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Homiletics: Outlines on the Old Testament Eisenach Series

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Outlines on the Old Testament Eisenach Series

By HERBERT E. HOHENSTEIN

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EDITORIAL NOTE: Since the entire October issue of our journal will be devoted to articles about C. F. W. Walther, homiletic material for both remaining months of the church year is presented in this issue.

As announced previously, the sermon studies and outlines for the coming church year will be based on the Standard Gospel Series.

As a part of the observance of the sesquicentennial of the birth of C. F. W. Walther, three outlines of sermons preached by him will appear each month. The translation and condensation will be done by Prof. Alex Wm. C. Guebert of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.

In addition, the pericope of one of the Sundays of the month will be presented in an exegetico-homiletical study. We are happy to announce that Pastor Robert H. Smith of The Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Chappaqua, New York, has already furnished the first manuscripts for these studies.

"Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old." (Matthew 13:52)

**THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY**

2 CHRON. 1:7-12

Wouldn't it be wonderful if you could be Solomon and hear God say to you, "Ask what I shall give you"? Well, go ahead and

Put Yourself in Solomon's Shoes

1. *If you do, you submit yourself to a real test and challenge*

A. It was a test for Solomon.

1. Notice the breadth of God's command, "Ask what I shall give you." No holds barred. Solomon's request could be as big and as broad as the Almighty's power. How great the temptation to respond: "Lord, give me

power, possessions, wealth, honor, a long life."

2. Do you disagree? Perhaps you suppose Solomon wasn't tried here at all. This was the great king Solomon, one of the stellar saints of the Old Testament. No sweat, no strain, no struggle for him to make the right choice of wisdom over wealth. You think Bible saints are supersaints, different, abnormal, not made up of the same frail and sin-combed stuff as we are. This is nonsense. This kind of thinking offers us an excellent and convenient excuse for not trying to match the godly feats and the heroism and sacrifice of these Bible people.

B. It is a test for us. "Ask, and it shall be given you," says Christ. Do we sense how this command puts us to the test? How it forces us to reveal our true colors? For the answer we give becomes a character commentary. It tells whether we have a God-centered heart or a goods-centered heart.

We should like to make two observations here:

1. It's not having goods that's wrong; it's serving them, being their obedient slave. There's nothing wrong with a hard-top convertible, a deep freeze, a color TV set, a backyard swimming pool, or a safe deposit box stuffed and crammed with bonds at 6 per cent. It's serving these things that's wrong, allowing them to dictate the course and plan of your life, letting these things be the center, the controlling and consuming interest of your life. That's what's wrong.

2. Serving goods is terribly costly. (a) It obscures and clouds God's love for us. Look at it this way. Your life is like a cup. Into

this cup God has poured His forgiveness and grace in Christ Jesus, and now the cup is full. But the Lord keeps on pouring, pouring the blessings of His love, the material benefits that we all prize and enjoy. The trouble is, we become overly concerned with the overflow of goods and material benefits. We love them more than the contents of the cup, God's grace and pardon in Christ. And so the Lord often deprives us of some of the overflow that we might again sufficiently treasure the contents of the cup. (b) It destroys our love for people. The story is told of the rabbi who had a miserly friend. One day he called this friend into his home and asked him to look out the window. "What do you see?" asked the rabbi. "I see people, of course," replied his stingy friend. "Good," said the rabbi. "Now take a good look in the mirror and tell me what you see." "Why," replied his friend, "I see myself, of course." "Behold," said the rabbi, "there is glass in both mirror and window, but as soon as a little silver is added you cease to see others and see only yourself." Does the silver of money and goods get in our way and prevent us from seeing the people about us who desperately long for our love, for the sacrifice of ourselves in their behalf?

II. *If you do, your requests should meet the challenge*

A. "God, help me in my job."

1. Solomon prayed that God would help him in his job of being king (v. 10). Now note the happy combination of humility and confidence in this prayer. Solomon didn't say, "Lord, I doubt if I can do it; this being a king is too much for me," nor did he say, "This is a snap; it'll be a breeze with all of my abilities and talents." No, he was willing to tackle this hard task *with God's help*.

2. And you can do the same. St. Paul taught us to say, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me." Please notice, you *can* do all things, you *can* be a good hus-

band and father and wife and mother and obedient child. You can do the difficult today and the impossible tomorrow. You can conquer yourself, your bad habits, your ungoverned tongue, your emotions, tensions, and fears. You can through Christ who makes you strong, makes you strong through the Word, the Word you hear, the Word you read, and the Word you eat. From the pulpit and from people you hear the Word about Jesus, Jesus who became very weak for you, weak even to the point of death, where He had no strength at all. By this weakness of Christ, God lifted the load of sin from your sagging shoulders and now you are strong and robust to serve God. At the altar you eat the Word, Christ Jesus who lived, died, and burst the bonds of death to separate you from your sins and to unite you with God forever. And as you hear the Word and eat the Word, you are made strong to do all things.

B. "God, give me wisdom" (v. 10).

1. Solomon is here praying for the skill to be a good king and for the knowledge and ability to walk God's paths, for wisdom in the Old Testament is always two things: it is the skill to do a good job and it is the strength to serve the Lord.

2. And isn't that our prayer to God? We, too, pray, "Lord, give me wisdom." And this is what we mean: (a) "Lord, give me Christ." St. Paul calls Jesus our Wisdom. Why? Because by Christ we know that guilt is gone and heaven is coming. By Christ we know that the grave is simply our temporary coffin bed and not our final resting place. (b) "Lord, help me to be holy." This is the point that St. James makes when he describes the heavenly wisdom in ch. 3:13-18 of his letter.

III. *But don't stay in Solomon's shoes*

A. Since Solomon asked for wisdom instead of wealth, God gave him both (vv. 11, 12). But in the end Solomon suf-

ferred because of his riches. His great wealth turned him away from God. It ruined him.

B. Therefore be careful of your goods. It is still easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter heaven. Put yourself in Solomon's shoes, but don't stay there.

THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Ps. 32:1-7

This familiar psalm defines:

The Happy Man

I. *The happy man is the confessing man*

A. He doesn't try to hide his sin (v. 2, "deceit"; v. 5).

1. It is impossible to do so (Heb. 4: 12, 13).

2. The results are disastrous. (a) A sick body (vv. 3, 4). Do we need to be reminded of the ravages which unresolved guilt can wreak upon both emotions and body? The poet says he began to wilt like a thirsty and fatigued man staggering beneath a blistering desert sun. (b) Strokes from the heavy hand of God (v. 4). He was smitten again and again. Is this perhaps the reason for that accident or illness or trouble? God is saying, "My son, you need confession."

3. There is only one tree behind which to hide. Not the tree of our excuses or our blaming others. There's only one tree behind which we can safely and legitimately hide, the tree of the cross, and the Christ who hangs there for us.

B. Rather he confesses his faults to God with honesty (v. 5).

1. Since God is invisible and untouchable, it may not appear very hard to confess to Him. It's like talking to the breeze. But confessing to people often seems to be a different story. Do we forget that if the Lord waits

for our love to reach Him through our loving deeds to people, He also waits for our confession to people? Confess your faults not just to God but also to one another.

2. Beware of viewing confession as a work you do to obtain pardon. God indeed commands us to confess our sins. But nowhere does He indicate that confession earns forgiveness. It's just like daily bread, given even without our prayer. Your forgiveness was gained by Christ alone, not by your prayer for it.

II. *The happy man is the covered man*

A. Covered with what, goods and glory? Our flesh would make happiness hinge on a perpetual satisfaction of physical urges and cravings. Such pleasures are not sinful in themselves. Christians are not puritans. They don't regard the natural passions in man for food, fun, and sex as sinful. If God loved the flesh enough to make it, to be made it, to die and rise to rescue it from the clutch of death and sin, to promise to raise it up again, if God loves my flesh that much, why shouldn't I? But a Christian's constant concern is to guard against letting fleshly cravings become the consuming and controlling interests of life.

B. No, he is the man covered with pardon (v. 1).

1. The word "forgiven" in v. 1 literally translated is "borne away." The Old Testament scapegoat annually bore away all the sins of the Hebrew community, carried them out into the desert (Lev. 16:6-11). We, too, like Israel, have a Scapegoat. His name is Jesus Christ. Like the Old Testament scapegoat He, too, departed from the camp, the city of Jerusalem, to a cross, loaded down with all of our sins. There He died and so did our sins. Now they have no breath or voice to accuse us.

2. Shed blood has gained this pardon (v. 1, "sin is covered"). The Day of Atonement is

the ritual behind this word (Lev. 16:15 ff.). Animal blood symbolized the covering of sin in the Old Testament. In the New the blood of Christ actually is the covering of all sin. (1 John 2:2)

3. This is a complete pardon. The poet here uses all three of the Old Testament words for evil ("transgression," "sin," "iniquity"). Divine pardon covers them all, whether the sin be rebellion (transgression), missing the mark (sin), or the condition of evil in which we constantly find ourselves (iniquity).

C. He is the man covered with righteousness (v. 2). Paul in Rom. 4:6 ff. fastens on this verse from the Old Testament as the basis for the doctrine of Christ's imputed holiness. Forgiveness isn't simply a dropping of charges. It involves also a giving of Christ's righteousness. It was given to us in Baptism when we put on the Lord Jesus. Then why become frightened over a lack of what we already possess, the righteousness of God?

III. *The happy man is the man of prayer* (vv. 6, 7)

A. He is a "godly man." The word for "godly" here is related to the word for "mercy," or "steadfast love" (RSV), in the Old Testament. Therefore we might perhaps say that the pious man responds to God's love in piety, not just in correct thinking about God and His laws.

B. He prays to God when the Lord is at hand, that is, during the time of grace. The Hebrew here is: "at a time of finding only." The RSV and the editors of the Hebrew Bible suggest emending the text to: "at a time of distress or evil." If we allow the text to stand unaltered, the meaning would perhaps be: "Pray to God for pardon now while He is near to help and forgive, for when the floods of His wrath burst over the world it will be too late." The changed text would have the meaning: "Call on God for pardon when

distress threatens; then the floods of trouble won't be able to touch you." In v. 7 the poet claims God as his Defense and Deliverer, the God who surrounds him with songs of deliverance. Everywhere the poet goes, God's rescue of him from trouble causes him to break into glad songs of praise.

Are you hemmed in by suffering? Nonsense, you're hemmed in by your delivering God. Therefore sing.

THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PROV. 2:1-8

Here are some

Words on Wisdom

I. *What is wisdom?*

A. The fear of the Lord (v. 5).

1. This is not terror. The war is over, the war between God and you. The cross achieved it. The rolled-away stone proves it.

2. Rather it is the reverence of God in a holy life. To fear God is to serve Him and to minister to people. Cf. 1 Cor. 13:3; James 3:13-18.

3. Only forgiven people can thus fear God (Ps. 130:3). Only people who have experienced the joy of a conscience cleansed by Christ's blood, who have lost their fear of divine punishment for sin, can truly fear God with the obedient life. For you cannot love a God who hates you and who is ready to disintegrate you with the bolts of His fiery wrath.

B. The knowledge of God (v. 5). To know God is to experience His mercy (Jer. 9:23, 24) and to practice faithfulness and kindness toward others (Hos. 4:1).

C. It is ultimately Christ Himself (1 Cor. 1:30). Through Jesus we know God, know that our guilt before God is gone and that we are heirs of eternal life.

II. *How is it acquired?*

A. You have to turn your heart and your ears to Wisdom (v. 2). Note that the word is capitalized, for the Wisdom to whom we must turn is Wisdom Incarnate, Jesus Christ. The more we ponder and reflect upon the Lord Jesus, His death and resurrection to bring us to God and eternal glory, the wiser we become, that is, the deeper and richer is our experience of God's love in Christ and the more diligently and lovedly we manifest that love to others.

B. You have to pray for wisdom (v. 3). Cf. James 1:5. Perhaps you don't have wisdom because you aren't asking for it. It is always God's gift to you.

C. You have to work for it (v. 4). Here the picture is of wisdom as silver ore hidden in the earth. You have to look for it and then sweat hard to dig it out. Cf. Jer. 41:8; Matt. 13:44; Job 28:1-11. Being wise, that is, having a strong faith and increasing in love, is not a matter only of wishing and wanting it; it involves working, practicing the necessary discipline of self, curbing the fleshly appetites.

III. *What are its blessings?*

A. God's aid (v. 7). The word translated "sound wisdom" in v. 7 might also be rendered "aid." God gives His help, stored up in rich measure, to the wise. He doles it out in just the right amount and at the right time. You don't have the strength and courage for tomorrow's problems and burdens, but you know the right amount of divine aid will be there when you need it.

B. God's protection (vv. 7, 8). This protection is afforded to those who walk in integrity and justice. The word for justice here means right conduct toward the poor and the needy. If we feel God's protection has forsaken us, perhaps it is because we have forsaken suffering people and are not pro-

tecting them as we should. But to be full of wisdom is to be loaded with love, God's love to you and your love to others.

THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 SAM. 7:17-29

With these words we view

A King at Prayer

I. *He speaks first of his unworthiness* (v. 18)

A king, yes, but still he asks: "Who am I?" It was God who took David from the sheep and made him a prince over Israel (7:8). God doesn't choose people as we do. Look at the nation He chose to be His treasure in the Old Testament. He didn't pick those Hebrews because they were so great and good and big, because He couldn't resist their attractive charm and beauty. He selected them when they were weak and small and an enslaved people (Deut. 7:6ff.). As in His choice of Israel and David, God didn't select you because of your beauty but in spite of your blemishes, not because of any loveliness in you, but because He is Love. He didn't choose you because you were good, but because He wanted to make you that way and He did, by putting Christ, His Son, upon a cross and then raising Him again that your guilt might be pardoned and your sinful blemishes covered with Christ's perfect righteousness.

II. *He expresses an optimistic outlook for the future* (v. 19)

Reviewing his own past and that of his people and trusting the promises by God's prophet (7:4-17), David is filled with optimism. This hope for the future is centered in the promise of a Son who will establish the Kingdom (7:12-16)

If David could be optimistic about the future because of God's promise of a Son, we can be optimistic because that Son, Jesus

Christ, has been given into death and then raised again that we might have a bright and happy future. If God gave His only Son that we might have His forgiveness and fellowship forever, our future can only be bright and beautiful no matter how big and frequent the afflictions. For if God gave His only Son for us, will His love ever refuse to give you the lesser gifts of providing dear ones, and bread, and clothes, and shelter?

III. *He confesses that God knows him (v. 20)*

A. There is a challenge in this. God will not be satisfied with less than our best. He knows us.

B. There is a great comfort in this. God knows how you feel, how hard it is for you to fight and conquer your fleshly urges, to carry your crosses with cheerfulness and courage. Therefore when you talk to Him in prayer about your frailties, you won't get from Him a blank and uncomprehending stare or a stern and severe lecture, but what you need, sympathetic understanding and grace to help.

IV. *He acknowledges God's uniqueness (v. 22)*

This uniqueness lies in the Lord's redemptive activities for Israel. God is great and unsearchable not merely because you can't understand His mysterious guidance in your life or His purpose in your suffering and affliction. It is above all because God is so redemptive, because He rescued His Old Testament people from Egyptian bondage, fed and led them through the cruel and savage desert, and brought them into the land of sweet milk and honey. That's why He's your unique God, because of His redemption to you. For by the death and resurrection of Jesus He has delivered you from Satan, hell, death, and sin.

V. *He acknowledges the uniqueness of Israel (v. 23)*

The greatness of the Hebrew nation did

not lie in its accomplishments but in God's saving activities toward Israel. Even so, our only claim to greatness, to uniqueness, must always be based upon God's grace to us rather than upon our achievements. The reason we are unique is that God set His love upon us, upon us of all people with all of our faults and shortcomings, upon us of all people who are nobodies in His sight. America, too, is great not because of what it is or has done, but because of what God has done for our nation.

VI. *Finally, David asks God to keep His promises (vv. 25-29)*

Although the Lord has made big and wonderful promises to David, he pleads: "May it please Thee to bless the house of Thy servant" (v. 29). Both the giving and the keeping of that promise are acts of sheer grace on God's part. The only thing we deserve from God is eternal death as the wages of our sin. Instead He gives His Son and gives us eternal life.

THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY

PROV. 24:14-20

The wise man issues us an order this morning:

Eat Plenty of Honey

I. *Honey here, of course, is wisdom*

The writer says that wisdom is to our life even as honey is to our lips. It is good and sweet. Perhaps we ought to refresh our minds once again on what wisdom is. It is skill, it is holiness, particularly of the tongue (James 3:1-12), and it is finally Jesus Christ Himself, whom to know is eternal life.

II. *But is this honey really sweet?*

Can you honestly say that you have a sweet tooth for this wisdom?

A. What about holiness? The truth of the matter is we often have far more zest and enthusiasm for our sins than for virtue. Take,

for example, prayer. Do we really love to pray? Do we look forward to it? Are we upset if we don't have the opportunity? Or is prayer a chore, a tiresome burden, a practice we force ourselves to do because we think God expects it? I fear that we pray more because we think God desires our prayers than because we realize how much we need to pray. And what about the giving of our money and ourselves for people? Do we do this with great cheer and enthusiasm? Do we stand at the door and wait for the man who will call upon us and ask our contribution to the United Fund? And what about our loving of people, the putting of ourselves out for them? Do we do this with joy in our hearts? Do we like the taste of honey?

B. What about the Bread of life? Do we have a real hunger for Christ? Do we say that He tastes like honey to us? Oh, we know that He's supposed to thrill us; we know that our taste buds should be excited by eating the Bread of life. But sometimes it's all so dull and tiresome and boring. Why? Is it because we have been eating the Bread of life too long?

III. *Where do we get it?*

A. In the word about Christ, who tasted not sweet honey but the bitter gall of death to obtain God's pardon for us.

B. In the example of others.

We are to observe the good example of our fellow saints, not to criticize them and say they're just shams and religious showoffs, they're just trying to make us look bad. No, we are to look at the good example of others and say, "God is talking to me through them. He is preaching a sermon to me through these stellar saints and telling me that by His grace and power I, too, can match their holiness."

C. In the Holy Communion. Perhaps there should be less opening of our mouths in complaint about our weaknesses and frailties and more opening of the mouth to eat the

body and to drink the blood of Christ that we might be stronger saints.

D. In the painful experiences of life. God is talking to us in every pain. He is telling us, "Prepare. Prepare for the day of death." Every pain we have, whether it be an upset stomach or a headache, is a grim herald of death. Get ready. How? By looking to Christ Jesus, who has conquered death for us, who died upon the cross and rose again that we might live with God forever.

E. In our pleasures. God is speaking to us also in the good days of life. He is telling us to be humble, that we don't deserve these benefits. It is God, not our brains and brawn, who gives us our blessings. God is also speaking to us in the good days and saying, "Praise Me for these benefits and blessings." The goods we possess are meant to make us love God, the Giver. Are we turning the thing around? Do we love the gift more than the Giver?

IV. *And if you do—*

A. You have hope for the future (vv. 13, 14). You have hope of:

1. Standing in the final Judgment. We shall stand perfectly forgiven and acquitted only because now we fall at the foot of the cross and pray: "For the sake of Jesus Christ, who died and rose to take my sins away, let me be with Him in Paradise."

2. Victory over death. This hope isn't a "maybe I will, or maybe I won't" wish. Have you ever heard of a bodiless head? Only in horror stories. Well, Christ, our Head, has been raised from the grave. Therefore, we, His body, have also entered into life eternal with Him.

3. This hope for victory over death will not be cut off, because Christ was cut off from His Father's presence and from the land of the living for three days in order that we might have a sure hope, a hope of standing forgiven in the final Judgment and of being victorious over death.

B. You can't be conquered (vv. 15, 16). We shall rise above all of our enemies: sin, pain, and death. None can get us down for good; for a while perhaps, but not for good. We can rise above these enemies because Jesus Christ fell beneath His cross, fell like a grain of wheat into a grave and then rose again. Because of this falling and rising of Christ we know that we will on the Last Day rise above all our enemies.

C. You won't rejoice in the misfortunes of your foes (vv. 17, 18). How easy and natural it is for us to say, "It serves them right," and to gloat over the troubles of those who have tormented us. But we will not act in this way if we remember that Christ on the cross took the blows of wrath which should have struck us because of our sin.

D. You won't fret over the prosperity of evildoers (vv. 19, 20).

1. This fretting, this concern over the good fortune of the wicked, is a form of pride on our part. We are telling God that He is unjust and that He is running the world in a bad and wrong way. We are saying that we are better than others and aren't receiving the joy we merit.

2. It is foolish to fret over the prosperity of the wicked. You don't become jealous, do you, over a candle that's flickering out? Even so it is with the joy of the wicked. It is simply a "going-out" candle. But you are an eternally burning light, a light that not even dark death can snuff out for good. For Christ, the Light, went out in death and came back on again, and because of it you will shine with the light of life forever.

**THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY**

Ps. 85:6-13

The poet who prayed these words expressed an amazing:

Confidence for the Future

I. Surely his present condition did not justify such confidence (vv. 4, 5)

These verses indicate that the poet was in distress. In fact, the suffering has been so prolonged that he fears it will last "to all generations" (v. 5). Why be hopeful for the future when the past has been so dismal, the present is so filled with distress? Why will tomorrow be better? Just because it is tomorrow? Americans, it seems, are obsessed with a faith in the future, but by what right? Where is the proof that tomorrow will be brighter and better?

II. Confidence is based on past deliverance

A. The poet begins this psalm with a reference to God's past redemptive activities for His people (vv. 1, 2). He calls the Lord the God of our salvation (v. 4) and refers to His "steadfast love" (v. 7), His covenant faithfulness. It is because God has so graciously rescued His people in the past that the poet is convinced of similar redemption in the future. Because God had once performed the greatest liberation of all, the deliverance from Egypt, there is assurance of rescue from every adversity.

B. So it is with us. Our confidence for the future, our hope for rescue from every affliction, including the most terrible of all, a shut and sealed casket, is based upon God's great redemption in the past. The Israelite looked back to Pharaoh's land for his confidence of rescue; we look back to Golgotha, where Christ Jesus breathed His last that God might not hold our sins against us, to the garden of Joseph where His breathless clay revived again that we might live with God in glory forever. This is our rescue, our deliverance, from death, Satan, hell, and sin, and this is God's promise of eventual future freedom from every evil and pain.

III. Confidence takes form in our lives

A. Hope for resurrection (v. 6). The poet's reference here is possibly to a resurrection from the "death" of the Babylonian Captivity. Ezekiel pictures the return from exile in the same terms (Ezek. 37). "Lord, wilt Thou not revive us again?" We, too, ask the same question, as we file reverently and tearfully past the casket of a dear friend or loved one, or as we ourselves gasp for breath on our deathbed. God has answered our question. Christ's resurrection is the first great crack in the prison of death, and that crack is God's way of saying: "One day the whole evil jail will come tumbling down, and you and your death-imprisoned dear ones will break free into the glad and glorious freedom of life with Me forever."

B. Hope for peace (v. 8)

1. The Biblical word for peace is a one-word summary for every conceivable blessing of heart, body, and life. It includes God's love, forgiveness, providence, and protection. It includes fruitfulness of womb and field (cf. v. 12), vigorous robust health, freedom from affliction, and a long and prosperous life (cf. Deut. 28:1-14). God will speak peace? Yes, He has in that word of peace, Christ Jesus. The last word you hear in every worship service is *peace*, peace from the God of the uplifted face, the God of the beaming, smiling countenance, and you leave church with a song in your heart because Jesus left Jerusalem to go to the cross, into the grave, and then out of it again, that God's peace might be yours all the week through, all your life through, all eternity through.

2. This peace is given to God's saints (v. 8). These are holy people, "set aside" people, because they are "graced" people. So God has put His hand on us in Baptism to be His own forever.

C. Hope for a happy reunion (v. 10). God's steadfast love and faithfulness will meet in the nation and will greet each other

like lovers. Israel's afflictions will end, and she will experience a blessed prosperity. And it happened that way. In the land of Israel God's love and faithfulness, His salvation ("righteousness," cf. Is. 45:8), and peace did meet and kiss. They came together on Calvary. And now not just Israel but the whole earth is delivered from the devil and his curse of sin and pain and death and is united to God forever.

D. Hope for fruitful soil (v. 11a). The crop referred to here is not grain but God's faithfulness. Since the Lord had delivered the fathers from Egypt, He would also rescue the present generation of saints from Babylon, and the crop of divine faithfulness would again be rich and abundant. Do you feel that the crop of God's faithfulness, His keeping of His promises to bless and befriend you, is rather small in your life? Then remember the faithfulness of Jesus even unto death for you. That faithfulness is God's proof to you that you'll have deliverance from every evil on that great day when by God's faithfulness you and all His people will spring up from the ground.

E. Hope for an open window (v. 11b). The word "righteousness" here means salvation (cf. Is. 45:8; 59:16ff.). God's salvation, His rescue of His people, is personified here. It looks down from the windows of heaven at God's people. In the fullness of time God's salvation, God's Savior, came down, down even to a cross, hell, and a grave, and then walked out of them again, that the windows of heaven might always be open over us. Through these open windows a smiling Father keeps pouring out pardon and peace.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PSALM 39

We owe a great deal to the writer of these words for he gives us:

The Proper View of Life

I. *It consists, first of all, of the right attitude toward suffering*

A. At first the poet thought his afflictions were brought on by his enemies and wicked men (vv. 1-3). The psalmist was in great distress. He remained silent. He didn't whine or complain or cry out in anger. He held his peace, especially in the presence of the wicked. This is a good point to remember. The wicked are watching how we saints respond to suffering. Do we endure with courage and patience and without whining?

B. But then the poet saw his afflictions as God's hand upon him (vv. 9-11). It is not some blind and cruel fate, some laughing, leering devil but your loving Father in heaven who is in charge of your life even when that burden is on your back. You are in His hands. It is your God who controls the heat in the furnace of pain.

C. Since this is true, don't cry out (v. 9).

1. This does not mean that you can't weep or sigh. A Christian is not an automaton, a mechanical man without emotions. Of course, cry, but not in a hopeless wail of despair.

2. Cry? Yes, but not in a whiny complaint and in defiant rebellion. Don't you want a bigger crop of love and holiness in your life? Then how can you despair in your sufferings? How can you despise them? They are simply God's pruning shears to make you a more fruitful branch.

D. Suffering preserves us from idolatry (v. 11). Oh, how we need the moth, the moth of misfortune, which eats away our earthly treasures. Without that moth we would be tempted to fall head over heels in love with goods and people. Then God would be shoved into a little corner, and things would be worshiped without letup. Thank God for the moth. It keeps telling

us we have no abiding city, but must look for one above.

II. *It consists of measuring life against its end (v. 4)*

When viewed in the light of death and eternity, life is:

A. Very short (vv. 5, 6). What's the distance of a couple of hands laid together? Just a few inches at most. That's the length of your life. How long does it take you to breathe one breath? That's the length of your life.

B. Very precarious. A breath isn't very sturdy or stable. In fact, you can't even see it. And so it is with your life. No matter how big and strong and robust you are, it takes just a microbe you can't even see to cut you down. And there's absolutely no substance to a shadow. And that, says the poet, is what our life is (v. 6). Go ahead and heap up huge piles of wealth. Can you be sure you'll enjoy it (v. 6)? Build the bigger barns. This night your soul might be required of you. Then whose will the barns be?

C. A sojourn (v. 12). You are just passing through. The Greek equivalent (1 Peter 2:1), etymologically related to the English word "parishioner," means pilgrim, foreigner.

1. Remember that other sojourner, Jesus Christ. He left His heavenly homeland, lived as a foreigner on this earth for 33 years, died and rose again that you might be a sojourner, that you might live here like a pilgrim and call heaven your home.

2. Live like a pilgrim. (a) Let your speech show that you are a foreigner. You can usually tell a foreigner by the way he talks. Men ought to be able to tell that our homeland is heaven. Our speech should be the speech of heaven, the speech of patience, love, and cleanness. (b) You can usually tell a foreigner by the way he dresses. And even so we should be wearing the clothes of righteousness and love, the clothes of our heavenly home.

III. *It consists of the proper view toward God*

A. He is the object of our hope (v. 7). Suffering has shown the poet that God is the only safe object of hope. People and goods go. But no moth of change or decay, no thief of death, can ever destroy God. He is always there, there to lean on, there with His love. That's why the man whose joy is more in God than in goods can be happy, for God is always there even when the goods aren't.

B. He is the forgiver of sin (v. 8). This prayer of the poet was answered when a man once didn't get an answer, when on the cross Jesus called out to His Father, but there was no answer. And because of that forsakenness, God now always answers every prayer for pardon with a blessed and eternal yes. You have it, you have this pardon for which you cry. And now with forgiveness, death has ceased to be the king of terrors and is instead only the little bellboy who ushers us into our heavenly room.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOB 14:1-5

What Then Is Man?

That's the question of this sermon, and our text supplies the answer.

I. *Man is born of a woman* (v. 1)

This is an obvious fact, but we dare never forget that we are twice-born people, born of our mother and then born again in Baptism. The pastor poured over our heads the gracious and powerful water of life, and we became God's little ones (1 Peter 1:23). Now we have God's own seed inside us. Peter calls it the good news, the glad news, that Jesus Christ became breathless clay upon the cross and then was raised by the Father's reviving hand on Easter that we might be God's forgiven and heaven-bound children.

II. *Man is of few days* (v. 1)

Indeed he is. How long does it take you to sigh? It's a matter of seconds. That's how long your life is (Ps. 90:9). Job in our text pictures our life as a flower and a shadow. There's no permanency in either. But again remember, we saints are twice-born people. We have God's own seed inside us, and that seed, says Peter, is immortal (1 Peter 1:25). When you plant a seed in the ground, to all observation it is absolutely dead. But once in the soil and nurtured by God's showers and sunshine, it miraculously becomes alive. It germinates and pushes up through the soil as a new and mature grain of wheat or corn. So it will be with us. We will be placed in the soil of the grave, to all tests and observations totally lifeless. Yet on the Last Day the rain and sunshine of Christ's reviving voice will cause us to germinate, to take on new life, and to spring up from our grave vibrant and robust with endless life.

III. *Man is full of trouble* (v. 1)

A. Suffering is normal for every life in this sinful world. (Cf. Job 5:7 where the same thought is expressed. Just as natural as it is for sparks to fly up from an anvil when it is hit by a hammer, so natural is it for man to suffer.) We sometimes ask, "What have I done to deserve this affliction?" The answer is, "No more, perhaps, than being human, a sinful man of a sinful race."

B. But the Christian knows abnormal suffering. You're also God's saint, and being His child assures you of a double load of trouble.

1. The conflict within, this internal strife between unholy urges and the Spirit's prompting. It's a fierce and agonizing war, but, oh, so comforting, for the hotter the battle, the holier the saint.

2. The conflict without, the struggle with the world. Ours is the difficulty of being peculiar, of being different, of being holy

in unholy company, of standing out like a "saintly thumb."

IV. *He is a creature under God's judgment* (v. 3)

Not only is a man of few days and full of trouble, but in addition God brings such a frail and afflicted creature under His scrutinizing eye. Indeed He does. But what's the verdict? What's the sentence? Not guilty. We have heard the joyful news Job was yearning for. "For there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). See that lifeless body hanging upon that cross? There God judged and condemned you, and you can't be punished twice for the same crimes. Job laments here that God's judgment is unjust because man can not but sin. Can horses bring forth cats? Just as little is it possible for unclean men to produce clean offspring (v. 4). Therefore, O Lord, how can you condemn us for being what we naturally are, what we can't help being—sinners? By the gift of His Son God replies: "I don't condemn you. For you're not your old unclean selves any more. You are in Christ, and this makes you a new man. The old things have passed away." Your sins passed away; they died when Jesus came to life on Easter. Your sinful habits have passed away (Rom. 6:1 ff.). When you were baptized you died to your evil habits. They can't command your obedience any more because you are dead to them and alive only to God's voice and will.

V. *He is under God's plan for him* (v. 5)

A. Of course, your days are numbered. Yet within that numbering, that plan and span of life for you, God leaves you room for the exercise of your own intelligence and common sense. It's you and not the Lord who shortens your life by poor health habits.

B. Your days are numbered, by God, of course. Are they by you? Are you number-

ing your days? Grateful for each precious fleeting second, living each moment for God and the brother as if it were your last? It may be, you know.

C. In another sense your days aren't numbered. The Hebrew here has: "His days are cut off." Yet since Christ was cut off from His Father on the cross, we know that our days won't be. We shall live for endless days with God in glory forever. Because Jesus was "numbered with the transgressors," we know God won't count our transgressions against us and our days won't be numbered. Rather they'll be countless in the joys of heaven.

THE FESTIVAL OF THE HARVEST

Ps. 34:1-9

With the writer of these words we, too, confess on this harvest day:

I Will Bless the Lord

I. *Bless Him at all times* (v. 1)

There is no sweat or strain in blessing God for the good days, the pleasant and pain-free days. But it does take faith and discipline and courage to thank Him in the days of distress, with a fast-spreading cancer, in spite of a drunken husband, with an empty chair at the family table. God, why be thankful at these times?

1. Because in pain God is still saying: "You are Mine, and I love you."

2. Because pain is used by God as a way of increasing your output of holiness. Pain is His pruning shears. By His pruning you become more fruitful. Don't worry. He knows just where to stop so that you won't be pruned to death. He knows, not you.

3. Because pain is used by God as a way of refining your faith. If you really want those faith-sapping doubts to go, then you'll have to go into the furnace of affliction. That's where God refines away the alloy of doubt.

II. *Bless Him with my lips* (v. 1)

A mouth that continually praises God houses a tongue that is kind and clean and true. A thankful tongue is a tongue that builds up the brother.

III. *Bless Him by giving God all credit for what I am and have* (vv. 2, 3)

This is difficult. It's our brow that gets sweaty and not God's in the gaining of our bread and possessions. Yet you couldn't even complain about that grind, let alone go through it at all, if the Lord wouldn't first grant you His permission. You couldn't even talk about your work, let alone do it, if God wouldn't provide the power. In Him you live and move and have your very existence.

IV. *Bless Him by encouraging my fellow saints to join me in praise of God* (v. 3)

We fail to do this if we agree with suffering saints who complain that their lot is wretched, unbearable, unfair, if we encourage their pessimism and increase their gloom by agreeing with their whiny, complaining remarks. We should rather invite them to "magnify the Lord with us," not question His justice or demand to understand His mysterious plan, but *magnify* Him, praise Him for the Son whose death and resurrection guarantee eventual deliverance from every pain and evil.

V. *Bless Him for His deliverance* (vv. 4, 6)

There are two divine rescues stressed here:

A. Deliverance from fear (v. 4).

1. The fear of punishment. Are you afraid of something that is dead? Your sins are dead, just as surely as Jesus died and then became alive again.

2. The fear of death. Is it still with us? Does this prove that you are a weak saint with little or no faith? Of course not. You're a normal Christian who is both afraid and not afraid to die. For you are always two people at once, God's man and a sinner.

Under Satan's tyranny you are still plagued by a clutching fear of the grave; as God's man you are victor over that fear. Remember, God has delivered you from this fear, for Christ died and rose again, not only that you might be the victor over death but also that you might have pardon for the fear of death.

B. Deliverance from trouble (v. 6). Why aren't you dead this morning? Others who, like you, last night were so sure they'd see today's dawn are dead instead. The answer is this: God has spared you. His grace has defended you. You sometimes say, "That was a close call." Not a close call, but a close angel. (V. 7)

VI. *Bless Him because He is so good* (v. 8)

A. The implication here is that you'll never really enjoy God unless you taste Him, that is, experience His love. If you simply have memorized some facts about Him, you'll not rejoice in Him. You have to take Him into yourself by faith in the Redeemer.

B. And you can do this in the marvelous meal at the altar. There God offers Himself in the body and blood of Christ, His Son, that body given into death and then raised again that you might taste the joy of forgiveness and the supper of salvation in the banquet hall of heaven, that blood spilled on the cross that you might never taste the bitter pains of hell.

VII. *Bless Him with a holy fear* (v. 9)

Thanksgiving is thanksgiving. Proper praise always takes the form of fear, a reverence for God that expresses itself in the sanctified life. Yet only saints can do this, says the poet, people upon whom God has laid His hand, people whom God has chosen to be His own. Saints are people made holy by God, people whom God has clothed with the garment of Jesus' holiness in the baptismal act. You're such a saint. Therefore fear the Lord.

**THE TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY**

PSALM 126

The end of the church year reminds us of the end of time and of our own end. And as we reflect upon these last days, we form this prayer:

Good Lord, Deliver Us

I. *This was the prayer of the psalmist (v. 4)*

The water courses of Negeb, that is, the region south of Palestine, where the wadi beds were dry most of the year, were filled with streams of life-giving water when the rainy season came. Israel's fortunes were like a dried-up creek. The rivers of joy were dried up. The prayer here is that God will restore the fortunes of His people, that the streams of gladness will flow again.

II. *This is also our prayer*

A. From the distress of the last times (Matt. 24:1-35; Luke 21:5-36). One cannot read the frightening words of our Lord without wondering: "Will I have the strength to endure this?" Endurance is absolutely vital, for Christ informs us: "By your endurance you will gain your lives" (Luke 21:19). Just how strong are you, you whose spiritual muscles have been made weak and flabby by the overabundance of our prosperous American standard of life? You, without any real crosses or burdens, now is the time to build up the stamina and the bravery you'll need when the sorrows troop into your life, not single file but in battalions.

B. From death. This has been man's cry ever since our first parents chained themselves and the rest of their race with them in death's grim prison. From the time we are old enough to sense the treasure of life, we are plagued with the tenacious, unshakable fear of losing that treasure. When and how will it happen? When will that ugly, fatal cancer begin to grow in our bodies? When will that mortal coronary stop our heart-

beat? when will the fatal accident take our life? When will bereaved friends and dear ones pronounce those, oh, so hollow words over us, "He looks quite natural, doesn't he?" When? You can crowd the unpleasant thought right out of your mind with a lot of work and fun, but it's only a temporary respite. You can't see a funeral procession without thinking: "There but by God's protective grace go I."

C. From condemnation. Together with this fear of death there is another fear that has been with us from our earliest recollections, the fear of punishment. Remember the fear in your heart when, as a child, you broke that good dish, or spilled paint on the living room rug, or tossed the ball through the picture window? You wanted to run away and hide. You didn't want to face father. Oh, how you dreaded his coming home that evening. Now it's toward evening, and this time it isn't father who's coming home, you are. What will happen when death delivers you at the door of the heavenly house? What kind of reception will you receive? How will Father greet you, with a smile and open arms or with a scowl and a switch? After all it isn't dishes or windows you've been breaking, but God's most holy Law.

III. *Actually He has delivered us*

A. It was true in the life of the psalmist (vv. 1-3). This past deliverance was almost too good to be true. The poet says that the people thought they were dreaming. God's rescue was so good and complete. (V. 1)

B. And so it is with us. No matter what our present burdens, we can always go back to the one great rescue in the past. It happened on a little hill outside Jerusalem and in a nearby garden. There Christ Jesus lost His life upon a cross and then gained it back again from the clutch of death that God might snatch us from Satan, hell, death, and sin. We pray: "Good Lord, deliver us." And God replies: "I have by the life, death, resur-

rection, ascension, rule, and return of Jesus, the Galilean."

IV. *Therefore He will deliver us*

A. The poem before us is typical of all Hebrew laments. First comes the mention of past divine rescues, then comes the plea for deliverance from present distress. The past deliverance assures present rescue.

B. We can have the same confidence.

1. Since Christ has delivered us by His death and resurrection from hell, death, devil, and sin, we can be absolutely sure He will eventually free us from every pain and evil. If He's already rescued you from Satan and hell, don't you think He'll also deliver you in His wisdom and way from ulcers and heart trouble? For which is easier to do, redeem you from hell or deliver you from upset nerves? He's done the greater; therefore He's able to do the lesser.

2. This deliverance is as yet incomplete. You still suffer, you still have to face pursuing, hounding death, when at last he corners you and there's no way out. And the prowling devil lion is still hot on your heels. But the beginning of your rescue, the beginning that took place on the cross and at the rent, vacated tomb, this beginning assures the final complete deliverance. God never starts a job He can't finish. He started setting you free from every evil in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus. There's your proof that He won't quit until you're finally and forever rescued from every pain and evil.

3. This rescue will be in the form of a complete reversal (vv. 4-6). Dry places will become pools (v. 4). Farmers who sowed their seeds with tears will bring in the sheaves with great gladness.

C. In the spiritual realm, sowing seeds portrays a life of faith and thankfulness. And this is often a hard and painful life. These are the tears that accompany the sowing. However, the harvest, that is, the reaping of eternal life, will be with glad songs and shouts of joy. Cf. Gal. 5:7 ff.; John 16:20-22; Matt. 5:10; Ps. 35; Rev. 7:13-17; 21:2-4. Just three brief points here:

1. No sowing of seed, no harvest. No tears now, no crop of eternal joy.

2. The more seeds we sow, the greater the harvest. Yet it should be borne in mind that the crop of heavenly joy is way out of proportion to the seeds of sorrow now sown (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17). It is by grace that we have this big harvest.

3. Let's not overlook the Lord Jesus here. He is the grain of wheat God planted in a grave and then raised again that we might enjoy the harvest of eternal life. He is the First Fruit, the first raised Man from the soil of the grave, the blessed First One that assures the near and certain resurrection of us all. One might say that Christ sowed with tears the seeds of our deliverance from death, hell, and Satan, and sin. Therefore since this sowing was so costly (His very life was involved), do you think He'll ever be deprived of the harvest, you and me to be His own forever?