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Homiletics: Outlines on a Series of Free Texts

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on a Series of Free Texts

(The following outlines are furnished by the Rev. Milton J. Nauss, St. Louis, Mo.
The suggested general theme is "Aspects of the New Life.")

THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ZECH. 7:4-9

"When Are Good Works Good?"

The general purpose is to show that good works are good before God only as they proceed from faith in Christ.

Introduction: Have you ever wondered about fasting? Is it really necessary? Is it spiritually helpful for us to refrain from eating at certain times or to refrain from eating certain foods on certain days?

Or have you ever wondered about good works? Have you ever thought—Yes, I have to believe in God and in Christ, but after all, it is the life I live, the good deeds I do which will determine whether I go to heaven or hell. We are going to discuss these things today on the basis of a book in the Bible of which we seldom hear—the second-last book in the O. T.—Zechariah.

Here is the situation leading up to our text. The Jews had been released from their 70 years of captivity in Babylon and some had gone back home to Judah. They kept four special fasts each year to commemorate the tragic experiences in the destruction of Jerusalem prior to the captivity. One of these pertained to the burning of the magnificent temple of Solomon. Now since a new temple was being built, the town of Bethel sent a delegation of two men to Zechariah, the prophet, asking whether this fast must be continued. Here is the answer from God Himself through Zechariah: Text.

I. So the Lord does not think much of their fasting. No doubt the people were a bit shocked. They thought they had really been

pleasing God. But instead of commending them God reprimanded them.

A. This is the point—they had not fasted to the Lord but to themselves. These fast days had not been commanded by God but had been self-imposed. The people were observing them to gain God's favor for themselves.

B. Actually fasting is not required of the Christian as it was in the Old Testament.

1. Fasting can be helpful if it is done in the proper spirit. It must be an altogether voluntary thing, but always remember there is not a shadow of merit in the act as such.

2. The Augsburg Confession has some pointed remarks concerning fasting and kindred rites: Article XXVI, third paragraph ff.

3. Further, in the N. T. we have these words of St. Paul: 1 Timothy 4:1-3.

4. Fasting, in the words of the Small Catechism, is "a fine outward training," but it will never gain us a silver star or a gold medal before God as a meritorious deed.

II. The Lord is concerned about far more important things than outward fasting. He says in our text:

A. Spend your time on executing true judgment.

1. Do this in your family if you have children, or at your job if you are the boss or foreman.

2. Whether you are a father or mother, boss or foreman, do your part in seeing that true judgment is rendered in government and in the courts of our land. At election time study the candidates and issues and then

vote. Be willing to serve on jury duty and to execute true judgment when you are called to serve. Judge the case not on the basis of emotion, nationality, or color but on its merits as right and wrong.

B. The Lord also says in our text: Spend your time on mercy and compassion.

1. Living in a day and age of unrivaled prosperity, we are to share our means with the destitute on the other side of the world and with the needy on the other side of the tracks. Reaching down and lifting people up is a fine exercise for strengthening your heart.

2. With the rise in prosperity mental, marital, and emotional problems also have increased. You will possibly find some cases in your own home or on your own street. We are living in a fast day and age, when we are so busy in making a living that friendship and concern have often been forgotten. As Christians we must take time out to show mercy and compassion to those in need.

III. Perhaps you see the wisdom and necessity of executing true judgment and of showing mercy and compassion. But it may surprise some of you to hear that it is impossible for us to execute true judgment and to show true mercy by ourselves as God would have us do it. To be acceptable to God these acts must be done in faith, Christian faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

A. Listen to the Scriptures: "Without faith it is impossible to please God." "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." So we may be able to satisfy ourselves and others without Christian faith, but we cannot please God. Therefore one can speak of good works *and* good works. There are works of civic righteousness and works of Christian righteousness. The latter proceed only from Christian love and faith.

B. This issue of good works recently prompted a question by a young lady con-

cerning the Athanasian Creed. She remembered one of the last lines of the Creed: "And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting. And they that have done evil shall go into everlasting fire." "Here it seems," she said, "that we get to heaven on the basis of our life—our good works and good deeds." In the description of Judgment Day in Matthew 25 it also seems that we are asked to earn heaven. But remember, we must always let Scripture explain itself, and Scripture says, once again: "Without faith it is impossible to please God." "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." There must be faith in the Father, who created us; in Jesus Christ, who redeemed us; and in the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies us. Then and then only can we please God and perform works which are actually good in His sight. Thus our good works are the results of our faith. So the point is this: If you wish really to execute judgment and show mercy, you must first have faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Then you will have both the desire and the ability of executing judgment and showing mercy in a God-pleasing manner.

Conclusion: I should like to urge you to show forth your Christian faith not only in your home and at your job, not only in your neighborhood and in your community, but also in your church. All that you do, do it to the Lord. Remember, you have been saved to serve!

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Ex. 33:17-23

"A Stupendous Request"

The goal is to show the great mercy of God toward us, particularly in sending us Jesus Christ.

Introduction: What kind of prayers do you send heavenward? Are they mainly for

material things? or for spiritual things? Are they mainly for little things? or for big things? The strength of a person's faith can be judged by his prayers—by what he asks of God, by how he asks of God. Too many of us, I'm afraid, ask for only little things—things which are helpful all right, but not things which show our full confidence in God's power and goodness. We have a man in our text who well nigh went the limit in a request—one of the boldest requests a human being has ever made of God. Listen: Text.

I. Moses.

A. Moses is one of the greatest men who ever lived. Through him God gave the world the Ten Commandments, which are esteemed also by many people of other religions and by many people without religion. Moses is regarded as a type of Christ. Cf. Deut. 18:15. Moses was the emancipator of the Hebrew people. He led them out of Egypt. Jesus was the Emancipator of the human race. He set us all free from sin, eternal death, and hell. Moses was a mediator between God and the Israelites. Jesus is the Mediator between God and man.

B. Moses was never satisfied with his spiritual self. He had been in close communion with God. But what he had experienced, instead of satisfying him, only made him desirous of an even fuller relationship with God. The more he knew of God, the more he wanted to know. That is why he asked, "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory."

C. That is the way you and I should be—always yearning for a fuller relationship with God, always wanting more blessings from above. Nothing pleases the Lord more than to hear, "Lord, You helped me yesterday. Now here I am again." Having asked for one thing yesterday, ask for two things today and even for a half dozen things tomorrow. And, like Moses, do not let your faith be so small that you ask only for little things.

Ask for big things, things which will truly help you in your Christian life and faith.

Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and pow'r are such
None can ever ask too much.

D. In answer to Moses' tremendous request the Lord said, "All right, Moses, I will show you My glory, but you cannot see it fully, for you are but a human being. You will not be able to stand it. I will tell you what I will do. I will put you in the cleft of a rock and while I pass by, I will cover you with my hand, for no man can see My face and live. And then I will take My hand away and you can see My back parts."

E. Just this is what happened, and Moses caught a glimpse of the glory of the Lord. The Lord granted it to him "because thou hast found grace in My sight." The reason so many of us do not receive great blessings from God is, first, that we do not ask for them and, second, we do not have the faith necessary to receive them fully. The way to grow in faith so that you can receive these great blessings fully is: Hear the Word with regularity on Sundays, read the Word daily in your home, and partake of the Sacrament faithfully.

II. The natural question of the day is: Just what is meant by God's glory?

A. God's glory is the sum total of all His attributes. He is eternal, omnipotent, gracious, etc. In God these attributes are in such perfection that He is too much for any human being, even Moses, to behold. Above all, we are sinful, we are not worthy to stand in the presence of God. He is too holy for us.

B. The crowning attribute of God, the one which especially shines through His glory and the one which God emphasized to Moses, is His grace. By grace we mean the undeserved love God shows to us.

1. God has especially shown His grace

by sending down His Son, Jesus Christ, to us. You see, we had life with God in Adam and Eve, but we lost it. Note, I say "we," because you and I are children of Adam and Eve and because, had we been in similar circumstances in the Garden of Eden, we would no doubt have done no better. Look at us now, for example, in all our sinfulness. As a result of our sins we deserve nothing less than their consequences, namely, eternal death and hell (Rom. 6:23; Ezek. 18:20). However, God in His grace, in His undeserved love has sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to take away the eternal consequences of sin. Jesus endured Gethsemane, Golgotha, and the pains of hell. Consequently, just as Moses found protection from the overpowering glory of the Lord in the cleft of the rock, so we can find salvation from the damning power of our sins in the cleft of the Rock of Ages. Yes, "Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee." Because of Christ we can escape hell and have eternal life. This act of grace on the part of Christ has no equal in the history of the world.

2. When God says in our text: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious," He does not mean that there are some people to whom He shows no grace. God showers His grace upon everyone (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4). The point of these words of our text is that God is gracious only because He chooses to be gracious, and not because of any merit or worthiness in us. Surely, He has been most gracious to us in the United States. As a result, there are a few things that follow:

a. First, "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." If we to whom all this grace has been given reject it, we shall suffer more in hell than those who have not been so blessed. (Luke 12:47, 48)

b. On the other hand, there will be degrees of glory in heaven. (Dan. 12:2, 3; 1 Cor. 15:41, 42)

III. Moses did not see the Lord face to face. He simply could not stand it. It is as if we tried to look directly into the sun on a bright day. We would be blinded. But there will come a day when we shall see the Lord face to face, when we shall be able to stand in His sight. This will come in heaven (Job 19:25, 27). What a stupendous occasion that will be!

Conclusion: You will not miss out on this stupendous occasion if you hide yourself in the cleft of the rock—the cleft of the Rock of Ages.

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY

PSALM 1

"The Description of a Christian"

The goal is to contrast the life and destiny of a Christian with that of a non-Christian.

Introduction: If you were asked to give a description of a Christian, what would it be? Is a Christian a person who believes in God? Is a Christian a person who belongs to the church? Is a Christian a person who lives a good and decent life? Just what is a Christian? Our text for today gives a good answer. Listen: Text.

I. For one thing a Christian is a person who is particular in regard to his associations.

Our psalm mentions three different kinds of people whom a Christian will shun.

A. First, a Christian will shun the ungodly, who in their blindness and carelessness have forgotten God. These folks are not necessarily atheists. They just do not believe in a personal God to whom they are answerable. And they are not necessarily wicked. They may be the nice folks who live next door or the affable fellow in the office or the nice lady at the club. They are not anti-Christian, they are simply non-Christian.

B. Second, the Christian will shun the sinner who deliberately chooses sin and evil as a way of life. These people are not only numerous but also popular—at school, at your job, in your neighborhood. They are the kind who think drinking and drunkenness is smart, who are promiscuous in sex, who play the horses, who engage in shady business deals. If you are a Christian, you will not make friends with such people. You will keep yourself “unspotted from the world.” George Washington once said, “Associate yourself with men of good quality, if you esteem your own reputation; for 'tis better to be alone than in bad company.”

C. Third, the Christian will shun the scornful, who mock and ridicule religion. In this day of religious popularity there are not too many people of this type. But you will find them especially in two classes of society: among the rough and coarse and among the would-be intellectuals. If you are a Christian, you will not fraternize with these people. They are spiritually dangerous.

D. So the Christian is a person who is particular in regard to his associations. In this respect he is a separatist. The people of whom we have spoken will probably call him narrow-minded or foolish or bigoted, but the Lord calls him blessed.

II. Another mark of a Christian is his contact with the Word of God.

A. Sunday morning is the highlight of the week for him. Going to church is not a mechanical habit. He enjoys it. In hearing the Word he receives the assurance that God is watching over him, the confidence that Jesus Christ is his personal Savior, the strength to overcome his sinful ways of the past and to live a better life in the future.

B. The Christian, however, does not limit his contact with the Word to Sunday morning. Text says, “he meditates upon it day and night.” In a Christian home the Bible is not a book just to be admired in its beauty,

nor a book used only for recording births and deaths, nor a book—like a medicine cabinet—for emergency use only. The Bible is a read book.

C. Do you find delight and joy in hearing and reading the Word? If not, ask the Lord in prayer to put enthusiasm in your heart and soul for His Word. Do this regularly, sincerely.

III. Another mark of a Christian is the life he lives.

A. It is a fruitful life (v.3)

1. Whereas Sunday finds him with regularity in God's house, Monday through Saturday finds him in his home, at his job, or out on the street living by what he heard on Sunday. Such a life bears fruit. It leads other people to look heavenward, to investigate the Christian faith.

2. A Christian's life also proves to be fruitful in another way. He has stopped doing what he wants to do and has begun doing what Jesus Christ wants him to do. That means he is interested in doing things for others at all times. He seeks to advance the church of Jesus Christ not only by his attendance and monetary gifts but also by his participation in its work.

B. Is this a description of you? Is your life fruitful?

C. In the psalm David contrasts the Christian's life with that of a non-Christian.

“The ungodly are like chaff”; their life is good for nothing. It is self-centered. Often they seem to be prospering in a material and physical way, but one day their bubble will burst, the roof will cave in. And then, as they stand before the Great Judge, the verdict upon them will be “guilty.” Eternal punishment awaits them.

IV. But for the Christian at the end of the road there is eternal life.

A. Matchless splendor and incomparable joy is the destiny of the Christian—how-

ever, not as a result of his righteousness but rather as a result of Christ's righteousness, because Christ led an absolutely perfect life on earth and then took our sins on His shoulders and made atonement for them. It is through Christ that we are made righteous and worthy of heaven.

B. You may think this world has its beauties, with the Rockies and Alps, our exquisite flowers and plants, the rushing rivers and clear blue lakes, but these do not even compare with the beauties of eternal life. And you may think that you have heaven right here on earth when you are in love or in wealth or in health. But these do not even come close to the joy and happiness which shall be ours in glory. Remember, the death of a Christian is not a demotion, it is a promotion!

Conclusion: On the basis of this description in Psalm 1, would you say you are a Christian? I hope so, but if not, I would suggest and urge you to seek out Jesus Christ. Accept Him for what He is—the Son of God. Acknowledge Him for what He did—that He made atonement for your sins. Then be particular in the choice of friends. Delve into the Word of God, and live your faith. Do that, and there is no doubt that you are a Christian, there is no doubt that eternal bliss awaits you.

THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PROV. 9:1-6, 9, 10

"True Wisdom"

The goal is to show the key to true wisdom—Jesus Christ.

Introduction: Have you ever seen a picture of what the creatures on Mars are supposed to look like? They are all head and eyes and ears with miniature bodies and spindly arms and legs. This is a good picture of a person who has developed only in mind. On the

other hand, have you ever seen a picture of Mars, the Greek god of war? He is usually pictured with a bullet-shaped head, with neck and shoulders and body like an ox with bulging muscles. This is a good picture of a person who has developed only in body.

Neither of these developments makes for a whole man. In fact, even a combination of the two is not sufficient to make for a whole man. We need a power within us which can apply constructively the knowledge we have and use constructively the physique we have. This power we call wisdom. Unless a man has wisdom, his is a wasted life. It is wisdom about which our text speaks. It tells us how to get wisdom and where to get wisdom. Listen: Text.

I. True wisdom begins with fear of the Lord.

A. When we speak of the fear of the Lord, we do not mean slavish fear, cowering fear, and we do not mean a Mr. Milquetoast type of fear or timidity. We mean a humble submission to the Lord, recognizing Him as Creator, ourselves as creatures. We mean a willingness and readiness to do what He says without answering back or questioning His judgment. With such a fear of the Lord in your heart and mind, you will have taken the first step in becoming truly wise.

B. You do not have to have a diploma from a recognized college or university or an M. A. or Ph. D. degree to be truly wise. Education is not the guarantee of true wisdom, is not the answer to the world's woes. Wisdom is a gift—a gift from on high. It begins to come to you when you begin to fear the Lord, when you begin to acknowledge Him as your Maker, Provider, and Savior, when you begin to follow His ideals rather than your own ideas. Do this, and you will become wise.

C. In the Scriptures we have examples of some truly wise men. We think of Solomon, the author of our text. The Lord appeared

to him in a dream and asked, "What shall I give you?" When Solomon asked for wisdom, the Lord answered him: 1 Kings 4: 29-34. There are other men whom the Scriptures call truly wise: The men who came from the East to find the Christ Child, who knelt at His crib and worshiped Him as the Son of God and Savior of the world. The Scriptures call these men Wise Men.

II. Do you remember the strange way in which our text begins? (v. 1). According to Scripture "house" refers to the O. T. people of God and the N. T. church. It is here that wisdom dwells. Here you can find wisdom and gain wisdom.

A. At a high school or college or in the laboratories of science you may find knowledge but not wisdom. As the Scriptures say, get all the knowledge you can, but with it get wisdom, or else your knowledge will be wasted. Since Russia is supposedly outstripping us in the training of scientists, new emphasis is being placed on science and education in our midst. This is good, but we need a note of caution. Never should science and education of the mind be permitted to take precedence over the cultivation of the spirit and soul of man. Any neglect of the spiritual for the sake of the material will cause us to lose our souls while we seek to save the world.

B. It is in the church where you will find wisdom. Now the word "church" needs explanation. There are many churches and unfortunately in some you may find no more wisdom than in a secular institution. Wisdom is to be found only in those churches which look to the Scriptures as the very Word of God, which look to the Gospel as our only hope for time and eternity, which look to Jesus Christ as the very Son of God and Savior of the world. Associate yourself with such a "house" and you will find true wisdom.

III. As great as was the wisdom of Solomon,

it did not even approach the wisdom of another Man who walked this earth. That Man was Jesus Christ.

A. Listen to what the Scriptures say of Him: Luke 2:40; 1 Cor. 1:24; Col. 2:3. Jesus Christ is Wisdom personified.

B. That means He is the very source of wisdom. Therefore, get connected with Him and grow in wisdom. Read about Him in the Bible, study about Him in a Bible class, hear about Him in church. By faith receive Him into your heart as the Son of God, as your personal Savior from sin. Jesus Christ in His wisdom and love did the greatest thing for mankind in the history of the world. He made atonement on the cross of Calvary for the sins of the world. He reconciled us to God. In His wisdom He knew this was the only way that you and I could escape hell and inherit heaven. In His wisdom, therefore, He has shown you and me the height and depth of love.

C. So fill yourself full of Jesus Christ, and true wisdom will become more and more yours. You will be able to meet the problems and challenges of this complex age. You will become a well-rounded, solid Christian.

Conclusion: And so fear the Lord and utilize the church. Take Jesus Christ into your life and you will be a wise man—one who can apply his knowledge and use his talents. With your wisdom you will be serving your God and aiding your fellowman.

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Is. 62:6-12

"The Greatest City in the World"

The goal is to make each person a citizen of the city of Jerusalem (the Christian church) and an active citizen of that city.

Introduction: What would you say is the greatest city in the world? Here in the

United States most of us would say New York City, and many people outside the United States would agree. In Japan they would say it is Tokyo, which is the largest city in the world. In Russia the Communists would say it is Moscow. The greatest city in the world, however, is Jerusalem—not the city located in Palestine but the city composed of people around the world. In other words, by Jerusalem is meant the holy Christian church. Listen to what the Lord says of Jerusalem and of your and my citizenship in it:—Text.

I. The physical city of Jerusalem had undergone many vicissitudes prior to this time. There had been days of glory and splendor; there had been days of shame and desolation. But the worst was yet to come. In 586 B. C. the city was destroyed and burned by Nebuchadnezzar. It was reinhabited and rebuilt upon the return of the Babylonian exiles 70 years later. But then in A. D. 70 it was again completely destroyed. There was a five months' siege by Titus. It is said that one million people were killed and 90,000 were sold into slavery. Such was the lot of the physical Jerusalem.

II. Spiritual Jerusalem, however, shall never be destroyed.

A. The Lord has sworn this, as He says, "by His right hand" and "by the arm of His strength." In the N. T. He says, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it [the church]."

B. This does not mean that the church and its members will not experience trials and tribulations and persecutions. We shall have these in the church.

1. Like the Savior, we shall individually be expected to bear the cross.

2. In congregations there will be bickering and biting among members, differences between pastor and people, factions and cliques.

3. There will be persecutions. Remember the first centuries after Christ: Stephen and James, the catacombs and arenas. Remember the period after the Reformation: the Spanish Inquisition. Remember recently: the purge of Christians in China, the squelching of Christianity in East Germany, Latvia, Estonia. And remember, it can happen to us too.

C. But the promise from God Himself is that though tribulation and persecution come, destruction will not come. Jerusalem, the church, is here to stay—through time and into eternity. New York City, Tokyo, Moscow may be bombed out of existence, but never Jerusalem. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

III. This great city has a Foundation which assures salvation and freedom for all—freedom from confusion and despair, freedom from the bonds of sin, freedom from hell. Its message is Jesus Christ, who is more than a mayor, governor, or President. He is the Son of God and Savior of the world. Through Him the citizens of Jerusalem are redeemed and holy. Remember what the Scriptures say: "Christ died for us." "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." "You were redeemed with the blood of Christ."

IV. How about you? Do you have this real life, this eternal life within you? Are you a citizen of the city of Jerusalem?

A. Mere membership in Pilgrim Church or any other church does not give you citizenship status. Nor does church attendance qualify you for citizenship. These are merely natural results of citizenship. To become a citizen you must take Jesus Christ into your mind, heart, and life as the Son of God and the Savior of your soul. So only God and you really know whether you are a citizen of Jerusalem.

B. If you are a citizen, you are a "watch-

man." That means, according to our text, "Make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, go through the gates, prepare ye the way; lift up a standard for the people!" In other words, do not be quiet about your citizenship and its advantages. Stand high, stand straight, be proud of your citizenship in Jerusalem, your membership in the church.

1. And then let people know about it. Speak out concerning your membership, your church, your Savior. You and I have been converted to become converters. Bring in your friends and neighbors who do not know Jesus Christ. "We cannot permanently preserve what we enjoy except by sharing it with others."

2. As a congregation we must be watchmen who lift up the standard of the Gospel before the people of the world. We can do so by fostering mission work beyond the confines of our congregation—in outstate Missouri, in the United States as a whole, throughout the world. This means giving money to the cause of Christian missions. Never fear that in giving to others our own treasury will suffer. The Lord has a strange, powerful law working under such circumstances. He always sees to it that when we think first and especially of others there is without fail sufficient for us. This is His promise: "Give, and it shall be given unto you." Christian missions call for imagination and daring, for the hour is late. Time is running out. It is five minutes to twelve on the clock of the world's history. Let us be up and about our Father's business.

Conclusion: So Jerusalem is the greatest city in the world. And if you are a citizen of it, you are a fortunate person, for you are the inhabitant of a city which never can and never will be touched by rockets or missiles, gas or bombs. You are safe for eternity. You are due for a promotion to the Heavenly City, the city of angels, the city of saints, the city of our Savior. Consequently be glad, be proud!

THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JER. 8:4-9

"Back to God!"

The goal is to show people today in the light of their indifference and unbelief the only way to God and heaven.

Introduction: Have you ever wondered what God thinks of us here on earth—what His opinion of us as individuals and as a nation is? I have. I have often wondered what He thinks about the tremendous wealth He has given us and the small amount we return to Him for the upbuilding of His kingdom—an average of 2% of our income. I have often wondered what He thinks of the religion of our land in the light of our extensive crime and immorality, some of it even among church people. I have often wondered what He thinks of me—the opportunities and blessings He has given me—and yet how I fail Him so often, how I sin against Him so frequently.

Back in days of the Old Testament, God often spoke to the people through a prophet. Sometimes His remarks were commendatory. More often they were condemnatory. Listen, for instance, to what He tells Jeremiah to say to the people of Judah: Text.

I. Very frankly, God is disgusted with the obduracy of Judah.

A. He asks, "Shall they fall and not arise?" If a person falls on an icy sidewalk, he tries to get up and walk again, but here are God's people, who have fallen on the slippery road of sin and make no effort at all to rise again. They seem to enjoy the mire of immorality. God asks further, "Shall they turn away and not return again?" If a person makes a wrong turn on a highway, as soon as he realizes his mistake he turns back and gets on the right road. But here are these people who have made a wrong moral turn, and they make no effort to get back on the right road. They seem to enjoy the path of the backslider.

B. To make matters worse, when God's prophet, Jeremiah, tells them that they have sinned, they in feigned innocence ask, "What have we done?" They refuse to admit any wrong on their part. In fact, when Jeremiah warns them of punishment and judgment to come, they not only continue in their same wicked path, they pursue it with even greater ardor.

C. In the face of such obduracy and stubbornness the Lord says, "Why, even the dumb animals know better." For instance, the stork and crane and swallow know when to go south in order to escape the cold of winter, and they know when to return north for spring and summer, but "My people," He says, "know not the signs of the times, know not the judgment of the Lord."

D. As if all this were not enough, these people actually thought they were wise, they actually believed the Lord was with them, and they were assured of this by their scribes and priests. How easy it is for people to be deceived. How easy it is for spiritual quacks and fakes to doctor gullible souls to death.

II. I am afraid the Lord is pretty disgusted with many of us too.

A. We have our share of backsliders, our share of people who are just playing around with religion. Backsliding seems to be a popular religious sport in America.

B. We also have people who disregard their sins. Too many people believe that only things like murder and adultery and stealing are sins. Too many people are unaware that when they disobey their parents, or gossip about a neighbor, or overeat or overdrink they are not only wronging the respective individual or themselves but at the very same time they are sinning against God. "Every sin is a sin against heaven too." I am inclined to believe that there are far more people who suffer from an innocence complex in our land than from a guilt complex.

C. We also have people who believe they are wise in things religious but who are actually being deceived and are deceiving. There are the scientific-religious cults and the psychiatric, peace-of-mind churches. To be sure, science and philosophy, psychology and psychiatry all have a relation to Christianity, but never to the point where they supplant basic Christian theology. This, however, is what has been done by these cults and churches. They have stripped Christianity of the supernatural and the miraculous. They have thinned out the Law and watered down the Gospel. A noted European art critic has said that Rembrandt in his lifetime painted 700 canvasses, of which 10,000 are in America. It is not only in art that we Americans accept forgery. Many Americans accept it in the name of religion—in these cults and churches where the fatherhood of God is proclaimed without the saviorship of Jesus Christ, where peace of mind is preached apart from the sinfulness of men.

III. Back to God we must go if we have been straying from Him. This road back is not easy, very frankly, but it is necessary for your eternal welfare that you take it.

A. The road back first requires that you humble yourself before God, that you recognize Him for what He is—your Creator, Provider, and Savior; that you recognize yourself for what you are—a creature, a mortal, a helpless human being.

B. Second, the road back requires that you repent of your sins. It is very hard to say, even to God, "I am sorry." But sorry for our sins we must be, if we are to take the road back to God.

C. Third, the road back to God requires that we look to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as our Savior from sin. We cannot atone for our sins, we cannot make up for them. Try to buy your way into heaven with your

money or your good deeds and you will go bankrupt. The Scriptures say: Eph. 2:9. It is Jesus Christ who has atoned for our sins: 1 John 1:7; John 1:29; John 14:6.

1. Thus Jesus Christ is the Key. When you have found Him, you have found God.

2. And Jesus Christ is the Key to heaven. When you have accepted Him, a place in the mansions on high is yours.

Conclusion: That is the road back to God. Humble yourself before Him, repent of your sins and accept Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin. I hope you will take this road, for it will lead you straight to God and straight to heaven!

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Is. 40:26-31

"In the Midst of Affliction"

The goal is to show that we can have a victorious life despite affliction.

Introduction: Have you ever been so depressed and despondent because of trials and troubles that you were tempted to believe there is no God? Or have you ever reached the point in the midst of affliction that you were tempted to believe that if there is a God He either does not know your problems or at any rate He does not care? If you are inclined to be skeptical, cynical, or pessimistic concerning God and His care for you, then our text for today is for you. Listen: Text.

I. Our text leaves no doubt about the existence of God.

A. It simply takes His existence for granted. That is the way the Bible is throughout its 66 books. It simply assumes the existence of God beyond a shadow of doubt, e. g., Gen. 1:1.

B. This God of ours has great power.

1. He is the Creator of this universe. He

simply said, "Let there be" — and there was. He is omnipotent, almighty. God has power to help you in your affliction, no matter how serious or severe it is.

2. This God of ours is everlasting, eternal. There never was a time when He was not; there never will be a time when He is not. In other words, He will always be present to help you in your affliction.

3. Further, this God of ours is omniscient — all knowing. Our text refers to the stars in the heavens. Astronomers tell us that we can see about 2,000 stars with the naked eye. They tell us, however, that scientists of the Mt. Wilson and Palomar observatories, with their modern equipment, are able to see a billion stars. Our text tells us that God knows each of these stars by name. We learn two things from this: first, God is omniscient; second, if He knows these inanimate stars by name, He certainly knows us, His favorite creatures, by name. And if He is omniscient and knows each of us by name, you can be sure He also knows our problems and cares about them. This God of ours takes an active interest in each of us. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows us like the proverbial "book." Listen to these words of assurance from Jesus: Matt. 10:29-31. If God is concerned about a sparrow, He is even more concerned about you. Note these words: "the very hairs of your head are numbered." It is said a blond person has approximately 104,000 hairs in his head, a brunet 102,000, a red-head 88,000. Now then, if God knows the exact number of hairs in your head, you can be sure He knows your problems too. He knows all your problems. Above all, He promises to help you with them.

II. Here is His prescription. Take it and you are in for help.

A. First, trust in Him. When Harry Lauder's only son was killed in the war,

Mr. Lauder said to a friend, "When a man comes to a situation like this, there are only three ways out: there is drink, despair, God. And by God's grace, it is God for me." That is the place, the only safe place to go in time of trouble. God can and will help you.

B. When a druggist fills a prescription, he must always be concerned about using the proper ingredients, otherwise the medicine may do more harm than good; in fact, it may even kill the patient. Here, too, in this prescription, we must have the proper ingredients, lest the medicine be of no value, in fact, be harmful. It is so important that you trust in the proper God, the Triune God. Trust in any other god and you are guilty of idolatry. Or exclude Jesus Christ from your concept of God and you will never reach God in your worship or in your prayers. (John 14:6)

C. Most prescriptions give you directions as to frequency and quantity. There are directions here, too, in the midst of your problem. We are told: "Wait on the Lord."

1. To wait on the Lord means first of all to pray. Prayer is the greatest power given by God to man here on earth. Pray, therefore, in the midst of your affliction. Tap that power!

2. To wait on the Lord also means to be patient. Pray in the midst of death, sickness, family difficulties, financial troubles. But do not necessarily expect an answer after your first request is sent heavenward. God in His wisdom will answer when He knows is best and in the way He knows is best. Contrary to what we might think, health or wealth are not always to our advantage. Be sure, when you pray, that God works—and when

God works mountains are moved, mountains of problems!

D. This is what the Lord will do for you. Listen: v. 31. You trust in the Lord to help you, and you wait on the Lord in prayer and patience. He, however, may not give you physical or material relief, but this He does give you: He gives you the strength and spirit to bear your affliction, yea to surmount it. For instance, I heard some time ago of a student at a university. He was a homely sort of a fellow. Besides, he used crutches. However, he had a talent for friendliness and optimism. And he won a number of scholastic honors. One day one of his classmates asked him what was the cause of his deformity. "Polio," he answered. "But tell me," said the friend, "with a misfortune like that, how can you face the world so confidently?" "Oh," he replied and smiled as he did, "the disease never touched my heart." Yes, there are people who have been greatly afflicted, who have serious problems, yet you would never know it, because the Lord has not allowed these things to touch their heart or afflict their spirit. Because they trust in Him and wait on Him, He daily renews their strength.

Conclusion: Remember the key to a victorious life is not health or wealth for the benefit of your mind and body. It is peace and happiness for the benefit of your heart and soul. And this the Lord will give you, if you only take His prescription: Trust in Him. Wait on Him. Do that, and your strength will be renewed. Yea, you will mount up with wings as an eagle, you will run and not be weary, you will walk and not be faint!