing in his bones again.

B. He preached because his people needed to hear these severe words. (a) Something was wrong with their ears (v. 4). They were not listening to the voice of God's prophets. (b) Something was wrong with their feet

(v. 3). They were not walking God's paths. (c) Something was wrong with their hearts (Jer. 7:4, 8-10). They foolishly trusted in a thoughtless and routine performance of their religious rituals as a guarantee against God's anger deserved for their repeated sins. "As long as we're frequently in church," they thought, "we'll be safe and secure from God's wrath and trouble no matter what we do the rest of the week." They were wrong, as the Babylonian Captivity so tragically proves.

C. He spoke the naked, ugly truth—though it hurt both him and his hearers.

1. It took raw courage for the prophet to preach like this. Note where he proclaimed these words. It was in the court of the temple (v. 2). "The nerve of this preacher, standing here in these hallowed halls, denouncing these sacred precincts, telling us they won't help or shield us from some imagined, fantastic peril. This is the temple, God's own house!"

2. The prophet pulled no punches. His message wasn't toned down with such phrases as "Don't blame yourself; blame your parents or environment." Or: "Don't feel bad; you're trying your best. Besides, everyone else is doing it, too." He spoke the truth.

II. Must I put the same question to you?

A. Do I have a command from God? Indeed, I have. The Lord has ordered me to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort." He has commanded me not just to please your taste and fancy with honeyed words, but also to speak of every sin with conscience-jolting words, words that are meant to disturb any lethargy and lukewarmness.

B. Do you have a need for these words?

1. Is something wrong with your ears? Do they hear God's voice frequently and well? Or does that voice get lost and swallowed up in the loud noises and clamor of everyday life, business, family, fun?

2. Is something wrong with your feet? Do they walk God's paths persistently? Because our feet walk the ways of sin, the feet of Jesus stumbled beneath the crushing weight of a cross, the feet of Jesus were nailed to that cross so that God might pardon our wandering.

3. Is something wrong with your heart? Does it count vainly on once-a-week church attendance as the guarantee of God's favor and approval? What brings us to heaven is not our churchgoing but Christ's going to a cross, into a grave, and out of it again.

III. What will your answer be?

A. "It can't be: This great cathedral — or this neat and pleasant little structure, this church — one day a heap of ruins, a silent and sad testimony to God's wrath upon religious playactors? Fantastic! Incredible! Impossible!" A response like this would put us in the company of the Israelites. And they were tragically wrong. God did make the beautiful temple at Jerusalem a shambles.

B. May we learn our lesson from this. Don't question the possibility, or deny the justice of such a judgment, but in repentance correct the causes. Ponder and reflect on the sacrifice of Jesus for your salvation. Render God not simply the "sacrifice" of an hour on Sunday, but with that Sabbath offering, above all, the sacrifice of all-out consecrated lives.

LAETARE

ISAIAH 52:7-10

Today the mood of the fast is broken, the fast of Lent with all its solemnity and sadness. For this is Laetare Sunday, and that means,

"Rejoice!" Certainly we should rejoice in the light of these Bible words, for they tell us about

The Arm That Woke Up!

I. There is an arm that once slept but now has awakened (Is. 51:9-11)

A. The people of Israel spoke these words to God's sleeping arm. Why was it sleeping? Why didn't it wake up and come to the rescue of God's bondaged people in Babylon? Had it lost its power? Surely it wasn't weak or asleep long ago when it brought the fathers out of Egypt, dried up the Red Sea, and guided the people through the savage desert to Canaan. "God, has Your arm gone to sleep? Why doesn't it wake up and deliver us from Babylon even as it once did from Egypt?"

B. Do you sometimes talk like that in your life? Are there times when you are sure that God's arm is asleep? When you are held captive like the Israelites in your Babylons of crushing, unbearable pain, do you with the Israelites shout: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord, and rescue us from our perils and adversities"? Yet does it seem that you are shouting your lungs out in vain? The divine arm slumbers on limp and inactive?

C. But God's arm has now awakened. Indeed, God bared His mighty arm. The sleeping arm woke up after 70 years and brought the enslaved Hebrews back from the land of Chaldea to their beloved homeland. The picture here is of a mighty warrior preparing for battle. He throws back his cloak so that it does not hinder him in his fighting. So God threw back His cloak, bared His great arm, and went to work to save His people.

D. For you, too, God has bared His holy arm. Indeed He bared it in the person of Christ, His Son, bared that arm when they stripped Him of His clothes and lashed His back with the claw-tipped scourge, bared His arm — yes, His body — when they nailed

Him to the cross. By that baring and dying you are freed from the devil, death, and all your sins. Yes, and on Easter, God once again rolled up His sleeves and bared His holy arm. See that mighty arm reach down from heaven, roll the big rock from the door of Christ's grave, and then raise the dead Jesus to new and eternal life. And by that Easter baring of God's great arm you are freed from the prison of your grave.

E. Let this baring comfort you in your present sorrows. The fact that God bared His arm in the death and resurrection of Jesus for your pardon and salvation is the reliable proof that He will one day bare that arm again, reach down, and rescue you from every pain and evil. It will happen when Christ reveals Himself at history's end, which is the beginning of your heavenly glory. Let these thoughts bolster you when you are tempted to think God's delivering arm is asleep.

II. There are some feet to tell us of that arm (v. 7)

A. The picture here is of a herald who comes with flying feet back to the city bringing the anxious inhabitants news of the battle. Who is winning? Shall we split the air with our victory shouts of praise to Jehovah, or shall we pack our belongings and flee from the conquering enemies advancing upon us? How breathlessly the people wait for the news, and how eager and impatient the herald is to bring it to them!

B. This time it is good news that the hurrying herald brings. And that is why his feet are so beautiful, so good to behold. For those running feet bring good tidings, news of victory and peace. The people won't have to prepare for siege or leave Jerusalem because of the advancing enemy. God is coming, leading the train of returning exiles from Babylon. No more battles, no more war—the captivity is over! God is bringing His people back. Not the Babylonian king, but

God is the One who reigns. God rolled up His sleeves, bared His saving arm, gathered His scattered people and is herding them home again. This is the good news the flying herald brings.

C. It's still the same today. Have you ever noticed the beauty of your pastor's feet? Oh, not because they are so physically, but because they bring your pastor to you in the pulpit, in your homes, at your bedside in sickness, when you need counsel and help. These feet of your pastor, however big and unsightly they may be, are beautiful because they bring him to you with the glad news that God has bared His arm for you. And by the baring of that arm in Christ's death and resurrection you have the good news of pardon for all your sins. You are sure that the war between God and you is forever over. He loves you with an everlasting love in spite of deep and repeated sins. You are sure of salvation from the devil, death, and hell's flames, and you hear the cheering proclamation: "Your God, your saving and loving God, rules—not your sorrows, not your evil habits, not cancer or heart trouble, not tragedies, not disasters, not death. Your God rules. Therefore be brave." Your pastor's feet carry him to you with this good news!

III. There are some eyes that watch for that arm (v. 8)

A. The picture here is of watchmen on the city's walls, straining to catch the first glimpse of God leading the returning band of exiles home from Babylon. Suddenly the group appears on the horizon. There is God at the front, guiding the group back. The watchmen's eyes catch those of the Lord, those smiling, divine eyes aglow with love—eyes that promise the shining, uplifted face of the Lord upon His people, the face of favor and blessing. It is small wonder, then, that these watchers on the wall break into singing and urge even the ruined, tumbled

ruins of Jerusalem destroyed by previous conquest to join in the happy chorus. "Look," shout the watchmen, "here comes the God with the bared arm, the arm that isn't sleeping any more. It did awake and put on strength. It did rescue our brothers from Babylon."

B. Even so I urge you to sing and shout for joy, sing in the midst of Lent because of Lent, or rather because of the suffering, dying, rising, and ruling Christ that Lent and Easter and Ascension commemorate. For like these watchmen on Jerusalem's walls, my eyes and yours, too, have seen God, who bared His arm in Christ for our salvation, for our deliverance from every pain and evil; and with the eye of faith, even now we see that God returning to our Zion, our world, our cemeteries, raising us all from our graves and leading us with shouts of praise and joy to the heavenly Jerusalem. Hallelujah!

JUDICA

NUMBERS 21:4-9

This sermon tackles the problem of griping. Its theme is

Grumblers, One and All!

I. Thus it was with the desert-journeying Israelites

A. They became impatient (v.4). The desert journey wasn't at all what they had envisioned. Or perhaps more accurately, it was tougher than they had foreseen. The sun was broiling and roasting them, the food and water were scarce, and the discomfort was abundant. And who could be expected to live joyfully on a week-in and week-out diet of manna?

B. Their discomfort moved them to hunger covetously for the past. They wanted their Egyptian fleshpots back again. Better a slave to the cruel taskmaster than in chains to the suffering of this savage wilderness.

C. Their discomfort moved them to grumble against God (v.5). (1) Such griping was an act of pride. It indicated a "we don't deserve such a fate" attitude. "God's people are better than heathen. It's morally wrong for God to let them suffer." It indicated a "He is a foolish God" attitude. "You're not being fair, Lord, in sending this suffering." (2) Such griping was an act of rebellion against God's guidance and plan. "We don't like or want Your wilderness way of suffering, Lord. We want *our* way—a way of green pastures and not barren deserts."

D. But didn't they have the right to grumble? Hadn't God promised to care for them in the wilderness? Where was that care? It was there all right but on God's terms, not theirs. Besides, even a divine promise does not convey to us the right to demand fulfillment of that promise when and how we will. Even His promises do not place the Lord in our debt (cf. Matt. 4:6, 7). Such an approach tempts God.

E. Mark well the punishment for grumblers. (1) They died by snake bite (v.6). (2) This only underscores the seriousness of grumbling. It is a sin unto death. The Lord does not regard it lightly.

F. Mark well how the snakes turned them to God (v.7). Affliction has a divinely intended goal: to bring people to their knees before God in admission of guilt and in repentance. Pain is God's megaphone to call us back to Himself.

G. Mark well God's antidote to the snake bite (vv.8,9). (1) There is marvelous grace in this. (a) God once again helped and healed these persistent grumblers, that He didn't say, "That's the last straw!" (b) Israel did nothing but look on the uplifted snake. Only the "effort" of a look. (2) There was divine irony in this: snakes were conquered by a snake. (3) There was a real challenge to faith in this. Look and live?

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Preposterous! Fantastic! Ridiculous! See a doctor, maybe! But look and live? Absurd!

H. And see how the bitten people responded. They looked—and lived. This was no casual glance. This was a life-or-death look. Once bitten nothing mattered but the fastening of one's eyes on that uplifted snake.

II. *Even so it still is with us*

A. How often don't we grumble—about our aches of heart and body, our political officials, our church or pastor, our friends and dear ones, our job and boss or fellow employees, the weather?

B. But do we sense the seriousness of this sin? (1) That it is a terrible pride on our part? Our gripes are actually our way of telling God that He isn't wise, that He is unjust, that He is all wrong in His running of our world and personal lives. Our grumbling is a severe judgment of God's providence, love, and wisdom. (2) That it is a claim of independence from God? Gripping is a signal that we aren't at all satisfied with the Lord's direction and guidance, with His plans and goals for us. We want things differently, more comfortably, less full of suffering and sacrifice. We want to go it our way, not God's way.

C. Do we know the solution to this sin? It is not an uplifted snake but a raised Man, Jesus raised high on the cross, lowered into a grave, and then raised to new life again. And all this that God might forgive our grumbings and give us eternal life.

1. Once again there is marvelous grace here. (a) We are frequent gripers, dissatisfied fussers! Yet God refuses to abandon us. He still holds out His love and grace. (b) It is still a look that saves—the life-or-death look on Jesus, the uplifted Man (John 3:15). And it is as we fix our eyes on this uplifted Man, Jesus, that God gives us the strength to stop griping.

2. Once again there is divine irony here. Through a man Satan brought sin, pain, and death into the world. Through THE Man, Christ Jesus, God brings righteousness, joy, and life. Through a tree, Satan led our first parents and us to death. Through a tree—the cross—God leads us out of death into life.

3. Once again there is a real challenge to our faith. There is seemingly very little in this Man from Nazareth to commend Him as God's solution to sin and a blessed hereafter. How in this world or in the world to come can a mere look on this Man save us? There is a challenge. Let God help us to meet it. Then there will be a change from "grumblers, one and all," to "grateful, one and all."

PALM SUNDAY

ZECHARIAH 9:9-12

This prophecy of Zechariah tells us about
The King and You

1. *The King*

A. His significance in the Old Testament prophecy.

1. His coming would signal the end of Israel's conflicts (vv. 8, 10). A marvelous picture in v. 8. The reason wars and conquest will cease is that God Himself, and not simply frail, mortal armies, will encamp at the gate of His holy city. God will be His people's one-Man army. And of course He cannot be conquered. God will encircle His people like a range of towering, rugged mountains (Ps. 125:2). And is there any enemy strong enough to scale such a mountain range? Never again will God's people be hemmed in by foreign armies. Instead, they will be ringed in by their loving Lord.

2. He would preach a powerful sermon on humility (v. 9). He would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. In early Bible times

distinguished persons rode on asses (Judg. 5:10; 2 Sam. 17:23). From Solomon's time on downward no instance of royalty riding on a donkey. Word translated "humble" here can mean (1) poor; (2) afflicted; (3) meek. Perhaps a combination of all three here. No display of pomp or power here.

3. He would bring great blessings with Him.

a. Justice (v.9). The Hebrew has **צְדִיקָה**. One is reminded of Mal. 4:2, where God promises for His suffering people the rising of the "Sun of righteousness." With the coming of this King, that sun would arise and disperse the grey clouds of distress that had been pouring the cold rain of evil down upon God's people.

b. Salvation. The Hebrew is **יְשׁוּעָה**, "endowed with salvation." This King would herald and assure Israel's rescue from all its enemies. Or the idea could be this: a saved King means a saved nation. The King was the symbol for the entire nation. If He is delivered from the hands of His foes, so is the nation. If He is conquered, so is the nation. (Cp. Is. 49:4; 50:8; 53:11 ff.; 45:8; 62:1)

c. He would restore national greatness (v.10). Boundaries portrayed here are those of ideal Israel. (Num. 34:1 ff.; Ezek. 47:15 ff.)

d. He would set the prisoners free (vv. 11,12).

aa. "Prison" and "pit" here are probably references to the Babylonian Captivity. Word for "pit" can mean a grave. Israelites in Babylon were as good as dead. Therefore the return from exile was indeed a "resurrection" by God (Ezek. 37). "Stronghold" would be Israel's native land.

bb. The released would be hopeful prisoners (v.12). Although languishing in the prison of the Babylonian Exile, they were nevertheless more certain of God's eventual deliverance than a weary night watchman is

confident of the sure-to-come dawn. (Ps. 130:6)

cc. It was only the blood of the covenant which assured the prisoners' ransom (v.11), not schemes or strivings on part of prisoners. God would deliver because He had sworn to be His people's preserving, rescuing God, and then sealed that oath with animal blood. Blood and deliverance belong together. Israel's first great deliverance, its rescue from death in Egypt, was achieved only through blood—the sprinkled blood of a lamb on the door.

B. His significance in the New Testament fulfillment.

1. This King who rides into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is also a bringer of peace.

a. Not a worldly peace, the absence of pain or conflict. He doesn't dispense divine aspirin tablets that magically whisk away all our troubles and tensions. In fact, He introduces an additional conflict—that constant war between flesh and spirit.

b. But the peace of God. (aa) Peace of power, the power to bear affliction bravely. Example: Jesus gave His disciples peace and then sent them out to face the world's persecution and scorn. (bb) Peace of pardon. This King Jesus was riding into Jerusalem to carry a cross out of the city to the place of the Skull, there to die that we might have the peace of God's pardon.

2. This King who rides into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is also preaching a powerful sermon on humility, because He came to serve and not be served and then "humbled Himself even unto the death of the cross" that we might be raised to God's right hand.

3. This King who rides into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday also brings us great blessings. (a) He gives us His own righteousness. He is our "Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings." His arms were extended on the cross. By that act of sacrifice we are healed of the disease of sin and are sure of an

eventual healing of all wounds of heart and body. (b) He gives us salvation. Since God delivered Jesus, our King, into death but then rescued Him again from the clutch of the grave, we have deliverance from death. For if the King is saved, so is the nation. (c) He gives us prisoners release, release from the prison of an accusing conscience. For since He was jailed in the prison of death for three days and then broke free again, we have freedom from a guilty conscience.

II. And you! Just one command here: be like Him. That is

A. Be meek. Meekness is not being a "Casper Milquetoast" individual. Rather it means the refusal to rebel against God's guidance in your life, especially when that divine direction may mean that you suffer while the godless about you prosper. (Cf. Ps. 37:8-11)

B. Be humble. Remember, humility is more than an attitude, it is an act. It is doing as Jesus did: humbling yourself unto the death, the death of self-love and self-worship, for a life of service and sacrifice to the brother.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

PSALM 111

This psalm and the Sacrament go together. We call the Lord's Supper a Eucharist, a Thanksgiving. The psalm before us is an order to praise God. Thus it might well be used as a source of lessons about the sacrament instituted on this day. It might be for us

A Sacramental Psalm

I. It commands us to praise God for the Eucharist (v. 1)

A. This is to be a wholehearted praise. Not simply praise that lasts for the brief

moment of actual communing. But rather a praise that takes the form of a constant dedication to the one great command Jesus gave us on this "Command Thursday," this Maundy Thursday: "Love one another as I have loved you!"

B. This is to be a corporate thanksgiving. And isn't that precisely what the sacrament is, the entire body of saints at a given place praising God in the act of communing? We indeed receive great gifts. But in this attendance at the sacramental board we are also giving—giving God praise for the Gift of His Son sacrificed and risen for our pardon and eternal joy. Paul says that we preach to one another about our Lord's death as we partake of this blessed meal. We are saying to one another: "Christ Jesus gave His life to procure God's favor and forgiveness for you."

II. It underscores the marvel and mystery of the Eucharist (v. 3)

A. The reference here, of course, is to God's redemptive works for Israel, starting with the Red Sea rescue and continuing through all her history. They were a part of God's plan of a final redemption.

B. As New Testament saints we can surely apply these words to the Sacrament. This work of God, this Sacred Supper, is indeed a meal to be marveled at, to be praised. It is not a meal to be reasoned out or debated over. Christ did not command us to understand this supper, but to eat it.

III. It helps us remember God's wonderful work (v. 4)

Jesus ordered us to eat this meal to remember Him. Every time we come to this table, we call to mind God's greatest work for us, the work of our Lord's living, dying, and rising that we might enjoy God's fellowship forever. In this work God in Christ

actually "worked Himself to death" and then rose again for our salvation.

IV. It speaks of food for the God-fearing (v. 5)

And isn't this precisely what the Sacrament offers—food for the God-fearing, food that gives us the Christ who was weak for us even to the point of death, to the point of no strength at all? By that weakness of Jesus we are now strong. For because of the weakness of Christ, God has removed from us the crushing load of our sins and now we are strong to do His will.

V. It speaks to us of a faithful God (v. 7)

A. The Old Testament believer was assured by these words that God would always be loyal and true both to His covenant promises of forgiving mercy and grace.

B. For the New Testament saint these words also mean that God will never go back on His promise of the new covenant. In fact, so faithful was God in the keeping of His promise that His faithful hands actually became flesh and blood in Jesus and were nailed to a cross so that He might keep His promise never to remember our sins. And in the Sacrament we receive the blood of our Lord which sealed this new agreement.

VI. It reminds us of redemption (v. 9)

A. The Old Testament redemption from Egypt. It is significant that Christ apparently instituted the Eucharist in connection with the Passover, the meal that kept the Israelites remembering the great deliverance from Pharaoh.

B. The New Testament redemption. In this Holy Supper we eat the body given for us, given into the death of Golgotha for our deliverance from death, hell, and sin for life, heaven, and holiness. In this meal we drink the blood shed for us, poured out upon the cross to rescue us from the outpouring of God's wrath.

GOOD FRIDAY

PSALM 22:1-11

This is a good Good Friday psalm. For it sets before us

Christ's Dying Words

I. They are the words of a forsaken Man (vv. 1, 2)

A. The beloved Son has become the forsaken Child. He cries not "My Father" but "My God." The crucified, suffering Son feels that the Father has disowned Him. He was forsaken that God might always call us His children despite our sins.

B. Yet this forsaken Man on the cross still has the courage to cry "My God!" Picture here a child who wildly, desperately, clings to the legs of a parent who has turned his back on him and is trying to walk away. Jesus in the depths of His unspeakable agony still clings to God. Can you? Can you still cry, "My God," in the depths of your misery?

C. There is an answer to His question.

1. God forsook His Son on the cross that our sins might leave us, that the gulf between our guilt and us might be wider than that between East and West.

2. God forsook His Son on the cross that He might never leave us. Even the eternal mountains will go before our God forsakes us (Is. 54:10). A lot of things will leave us—health, money, goods, loved ones, even life itself. But not our loving, defending God.

II. They are the words of a suffering Man (vv. 6-8)

A. So intense is the agony that it reduces the Sufferer to less than a man. He is a worm. In Gethsemane, our Lord's face was in the dust as He prayed for the passing of His Passion cup. Now, on the cross, He is *all* in the dust, like a worm.

B. The intensity of the suffering is heightened by the fact that the very objects of His

dying love scorn and despise Him (vv. 6, 7). The men for whom He hangs on the tree fling their jeers and insults into His dying face. And this is love—to die for one's enemies. Inspired and infused by that love, go and do likewise. The test and measure of your love is to be found in your patience and kindness to those who tax the control of your tongue and temper to the breaking point.

III. They are the words of a confident Man (vv. 3-5, 9-11)

A. This confidence is based upon God's past deliverances (vv. 3-5).

1. The poet of this psalm was certain God would eventually rescue him because of the Lord's past deliverances of his ancestors. "God saved the fathers; therefore He will rescue Me. If he performed the miracle of the Red Sea rescue, no strait could ever place me beyond His delivering reach."

2. Christ had the same confidence on the cross. God could and would rescue Him even from His hell of God-forsakenness. His past life proved it. Hadn't His Father delivered Him from Herod's sword? Hadn't that same Father sustained and rescued Him from Sa-

tan's assaults in the desert? Hadn't that Father preserved Him time and again from the clutches of the hateful Pharisees? Therefore even from this most terrible of straits God would deliver Him.

B. We can have that same confidence in our distresses. The Israelite kept returning to God's marvelous and miraculous rescue of his fathers at the Red Sea. That was his proof God would at last "spring" him free from every trouble. We don't return to a rescue by a sea; we go back to a rescue on a hill and in a garden. On the hill of Golgotha, Christ died to deliver us from our sins. From the sealed grave in Joseph's garden He arose to set us free from the prison of our graves. That past rescue is our proof of deliverance from every pain and evil. Therefore we are brave and confident beneath the crushing cross.

IV. He prayed these words so you don't have to

Since Jesus on this day cried: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" you can die with His words "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" on your lips.

Richmond Heights, Mo.