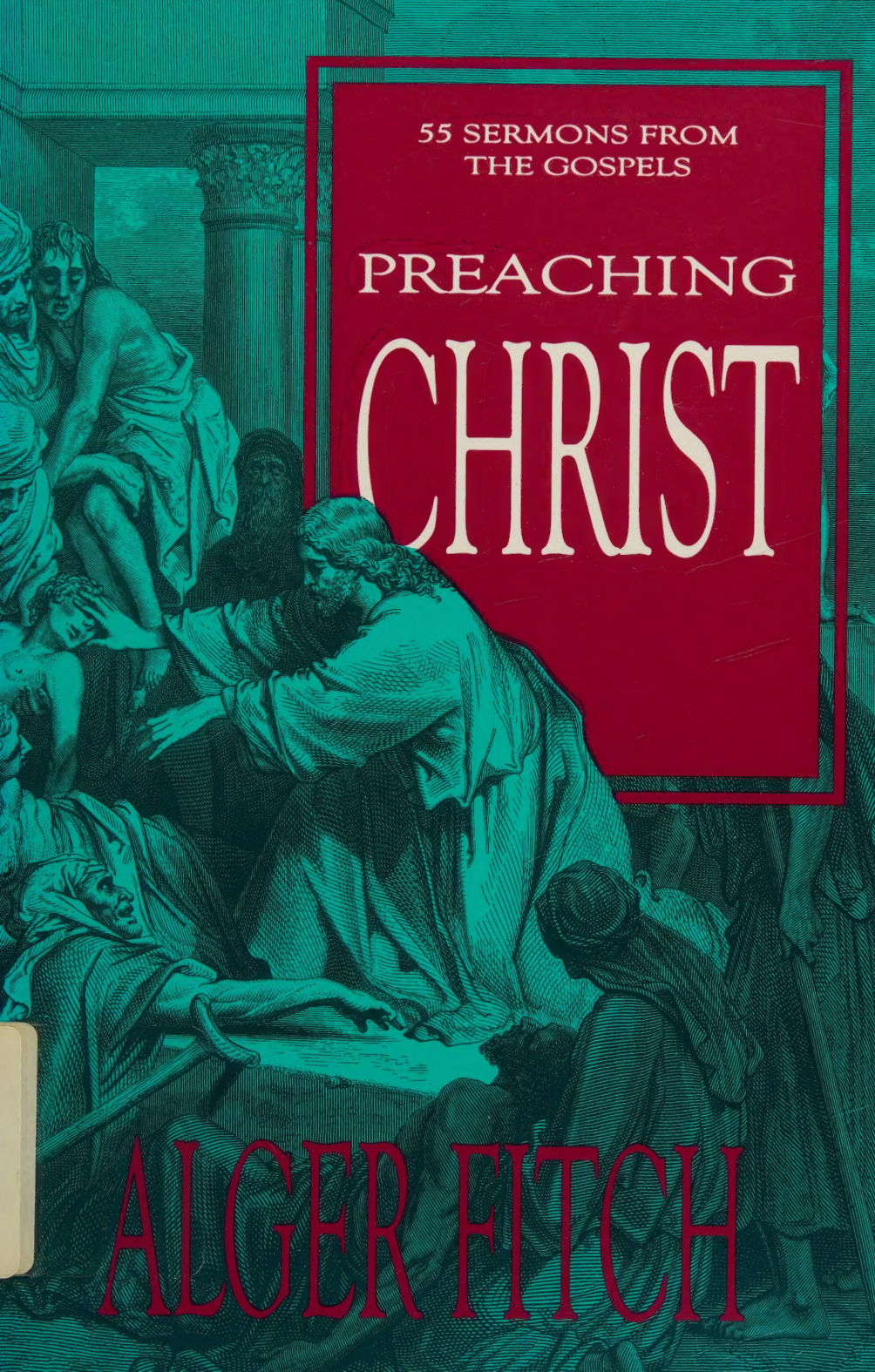

55 SERMONS FROM THE GOSPELS
PREACHING
CHRIST
ALGER FITCH

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55 SERMONS FROM
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PREFACE

The greatest honor afforded to any human being is the high joy of preaching Christ. If "the greatest story ever told" is the saga of God redeeming mankind through His Son, then the "privilege of privileges" is to herald that stirring message to hurting humanity.

Preaching and teaching the glad tidings of God's love can be done by mothers to infants at their knees, by businessmen to clients across the table, by Sunday school teachers to pupils gathered on a Lord's Day. Some will stand behind pulpits week by week and address audiences from 20 to 2,000. Be the audience but one person or many, a lifechanging response will come if the gospel story is carefully structured and lovingly told.

This small book is intended to be stimulus to your thinking as you ponder over how you will make the message of heaven come alive to your potential audience on earth.

INTRODUCTION: PREACHING THE LIFE OF CHRIST

What is meant by "preaching the life of Christ?" That question can be better answered after reminding ourselves of the meaning of "preaching" and the significance of the admonition to "preach Christ."

PREACHING

In one sense preaching is heralding the good news of Jesus. All the men and women of the Jerusalem church, when driven out of their city by persecution, "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).[1] That is, each disciple of the Lord told of Jesus' death for his or her sins, of his resurrection from the grave, and of what promise for salvation that held for those

who would receive the message (I Corinthians 15:1-7; Acts 2:38-41).

Those of us who "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:5), or, more formally, follow the congregation's call to be "evangelists" or "pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11), need to hear again the time-proven, widely accepted, definition of a sermon by the late Austen Phelps of Andover Theological Seminary. To him, only that passed for a true sermon that was "an oral address to the popular mind, upon religious truth as contained in the Scriptures, and elaborately treated with a view to persuasion."

Whether you consider yourself a small "p" or capital "P" preacher, that definition can sharpen your ministry of making Christ known.

Oral Address

The discipline of writing one's message is not disparaged when it is affirmed that sermons were meant to be heard. Alexander Campbell, for one, saw the importance of a warm human voice telling the story.[2] Something of the urgency and concern of the speaker is lost when we read what was uttered but do not hear the words enunciated, the voice projected, or see the non-verbal communication of posture, gesture and facial expression.

To The Popular Mind

It is to be hoped that the modern minister of the Word can read theological journals and enter technical discussions without embarrassing his cause. However, he is well advised to remember that the feeding of "sheep" is our mission, not the feeding of "giraffes."

We need to consider our particular audience that waits to be fed. Will our clerical robe, business suit, or open-neck shirt with jeans be a "help to" or "barrier to" the communication that must take place? Just as the wrong attire hinders and detracts from the lesson, so showing our awareness of religious jargon or the names of modern theologians could keep the listener from hearing the voice of the Spirit. Simplicity is a virtue, not a vice.

On Religious Truth As Contained In The Scriptures

In what sense is the pulpit of Christ's church a free pulpit? The freedom of the pulpit is the freedom to proclaim God's Christ and the freedom to expose the meaning of Scripture.

The Christian congregation has a right to expect its public voice "to speak where the Scriptures speak and to be silent where the Scriptures are silent."

"This one thing I do" is a safe motto for the preacher. To proclaim Americanism, one's negative or positive attitude toward labor unions, denominational views, etc.,etc.,etc. . . . is at best to substitute the human good for the divine best.

God's man must hide behind the quotation marks of the Bible. The most prejudiced man in the pew will recognize the "thus saith the Lord" and bow to it. Yet the continual "thus saith the preacher" and his personal opinions will bring division rather than harmony to the family of God.

Elaborately Treated

A verse-by-verse commenting will not pass as a sermon. One needs to pour over the divine revelation until he grasps (and is grasped by) the message the Bible writer had in mind.

Only after hours of studying the text and wrestling with its truth will you be ready to preach. The additional hours spent,

after the Divine Author's outline has been uncovered, will reveal some simple and easy-to-be-remembered way to say it.

If you choose not to use a chalkboard, overhead transparency, or some other visual aid, at least think and speak in a way that could be charted. Not only will you be more able to remember the truth you desire to present, but the people will be less apt to forget it.

With A View To Persuasion

The best of tailors would find their efforts to little avail if they failed to tie a knot in their thread.

Each of your messages needs a proposition (a single sentence that states what your message is to establish). It also needs a purpose. Know what response you seek from your audience. Only use material that contributes to knowing your single proposition and accomplishing your single purpose. To aim at everything will end in hitting nothing. Weed out all that is not essential. The message need not be long but it must be clear. As one wisely said, a sermon need not be eternal to be immortal.

I am trying to say that when you are through, sit down. You will be forgiven for quitting fifteen minutes early but not for going five minutes over. The longer you spend in thinking your message through *the more terse you can make it.*

PREACHING CHRIST

Truly Apostolic

Philip began with some verses in Isaiah 53 "and preached Jesus" to the Ethiopian (Acts 8:35). In that practice he followed apostolic example. Be it Peter, or Paul, or some other speaker,

he could hear an Old Testament text read and see Jesus in every passage.

The apostle to the Gentiles, as his custom was, would enter a synagogue. It would matter not if the text were from the Law of Moses, the Psalms of David, or one of the Prophets, it would serve as a springboard for preaching Jesus. The record tells how Paul would take the passage of the day, then he would "open and allege" from the text that the Messiah would suffer, rise again from the dead and that Jesus is Christ (Acts 17:1-3).

What this establishes is that "preaching Christ" does not demand that the Scripture passages used be drawn only from the four Gospels.

Truly Christian

The Master Preacher himself referred to the Old Covenant Scriptures saying: "You search the Scriptures, thinking that in them you have eternal life, these are they that bear witness of me" (John 5:39).

Just as Jesus, the Lamb of God, takes the seven-sealed book of the future and totally unseals it in the Book of Revelation, so he earlier took the Jewish Bible and opened its meaning to his disciples. On the way to Emmaus two of Christ's followers found that he "opened to them the Scriptures" (Luke 24:32). Everything in the law, prophets, and Psalms found their fulfillment in him (Luke 24:44).

PREACHING THE LIFE OF CHRIST

An Appealing Option

The authors Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are rightly called Evangelists . . . .i.e. preachers of Christ. The books

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are known as the Gospels . . . i.e. Sermons.

The Gospel of Mark is termed *predict*, or preaching, by the scholars. The brief sermons of Acts compare to Mark's gospel according to C. H. Dodd. Matthew, Luke and John also bring the same saving message to their churches "that they may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing they may have life in his name" (John 20: 30.31).

It seems that such great sermons from the apostolic era would be a logical base for 20th century sermons on the eternally relevant Christ.

An Abundant Resource

What Jesus did and taught is the material recorded in the four Gospels (Acts 1:1). Since thirty days of Jesus' thirty-three years of life is all that is told, we can be sure that every incident and message is of supreme importance.

Twenty-eight chapters in Matthew plus sixteen in Mark plus twenty-four in Luke plus twenty-one in John equals eighty-nine chapters of basic material on Jesus and His gospel. Not only is the Biblical information extensive, but the commentaries and helps in your public or private libraries are ready to assist you in your in-depth investigation.

There is no shortage of helpful commentaries on the Gospels. With concordances, dictionaries, lexicons, etc. at your fingertips you can supplement your devotional study. But the place to begin is the reading, rereading, meditating and reading again of your own Bible. By asking the primary question of who is speaking? to whom? why? and so on, you can get started. The other resources will help you check your understanding for accuracy.

An Exciting Experience

A preacher and his congregation can enjoy walking in the footsteps of Jesus for a self-determined period of time. Since each separate sermon is to be a self-contained unit, the interest will not wane no matter how long the series.

No other topic should challenge the Christian more than to study his Lord's life and message. The members of the congregation can study the same body of Scripture that their minister shall immerse himself in for the week. His additional hours of preparation and his training in Biblical exegesis should bring to the church members discoveries of even further light.

YOUR PREACHING OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST

Be a Preacher, Not a Parrot

No man can preach another man's sermons. This book is only to serve as an encouragement. It is intended to affirm in you the confidence that you can preach Christ . . . you can search the Scriptures and find God's message for His people . . . you can absorb yourself in your Bible and bear witness to its message. Anytime your mind is tired and nothing seems to come, then look and see how somebody else did it. That might be all it takes to get you started. Don't be content until you have created a sermon that is your own. Make it better than any other you have ever read. Work on it till it is better than any other you have preached before.

Next Sunday's message should be like the lambs offered in the temple . . . that is, it should be without spot and blemish. Our King deserves our best. Nothing offered to God ought to be carelessly prepared or delivered.

Be a Teacher, Not Just a Talker

Think of the man-hours wasted, if you use up 20 or 30 minutes and yet do not say something vital. It won't just happen. You must pay the price.

When you preach a series, buying some additional helps in that area will be money well spent. But, the cost of time rather than money, is in my mind.

"Discipline" is a demanding word. "Stewardship" is another. My congregation will be best served if I balance my responsibilities for the week. I need to spend hours in the Word, so I know God's message for the people. I must give some time with my people, making housecalls, or I will not know their hurts and needs. It is essential that I spend some hours each week with the lost. Jesus did. I must, or I'll forget why the church is here. And, last but not least, I dare not forget to give prime time to my family, the most important members of every preacher's congregation. Unless that unit of the Lord's body goes well, the entire ministry is in vain.

Be a Gospel Herald, Not a Gloom Harbinger

"Don't preach to me!" cries a child or adult that does not understand what preaching is. Gospel means Good News. Evangelism is telling the glad tidings.

Just before you write *finis* on the message you are preparing, recheck your definition of preaching. Will what you plan to say build up, cheer up, stir up (1 Corinthians 14:3)? Does it bring balm to the soul? Is it meant to lift hearts and encourage God's people?

If your words will sound like "a bawling out," tear up the sermon and start afresh. The gospel sound is needed. Trumpet

forth God's love, redemption and forgiveness.

Ready, get set, go . . . into the world with God's Good News.

Endnotes

1. Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Revision, 1901.
2. *The Millennial Harbinger*, Series III, Volune VII (Bethany, Va. 1850), p. 75.

SERMON SUGGESTIONS

ETERNAL YEARS OF PRE-EXISTENCE

SERMON 1

Suggested Incident
Incarnation

Suggested Scripture
John 1:1-17

Suggested Title
Everybody Ought To Know Who Jesus Is

Suggested Outline

Jesus is:

I. THE SOURCE OF ALL REVELATION (John 1:1, 2)
II. THE SOURCE OF ALL CREATION (John 1:3)
III. THE SOURCE OF ALL LIFE (John 1:4)
IV. THE SOURCE OF ALL LIGHT (John 1:5-9)
V. THE SOURCE OF ALL REGENERATION (John 1:10-13)
VI. THE SOURCE OF ALL GRACE (John 1:14-17)

Textual Highlights

Jesus is called the "Word" in John's Gospel (John 1:1, 14), his epistle (I John 1:1) and his apocalypse (Revelation 19:13). A word is a vehicle of thought. We express ourselves through words. We speak our ideas and write our thoughts. We can also dramatize or act out what we choose to communicate.

God has made his will for men known orally through prophets and apostles. That oral word, when penned, became the written word of Scripture. The heavenly Father's clearest revelation of his love and grace became visible in the incarnate life of his only-begotten Son, Jesus.

Just as the ancient Bible of the Jews began, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1), John's Gospel starts with the reminder, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made through him" (John 1:1-3). Throughout the following chapters miracle after miracle will be a "sign" pointing to the Christ's Sonship with the Father. Creative power is Divine power. Who but God can raise the dead and give "life" (1:4), as Jesus did to Lazarus (chapter 11)? Who but the Creator can bring "light . . . in the darkness" (1:4), causing those born blind to see clearly (chapter 9)? Who but "the only begotten from the Father" could give to believers the "right to become children of God" (1:12-14), as explained to Nicodemus (chapter 3)?

He who is seen to heal at Bethesda (chapter 5) and feed multitudes by the Galilean sea (chapter 6) can be no less than "Lord and . . . God," as Thomas belatedly testifies (John 20:28). No other human could claim our unwavering allegiance. No other mortal would find the masses flocking to him as he called himself "the good shepherd" (10:11) or "the resurrection, and the life" (11:25). Who else could offer total forgiveness and create unending hope?

The prelude of the Gospel (1:1-17) suggests to each reader some of the great themes to be developed in the following chapters. The initial embryonic faith of the opening lines crescendos page after page to the writings climax: "believing ye may have life in his name" (20:31).

EARLY YEARS OF PREPARATION

SERMON 2

Suggested Incident
Incarnation

Suggested Scripture
John 1:14

Suggested Title
Christmas Ties

Suggested Outline

I. THE CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS TIE THE WORLD TOGETHER
   A. From Palestine the manger scene
   B. From Germany the tree (Boniface)
   C. From Holland the stocking (Nicholas)
   D. From Ireland the light in the window
   E. From England/France the carols and cards

II. THE CHRISTMAS CAROLS TIE THE CHURCH TOGETHER
   A. A Unitarian wrote "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"
   B. An Anglican wrote "O Little Town of Bethlehem"
   C. A Methodist wrote "Hark the Herald Angels"
   D. A Lutheran wrote "Away in a Manger"
   E. A Catholic wrote "Silent Night"
   F. The Restoration principle is established when unity is in the person of Christ

III. THE CHRISTMAS EVENT TIES HEAVEN AND EARTH TOGETHER
   A. Jesus is truly God
   B. Jesus is truly man

Textual Highlights

"And the Word became flesh." He who is over history came into history. The Transcendent became immanent;"Immanuel: which is, being interpreted, God with us" (Matthew 1:23). This is no fairy tale about a man becoming deified, but the true account of God entering our world in the person of his Son. He "dwelt" or "tabernacled" among us. The author John joins the other apostolic witnesses affirming, "we beheld his glory." In another place he declares to have "heard . . . seen . . . and handled:" God's Word (I John 1:1).

The incarnation is a central Christian doctrine. It is worthy of celebration, as is the conquest of death by Jesus' resurrection. At the seasons known by the world as "Christmas" and "Easter," these basic beliefs of the ancient church become highlighted. Where can we see "grace and truth" so beautifully wedded than we do at Jesus' birth (the beginning of the story) and his resurrection (the climax of the story)?

SERMON 3

Suggested Incident
Virgin Birth

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 1:18-25

Suggested Title
I Believe the Christmas Story

Suggested Outline

I. IS THE VIRGIN BIRTH PERTINENT?
   A. It is pertinent to faith in the Scripture
   B. It is pertinent to faith in the Christ
   C. It is pertinent to faith in the Church
   D. It is pertinent to faith in the Supernatural

II. IS THE VIRGIN BIRTH POSSIBLE?
   A. "Parthenogenesis" (virgin birth) is the scientific word for life's lowest forms
   B. Human manipulation raises this to higher levels
   C. Divine intervention could raise this to the human level

III. IS THE VIRGIN BIRTH PROBABLE?
   A. It is historical (i.e. the New Testament accounts)
   B. It is predicted (i.e. the Old Testament prophecies)
   C. It is expected (i.e. a unique person suggests a unique origin)

IV. IS THE VIRGIN BIRTH PROVEN?
   A. The witnesses are trustworthy
   B. The documents are reliable
   C. The alternatives are wanting

Textual Highlights

Without apology, excuse or hesitation Matthew, like Luke, affirms Jesus' virgin birth. To be more exact, Matthew believed his Lord to have been "born" like all other men, but to have been "conceived" miraculously. This conception in the womb of the virgin was before she and Joseph "came together" (verse 1). The "Holy Spirit" is asserted to be responsible for the conception (verses 18, 20). Matthew applies the Isaiah 7:14 passage to the event.

This conviction was not necessitated by the apostles' low view of the place of sex in marriage. Christ's apostles not only believed in marriage but were married men themselves (1 Corinthians 9:5). Their Old Testament priests had been joined in wedlock and they encouraged the New Testament bishops and deacons to prove their worthiness by their family life (1 Timothy 3:2, 12).

SERMON 4

Suggested Incident
Genealogical Lists

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:3-38

Suggested Title
Jesus' Family Tree

Suggested Outline

Introduction
"What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?"

I. JESUS IS THE SON OF PATRIARCHS
Adam, Noah, Abraham, Issac, Jacob, Judah,

II. JESUS IS THE SON OF KINGS
David, Solomon, Righteous Kings, Wicked Kings

III. JESUS IS THE SON OF SINNERS
Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, Mary

IV. JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD

Textual Highlights

Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:3-38 are the genealogical lists tracing Jesus' family tree. There are many similarities and also

significant differences. Varied interpretations and explanations are offered for the divergencies, as you will find in consulting the innumerable commentaries available.

Matthew is writing for Jews. He wants to establish from the beginning of his work that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. Christ's genealogical list is evidence number one. He is a descendant of both David the king and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jewish memories go back to the call of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) and the further promises to Isaac and Jacob (Hebrews 11:9). No later human born in Korea, India or America can claim to fulfill the ancient Scriptures. No male or female with a lineage from other than King David meets the prophetic demands. Jesus, who was born King of the Jews (2:2) and in the city of David (1:1, 2), has a line traceable through that king to Abraham. This son of David will conquer "all the nations" (28:19), as "many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (8:11).

Since the numerical value of the name David is fourteen, Matthew divides his genealogical list into three sets of fourteen names (1:17). Some think that this Gospel traces Jesus' legal right to the throne by giving Joseph's lineage, for he was the foster father.

Luke is presumed to be giving Jesus' blood line through his mother Mary. As a Gentile, Luke chooses to trace Jesus farther back than Abraham, the father of the Jews, to Adam, the father of all humankind. We need to recall that the earliest copies of Luke's writings were in Greek and not English. It is also good to recall that the Greek uncial manuscripts contained no punctuation marks. So when we read: "And Jesus himself . . . being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the *son* of Heli, the *son* of Matthat. . . . " (Luke 3:23, 24), we need to note that

the brackets are additions to Luke's original. That is true also of the italicized word "son." Move the concluding bracket two words to the right. Now it reads: "being the son (as was supposed of Joseph)." Reasoning this way Mary could be the descendant of Heli being referred to.

OBSCURE YEAR OF
INTRODUCTION

SERMON 5

Suggested Incident
Temptation in the Wilderness

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 4:1-11

Suggested Title
Temptations of a Kingdom Builder

Suggested Outline

Introduction
- A. Temptation immediately followed baptism (Christ's anointing)
- B. Temptation related to the announced kingdom

I. OUR KING REJECTED THE MATERIALISM ROAD (1-4)

II. OUR KING REJECTED THE MIRACLE ROAD (5-7)

III. OUR KING REJECTED THE MILITARY ROAD (8-10)

Textual Highlights

Matthew has recorded the genealogy of the King (Chapter 1), the birth of the King (Chapter 2), the anointing of the King (Chapter 3) and now a major battle of that King (Chapter 4). The primary question has to do with the kind of kingdom Jesus will inaugurate. John the Baptist had been making "ready the

way of the Lord," as he cried out: "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (3:2, 3).

There is a close connection between baptism and temptation. In our case, baptism marks our moving from Satan's domain into the realm of the Lord. The devil has lost a servant. It is no surprise that the tempter will lure back to his way every believer that he can seduce. He ever as "a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Every son of Adam knows "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life" (1 John 2:16). When the second Adam began the new creation, he who was sinless called on men to let God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). Our baptism saw the burial of all our past sins and marked a new beginning. We arose to live a new way.

He, who was without sin, identified himself with the sinners he came to save, when he joined them in baptism. The anointing into his kingship designated the beginning of his ministry. As Jesus' final acts of death and resurrection will assure the defeat of man's enemy, Christ's temptation victory will define the nature of his kingdom.

Will Jesus, like the kings before and after his time, gain allegiance by promising "bread?" Can God's will for mankind be obtained simply by raising the human's living conditions? Jesus' response to the temptation of going the way of economic betterment, reveals his insight that man needs bread, but not "bread alone." Christ's heavenly-given powers will be used for the saving of man and not the amazing of dupes (cp. Matthew 7:22, 23). He will build heaven's kingdom by God's methods.

SERMON 6

Suggested Incident
Jesus Makes His First Disciples

Suggested Scripture
John 1:35-51

Suggested Title
When Six of One Became a Half-dozen of the Other

Suggested Outline

Introduction
A Study of John's Men Becoming Christ's Men

I. NOTE HOW THE SIX BECAME DISCIPLES OF CHRIST
   A. The Baptist won his pupils (35-39)
   B. Andrew and John won their brothers (40-42)
   C. Philip won his friends and neighbors (43-50)

II. NOTE WHY THE SIX BECAME DISCIPLES OF CHRIST
   A. They saw Jesus to be the Lamb of God (36)
   B. They saw Jesus to be the Messiah (41)
   C. They saw Jesus to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament (45)
   D. They saw Jesus to be the Son of God (49)
   E. They saw Jesus to be the King of Israel (49)

Textual Highlights

We are given more information on the last week of Jesus' life than on the preceding thirty-three years. However, John in his first chapter suggests how busy each day of Christ's stay on earth would be, by showing some incidents in an early typical week of the Master's ministry. Catch the words: "On the morrow" (1:29) and, "Again on the morrow" (1:35). Note they are followed by still another "On the morrow" (4:43). Observe then the phrase, "And the third day" (2:1).

The passion week at the end of the story is called to mind at every communion service of your Church. It will be good for us also to remember that the earlier planting is an essential to full-grown crops. The flaming evangelists of the church recorded in Acts got their start in the earlier days of Jesus' preaching-teaching ministry. "First the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear" (Mark 4:28). First disciples must be recruited, then developed and trained, and only then sent out to serve. Enrollment in the school goes before the learning which precedes graduation and life-work. This text takes us back to those early days. It suggests to us how workers can be recruited. It reminds us of facts about Jesus that build faith.

SERMON 7

Suggested Incident
The Woman at the Well

Suggested Scripture
John 4:1-42

Suggested Title
The Bad Samaritan

Suggested Outline

Introduction
- A. Jesus reached out to groups (mass evangelism)
- B. Jesus reached out to individuals (personal evangelism)

I. MASTER THE MASTER'S METHOD
- A. You need to make a contact (John 4:1-6)
- B. You start a friendly conversation (John 4:7-9)
- C. You guide the conversation to spiritual things (John 4: 10-15)
- D. You lead the person to realize his/her need (John 4:16-19)
- E. You keep to the subject (John 4:20-25)
- F. You point to the solution (John 4:26)

II. BE ANSWERED BY THE MASTER'S PASSION
- A. Realize the high calling of soul-winning (John 4:34)
- B. Realize the present urgency of soul-winning (John 4:35)
- C. Realize the great rewards of soul-winning (John 4:36)
- D. Realize the moral obligation of soul-winning (John 4:37)
- E. Realize the unending consequences of soul-winning (John 4:39-42)

Textual Highlights

Until a man knows hunger, he does not look for food. Before you seek a Doctor, you recognize that you need one. Jesus knew that the Samaritan must see her need for cleansing before she would desire to be washed.

A conviction of sin goes before a conversion to Christ. This woman will try to alter her own life by her own power as long as she can. But a self-reliance that she could overcome a few personal deficiencies was not what the woman at the well needed. Upon seeing herself as a sinner, a rebel against God's will, she finally was ready for "the Saviour of the world" (4:41). While at first he was "a Jew" (4:9), "Sir" (4:11), "a prophet" (4:19) and "the Christ" (4:29), he became "Saviour" when self-pride was replaced by self-need.

SERMON 8

Suggested Incident
The Woman at the Well

Suggested Scripture
John 4:20-24

Suggested Title
Worship As It Ought To Be

Suggested Outline

I. IT MATTERS WHO YOU WORSHIP ("FATHER")
(The right object is God alone)
A. That is the message at Sinai (Exodus 20:3)
B. That is the message in the Wilderness (Matthew 4:10)
C. That is the message on Patmos (Revelation 19:20; 22:8, 9)
D. That is the message in Caesarea (Acts 10:20)
E. That is the message at Lystra (Acts 14:13-15)
F. That is the message at Carmel (I Kings 18:21)
G. That is the message at Samaria (John 4:23)

II. IT MATTERS HOW YOU WORSHIP ("TRUTH")
(The right manner is revealed)
A. There ought to be Apostolic teaching
B. There ought to be fellowship
C. There ought to be breaking of bread
D. There ought to be prayers

III. IT MATTERS WHY YOU WORSHIP ("SPIRIT")
(The right motive is essential)
A. Else our music is unacceptable (Amos 5:21-24)
B. Else our money is unacceptable (Matthew 5:25)
C. Else our communion is unacceptable (1 Corinthians 11:20-22)
D. Else our prayer is unacceptable (Hebrews 11:6, Proverbs 28:9)

Textual Highlights

What matters in worship is not where your body is, be it Gerizim ("this mountain") or Zion ("in Jerusalem" John 4:20). The essential is where your heart is. Worship is worth-ship. What do you hold as of highest value or most supreme worth?

SERMON 9

Suggested Incident
Paralytic Lowered Through Peter's Roof

Suggested Scripture
Mark 1:1-12

Suggested Title
The Quartet That Raised the Roof

Suggested Outline

I. THE DETERMINATION OF THE MEN (1-4)

II. THE MINISTRATION OF THE LORD (5)

III. THE CONSTERNATION OF THE SCRIBES (6, 7)

IV. THE VERIFICATION OF THE WORD (8-12)

Textual Highlights

"I believe in miracles, I've seen a soul set free," goes the hymn of Carlton Buck, a long-time minister in the Christian Church. "I believe in miracles" is an obvious message in the entire Gospel of Mark. John Mark had seen Jesus work the wonders that declared him to be "the Christ" (Mark 8:29). Mark's missionary experience with the Lord's ambassadors allowed him to record that "they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the

word by the signs that followed" (Mark 16:20). One such faith-building and Christ-exalting miracle is the healing of the paralytic, as told in Mark's second chapter.

The teacher is in "his own city" (Matthew 9:1) and "in the house" (Mark 2:1). He is doing his divinely given task of communicating the good-news of God (Isaiah 61:1). Since actions speak as well as words, the lesson of God's love will be established by the accompanying healing. It is good to recall the purpose of Jesus' coming to our world. Mark has described the preaching of John the Baptist (1:4-8) and has related how "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God" (1:14). He has recalled how the Saviour early called and trained others to be "fishers of men" (1:17). When multitudes pressed him to do constant miracles, he made clear his primary mission was the message. Hear his words: "Let us go elsewhere unto the next towns, that I may preach there also; for to this end came I forth" (1:38). The miracle of chapter two not only illustrates the message, it establishes Christ's right to offer his message of forgiveness.

We see Jesus in the posture of teacher, as "he spake the word unto them" (2:2). The message to all the audience was personified in the one sick of the palsy. "Son, thy sins are forgiven" (2:9). The grand manifestation of divine Sonship was overwhelming. "Which is easier, to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins . . . I say unto thee Arise" (2:9, 10). Now, its truth established, the gospel is to be preached "to the whole creation" (16:15).

SERMON 10

Suggested Incident
Call of Matthew

Suggested Scripture
Luke 5:27-32

Suggested Title
A Tax Collector Who Quit His Job

Suggested Outline

I. WHAT JESUS DID FOR MATTHEW
   A. He took away his sins
   B. He took away his reproach

II. WHAT MATTHEW DID FOR JESUS
   A. He served him with pen and ink
      (The Gospel of Matthew)
   B. He served him with knives and forks (29-32).

Textual Highlights

"They that are in health have no need of a physician; but they that are sick" (Luke 5:31). Nothing could be plainer. In the opinion of Jesus, the sick are not untrue to their faith when they seek out a doctor. To go to a medical practitioner may seem a wrong action to readers of Mary Baker Eddy. To take medicine may appear a renunciation of God's promises to a few evangelists that conduct faith-healing campaigns. Yet, "the

anointing . . . with oil" has place with the "prayer of faith" (James 5:14, 15), according to Jesus' half-brother. More importantly, the Great Physician himself joins together "they that are sick" and the "need of a physician."

As vital as that truth is, its application is of even greater magnitude. "I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (5:32). As surely as the sick need a doctor, the lost need a Saviour. The Master is uttering an answer to the Pharisees' criticism of his eating and drinking "with the publicans and sinners" (5:30). It is appropriate for doctors to spend prime time with those who are weak, sickly and about to die. It is inappropriate for Christians to use most of their waking hours with those of like precious faith. The cure for the leprosy of sin will not fulfill its healing mission unless brought to the very ones for which it was created.

Levi (Matthew) had the wisdom to know that his fellow tax collectors would not feel welcome at the local synagogue. He was sure they gladly would come to his house. There, over a meal, they could meet Jesus. In that comfortable surrounding they could learn from Jesus' lips words about God's love for everyone. How can "the wrong kind of people" learn of God, when heaven's messengers only associate with themselves? The words "preach the gospel" are preceded by the orders "Go ye into all the world" and followed by the phrase "the whole creation" (Mark 16:15).

If Jesus did not allow the murmuring of the scribes to keep him from mingling with sinners, should we? That is our mission.

POPULAR YEAR OF

PUBLIC FAVOR

SERMON 11

Suggested Incident
A Sabbath Controversy

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 12:1-14

Suggested Title
Spying for the Jerusalem F.B.I.

Suggested Outline

Introduction

Luke 6:7 makes clear that the Pharisees spied on Jesus. He charges them with three indictments:

I. *F*ORSAKING SCRIPTURES (1-8)
   A. About David (3, 4)
   B. About Priests (5, 6)
   C. About Hosea (7)
   D. About Jesus (8)

II. *B*YPASSING PRINCIPLES (9-12)
   A. It is right to help save (11)
   B. It is right to do good (12)

III. *I*NDICTING THEMSELVES (13, 14)
   A. They plotted murder (14)
   B. They joined with Herodians (Mark 3:6)

Textual Highlights

Jesus went about doing good. But he had his critics. Christ was without sin. Yet he was spoken against. Learn from God's Son. Do not let discouragers keep you from doing the Father's will. Do not allow the rebukes of the world to stop you from loving, caring and sharing.

Matthew 12:1-8 tells of Jesus rising to the defense of his disciples when they were charged with breaking the Sabbath. The Lord knew the difference between the beneficial laws of God and the burdening rules of men. Legalism cramps and pains the world. Freedom to do God's good will lifts men to spiritual heights.

Matthew 12:9-14 speaks of the carping complaints at Jesus for healing a man's withered hand on a Saturday. They sought "how they might destroy him" (12:14). He sought "to do good on the sabbath day" (12:12). They united with their former enemies, the Herodians (Mark 3:6), in sealing Jesus' death. How strange that the Deceiver can blind religionists' eyes. He causes them to overlook the command, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13), while swearing allegiance to the fourth of the ten commandments, "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). He who understood that the "sabbath was made for man" (Mark 2:27), looked at them with "anger . . . grieved at the hardening of their heart" (Mark 3:5).

SERMON 12

Suggested Incident
Selection of the Twelve Apostles

Suggested Scripture
Mark 3:11-19

Suggested Title
What Christ Wants in His Preachers

Suggested Outline

Introduction
- A. The meaning of names
- B. Christ gave names to disciples suggestive of qualities desired

I. CHRIST WILLS PROCLAIMERS TO BE FILLED WITH CONSECRATION (Mark 3:11-15)

II. CHRIST WILLS PROCLAIMERS TO BE FIRM IN CONVICTION (Mark 3:16)
Peter means rock

III. CHRIST WILLS PROCLAIMERS TO BE FAR-REACHING IN COVERAGE (Mark 3:18)
Boanerges means sort of thunder

IV. CHRIST WILLS PROCLAIMERS TO BE FLAMING WITH CONCERN (Mark 3:19)
Zealotes or Cananaean means zealous

Textual Highlights

Do not let the new paragraph, beginning at Mark 3:13, break off the flow of thought from what precedes. Unclean spirits told the truth concerning Jesus: "Thou art the Son of God." That is the very truth upon which the church was to be built (Matthew 16:16-18). However, message and messenger are so intertwined that it matters who gives the news as well as what that news is. Are the demons of hell to be fit vessels for the word from heaven? Shall contaminated cups be the conveyors of God's living water? Will slaves of the Devil be the announcers "to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound" (Isaiah 61:1)?

The destroyer of souls has "no truth in him . . . he is a liar, and the father thereof" (John 8:44). Anyone who would accept the truth from such a corrupt source would receive all else coming from the pit of the abyss. Jesus who is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) wants his messengers to live lives worthy of that gospel. The world would rather see a sermon than simply hear one. The bearers of the glad tidings of redemption are to be a living demonstration of the gospel's power to transform. Men listened to Paul preach "the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16), because they knew he had been "chief" of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). To read the names of the appointed apostles is to be reminded of common men of weakness who Jesus' touch enabled to do uncommon deeds of life-altering power.

SERMON 13

Suggested Incident
Sermon on the Mount

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 5, 6 and 7

Suggested Title
A Mountain-top Experience

Suggested Outline

I. CHRIST MAKES A HIGHER DEMAND (Matthew 5)
   A. The attitude of love demands more than not doing acts of murder (21-26)
   B. The attitude of love demands more than not doing acts of adultery (27-30)
   C. The attitude of love demands more than not doing acts of divorce (31, 32)
   D. The attitude of love demands more than not doing acts of swearing (33-37)
   E. The attitude of love demands more than not doing acts of revenge (38-42)
   F. The attitude of love demands more than not doing acts of limited love (43-48)

II. CHRIST SEEKS A HIGHER DEVOTION (Matthew 6)
   A. Real generosity is for the help of our brothers (2-4)
   B. Real prayer is for the ears of our Father (5-15)
   C. Real sacrifice is for the need of our souls (16-18)
   D. Real trust is for the security of our future (19-34)

III. CHRIST WANTS A HIGHER DEMONSTRATION (Matthew 7)

A. The evidence is concern, not censure (1-12)
B. The evidence is control, not crowds (13, 14)
C. The evidence is character, not chatter (15-20)
D. The evidence is condescension, not confusion (21)
E. The evidence is charisma, not claims (22, 23)

Conclusion: Matthew 7:24-29

Textual Highlights

The beatitudes made clear who will be "blessed" through the ministry of Jesus. It will be those who sense their need for a Saviour.

SERMON 14

Suggested Incident
Sermon On the Mount

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 7:7

Suggested Title
Lord, Teach Us to Punctuate

Suggested Outline

I. EVERYONE WHO ASKS RECEIVES? (QUESTION MARK)
The doubter's rendition

II. EVERYONE WHO ASKS RECEIVES. (PERIOD)
The nominal Christian's rendition

III. EVERYONE WHO ASKS RECEIVES! ! ! (EXCLAMATION POINT)
The prayer-warrior's rendition

Textual Highlights

Some have likened the Sermon on the Mount to varied beads of beauty strung together. The implication is that Matthew has pieced together, in his chapters 5, 6, and 7, exerpts from the Lord's teaching on various occasions. Especially that is presumed to be the case in 7:1-12. The short paragraphs are labeled "disconnected" or "disjointed."

I prefer to think of a united message intended to inform "the multitudes" and "his disciples" (5:1) of the high cost of being his followers. Jesus knew that the scribes and Pharisees strove harder than all others to do God's will. To them the Master Teacher made this astounding demand: "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven" (5:20).

Chapter 5 shows the standards for those that choose Christ as king will exceed even those brought through Moses at Sinai. Chapter 6 demonstrates that ritualistic acts of worship will not satisfy the God who looks for reality and righteousness over form. The last chapter of this sermon contrasts the Christlike attitude that will mark believers in the Christian era from the judgmental spirit that was found among some in ancient Israel.

To my mind, 7:1 is the opening statement: "Judge not." Many hearers knew pharisaic religionists who majored at criticizing others. Jesus wishes those who follow him to be a blessing to their neighbors and not a burden. Their lips were not meant to tear down a brother in the community's eyes, but to lift up a fallen brother through supportive prayer. There is no discontinuity to move from condemnation (7:1) to intercession (7:7). It is the logic of Jesus to remind us why God gave us mouths. Most assuredly our Creator did not give us tongues to sting one another through criticism. He equipped us with lips to call upon the Father for their well-being. To "ask," to "seek," to "knock" at heaven's door is a redemptive ministry.

Every believer remembers that he is a sinner graciously forgiven. The "mote" in a brother's eye is nothing compared to the "beam" in one's own. As a human also hungering and thirsting "after righteousness," he will use his tongue to tell all he meets where to find Life's Bread.

SERMON 15

Suggested Incident
John the Baptist's Questioning

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 11:2-30

Suggested Title
Jesus, the Doubt Remover

Suggested Outline

I. REMOVING DOUBTS ABOUT JESUS (Matthew 11:2-6)
   A. John's body was Herod's prisoner (2)
   B. John's spirit was Christ's prisoner (3)
   C. John's ears were to hear the evidence (4-6)

II. REMOVING DOUBTS ABOUT JOHN (Matthew 11:7-11)
   A. John is not fickle (7)
   B. John is not soft (8)
   C. John is a prophet and more (9-10)
   D. John is the greatest of men (11)

III. REMOVING DOUBTS ABOUT JUDGEMENT (Matthew 11:12-24)
   A. To reject Christ is to reject God's kingdom (12-15)
   B. To reject Christ is to reject God's plan (Luke 7:29, 30)
   C. To reject Christ is to reject good reason (16-19)
   D. To reject Christ is to reject God's mercy (20-24)

IV. REMOVING DOUBTS ABOUT JUSTIFICATION (Matthew 11:25-30)

A. Justification is by faith (25, 26)

B. Justification is through Christ (27)

C. Justification is at one's "coming" to Christ (28-30)

Textual Highlights

East of the Dead Sea at Machaerus, John the Baptist has languished in prison for a year. Word of Christ's benevolent miracles reaches his ears. Since Jesus has the power and bestows release from disease to others, why does he not give this freedom from Herod's bondage to his forerunner? Has Jesus a list of favorites and John is not among them? After all, he was the chosen "voice" to cry in the wilderness and made known the king's coming. The Baptizer was even kin to Jesus through his mother.

When a present day telecast tells of a miracle of healing and deliverance some voices cry, "Hallelujah!" Other hearts cry out, "Why was I left out?" Such questioning is in John's mind. He has no doubt as to who Jesus is. He was there when the voice from heaven called Jesus God's Son and the Holy Spirit came upon Heaven's Anointed. Could those contemporaries be correct who expected a second Messiah? Were the prophecies about a "suffering servant of the Lord" speaking of a different coming one than the Scriptures that announced a coming "king?" Firm believers can have honest questions.

SERMON 16

Suggested Incident

Healing of a Centurion's Servant and Raising a Widow's Son

Suggested Scripture

Luke 7:1-17

Suggested Title

Destination: Cemetery

Suggested Outline

I. THERE IS HOPE FOR THE DYING (Luke 7:1-10)
   A. Note the heart-breaking situation (1, 2)
   B. Note the heart-breaking plea (3-5)
   C. Note the heart-breaking question (6, 7)
   D. Note the heart-breaking faith (7-10)
   E. Note the heart-breaking declaration (Matthew 8:11, 12)

II. THERE IS HOPE FOR THE DEAD (Luke 7:11-17)
   A. Jesus sees (11-13)
   B. Jesus cares (13, 14)
   C. Jesus speaks (15-17)

Textual Highlights

Luke, the Gentile, knows that Christ walked the roads of Palestine but let his blessing flow freely on non-Jews both in and out of that land. Luke 7:2-10 is such a recollection. It has to do with a Roman centurion. This military man was

impressed by the sanity of monotheism and the magnetic pull of the moral ideals upheld by the Decalogue. His respect for the God of Israel led him to show his appreciation by erecting the synagogue in Capernaum. His sincere love for the Hebrew people was felt by its elders.

The centurion's grasp of what servanthood meant is instructive to those who with Paul and Timothy count themselves "servants (bondslaves) of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:1). The Roman understood the position of "a man set under authority" (Luke 7:7). If the order is "Go . . . he goeth." Should the command be "Come . . . he cometh." When the imperative is "Do this," no arguments are offered or excuses suggested. Total submission to the will of the commander is completely expected and immediately given.

The Biblical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers carries the connotation that all followers of Jesus are servants. We chose freedom by willing subjection to Christ's every command. It does not take much imagination to see the centurion's soldiers as typical of the "Christian soldiers marching as to war." If our King at the table in an upper room said, "this do" in remembrance of me (I Corinthians 11:25), no loyal soldier of the cross will go AWOL, "forsaking . . . assembling together" (Hebrews 11:25). Should the order from headquarters be "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them" (Matthew 28:19), only a deserter would run away from the battle for souls.

SERMON 17

Suggested Incident

The Anointing of Christ's Feet by a Sinful Woman

Suggested Scripture

Luke 7:36-50

Suggested Title

Psychoanalyzing a Psychotic Psychoanalyst

Suggested Outline

I. OBSERVE THE SYMPTOM: LACK OF SERVICE
(Luke 7:36-38)

II. OBSERVE THE SYMPTOM: LACK OF LOVE
(Luke 7:40-46)

III. OBSERVE THE SYMPTOM: LACK OF FAITH
(Luke 7:50)

IV. OBSERVE THE SYMPTOM: LACK OF TRUTH
(Luke 7:39, 47)

CONCLUSION: LACK OF FORGIVENESS
(Luke 7:48)

Textual Highlights

Jesus never turned down an invitation to dine. He gladly accepted the opportunity to break bread with the tax collectors at Matthew's house. It was such men he had come "to seek and to save" (Luke 19:10). Rumor had it that "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" (Luke 15:2). Many a scene in the Gospels portrayed Jesus breaking the Bread of Life with his disciples in some upper room. But there was something unique in the meal described in Luke 7:36-50. Here the Teacher was not reclining at table with acknowledged sinners or professed disciples. In this account the host, a Pharisee, was Jesus' negative critic.

It is likely that a synagogue service had concluded and the Pharisee had invited the Lord to come to his house. That would afford time to learn more about this one, whose popularity with the masses was getting out of hand. When a woman off the street that had learned God's forgiveness through Jesus saw him, her tears of appreciation flow unhindered. Since his sandals had been left by the door and his uncovered feet extended outward from the table where he reclined, Jesus felt the teardrops bathe his feet. The woman, embarrassed, wiped his wetted feet with her hair and anointed them.

The unappreciative host thought his doubts regarding Christ were confirmed. Within himself he reasoned, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have perceived who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him" (7:39). His inner musings revealed his total misunderstanding of the coming Messiah's mission. Had he never read Isaiah 53? Were the Scriptural words "forgiveness" or "loving-kindness" unknown to him? What did unforgiving legalists understand Isaiah 1:18 to say about God's character: "though your sins be as scarlet, they

shall be white as snow?"

The parable of the two debtors made transparent why the woman was so filled with gratitude and the host unmoved. That person will love most who has been forgiven most. Do not mix up the order of cause and effect. Ponder Jesus' conclusion, "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much" (7:47). The woman's love did not produce the forgiveness. It was the unmerited forgiveness received that called forth her praise and appreciation.

SERMON 18

Suggested Incident
Kingdom Parables

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 13:1-53

Suggested Title
Parables From the Master Preacher

Suggested Outline

Introduction

Jesus as a master preacher always spoke on majestic themes, in a masterful style, using mighty illustrations, sharing a marvelous spirit and backing the words with a magnificent life.

I. THE KINGDOM WILL MEET OBSTACLES
   A. Parable of the soils speaks to the problem of the human mind (1-23)
   B. Parable of the weeds speaks to the problem of Satanic activity (24-30, 36-43)

II. THE KINGDOM WILL EXPERIENCE SUCCESS
   A. Parable of the mustard seed speaks to the extent of church growth (31-32)
   B. Parable of the leaven speaks to the method of church growth (33)

III. THE KINGDOM WILL BRING JOY
- A. Parable of the hidden treasure speaks of the happiness to finders (44)
- B. Parable of the precious pearl speaks of the happiness to seekers (45, 46)

IV. THE KINGDOM WILL RESULT IN CONSEQUENCES
- A. Parable of the net speaks of man's eternal options (47-50)
- B. Parable of the householder speaks of the Scripture's inexhaustible truths (51-53)

Textual Highlights

Who can forget a moving story, especially one that is brief? Jesus used the parable as an unequalled teaching device. The uncommon reign of God was made clear through very common things (seeds, weeds, nets, pearls). To remember a simple tale is to recall a basic truth. This kingdom foretold in ancient Scripture and more recently heralded by John the Baptist, what is it to be like? Gathered together in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew are seven or eight stories to answer the question. When you hear what "The kingdom of heaven is like," you want to be in it.

SERMON 19

Suggested Incident
Commissioning of the Apostles

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 10:1-20

Suggested Title
Commands of Jesus We Should Not Obey

Suggested Outline

Introduction
The importance of asking "who is speaking?," "to whom?," etc. (Matthew 10:1-4)

I. GO NOT TO THE GENTILES (5, 6)

II. SAY THE KINGDOM WILL BE STARTING SOON (7)

III. WORK MIRACLES (8)

IV. GO TO YOUR MISSION FIELD WITHOUT SUPPORT (9-15)

V. DO NOT PREPARE YOUR SERMONS (16-20)

Textual Highlights

Every Bible student needs a course in Hermeneutics, the science of interpretation. Having learned how to get out of the

Scripture what is there, we need a constant refresher course in the art, lest we read into the text what is not there. Perhaps all your life you have been cautioned to ask, when reading the Word of God, "Was that said to all or to some specific person only?" Are the instructions to Levitical priests to be followed by New Testament saints? Are the followers of Jesus to build arks, march around Jericho or offer bullocks on the altar?

Similar questions need to be asked at the reading of Matthew 10. Are the promises of miracle power to the "twelve disciples," or to the millions of future disciples yet unborn? Does the listing of their names (10:2-4) make an exclusive distinction between them and the rest of those committed to Jesus? Should the modern church call back its workers from the far-flung mission fields of the world by the words: "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:5, 6)?

No quick answer to such inquiries is apt to be a correct one. Paul's admonition is worthy of application: "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Humbly approach the texts. Avoid seeking the answer that fits your preconception. Prayerfully and objectively put your mind to work.

Careful investigation of contexts and thorough comparison with other texts will give guidance to your search for truth. Following the thought of Matthew's Gospel to its final chapter will keep us from taking God's message exclusively to Israelites. The great commission supercedes the preliminary commission. Today's orders are to "make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19).

SERMON 20

Suggested Incident
Beheading of John the Baptist

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 14:1-12

Suggested Title
When Kings Lose Their Heads

Suggested Outline

Introduction
Herod beheaded John

I. HEROD LOST HIS HEAD THROUGH SUPERSTITION (1, 2)

II. HEROD LOST HIS HEAD THROUGH LUST (3-5)

III. HEROD LOST HIS HEAD THROUGH ORGY (6-8)

IV. HEROD LOST HIS HEAD THROUGH PRIDE (9-12)

Textual Highlights

According to Josephus, the daughter of Herodias was named Salome. Whatever her faults, she inherited them from her mother. If, in that day, there had been an equivalent to our

"Mother's Day," it would be hard to imagine a card or a gift appropriate for a child to give such a tyrant mother. Herodias chose to break God's law of marriage. She longed for the death of God's prophet who exposed her iniquity. She had the family trait, stemming from Herod the Great, of being anti-Christ.

Where Satan dwells all kinds of iniquity come forth. Having murdered God's prophet, Herod the tetrarch is tormented by fear. He had convinced himself earlier that the Sadducees' beliefs were correct. "The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection" (Acts 23:8). Yet, the guilt-burdened conscience of Herod is goading him for beheading John. Hearing reports concerning a wonder-worker by the name of Jesus, the confused King switches religions. "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore do these powers work in him" (14:2).

Many morals are in this sad story. One is that superstition and guilty fear is a poor foundation on which to build a person's belief system. Let your faith come by "hearing . . . the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). "Turn to the law and to the testimony" (Isaiah 8:20). Another lesson in our text is the foolishness of making promises and taking oaths in matters beyond our control (14:7). Rather than admit our sin to God or lose face before men, we continue our foolish course to destruction. Did not Jesus admonish "Swear not at all: neither by the heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet, nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King" (Matthew 5:34-35)? Did not James echo "swear not, neither by the heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath" (James 5:12)? John the Baptist lost his head physically, but Herod is the person who had lost his head mentally. To go against God's teaching is to lose one's senses. Sin is foolishness at its worst.

INTENSIVE YEAR OF
OPPOSITION

SERMON 21

Suggested Incident
Results of the Synagogue Sermon
Following the Feeding of the 5,000

Suggested Scripture
John 6:22-71

Suggested Title
Why Jesus Lost the Crowds

Suggested Outline

Introduction
John 6:66 (7:1)

I. THEY LEFT CHRIST FOR HE SPOKE OF THE SPIRITUAL, NOT THE MATERIAL (26)

II. THEY LEFT CHRIST FOR HE SPOKE OF THE ETERNAL, NOT THE TEMPORAL (27)

III. THEY LEFT CHRIST FOR HE SPOKE OF FAITH, NOT MERIT (28, 29)

IV. THEY LEFT CHRIST FOR HE SPOKE OF THE RATIONAL, NOT THE SENSATIONAL (30-33)

V. THEY LEFT CHRIST FOR HE SPOKE OF THE DIVINE, NOT THE HUMAN (34-50)

VI. THEY LEFT CHRIST FOR HE SPOKE OF THE CROSS, NOT THE CROWN (51-58)

Textual Highlights

The Gospel of John retells no miracle of Christ previously made known in the Synoptics, with the exception of the feeding of the five thousand. This ought to alert us to its importance. That one event was a critical turning point in Jesus' life. It climaxes the second year of the Lord's ministry, often termed "the popular year of public favor." It inaugurates the final year, spoken of as "the intensive year of opposition," which will end at the next Passover time. Observe that the chapter begins: "a great multitude followed him, because they beheld the signs which he did on them that were sick" (John 6:2). The last paragraph concludes: "Upon this many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (6:66). To give men what they want draws the crowds. To give them what they need has not the same appeal. Itching ears cry for promises of physical health and financial wealth. God's balm for man's deepest need is the cure from sin's rebellion. It calls for the hard decision of turning from evil to the "straightened . . . way, that leadeth unto life" (Matthew 7:14). The few, not the many, do the difficult.

In the hearts of Jesus' contemporaries burned a longing. It was for a Davidic king who would lead the Jews in throwing off Rome's chafing yoke. One with such power as Christ manifested seemed ideal for the task. "Jesus therefore perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force, to make him king, withdrew again into the mountain himself alone" (6:15). He had won the same battle in the desert after his baptism. He will not follow the Satanic suggestion of substituting an earthly kingdom for a heavenly one. Instead of casting his lot with the crowds, Jesus opts for intensely training twelve who will distribute "the bread out of heaven" after his ascension to the Father.

SERMON 22

Suggested Incident

Criticism of Christ's Disciples by the Pharisees for Disregarding Tradition

Suggested Scripture

Matthew 15:1-20

Suggested Title

Shocking the Well-grounded Pharisees

Suggested Outline

Introduction

Matthew 15:12 "The Pharisees were offended" i.e. "shocked"

I. THEY WERE SHOCKED THAT JESUS CONSIDERED HUMAN TRADITIONS DISPLACING GOD'S WORD (3-6)
II. THEY WERE SHOCKED THAT JESUS CONSIDERED OUTER FORMS AS SECONDARY (7, 8)
III. THEY WERE SHOCKED THAT JESUS CONSIDERED UNREVEALED WORSHIP AS UNIMPORTANT (9)
IV. THEY WERE SHOCKED THAT JESUS CONSIDERED UNCLEAN HEARTS MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN UNCLEAN HANDS (10, 11, 15-20)
V. THEY WERE SHOCKED THAT JESUS CONSIDERED MAN-MADE INSTITUTIONS AS MORTAL (13)
VI. THEY WERE SHOCKED THAT JESUS CONSIDERED SINCERITY AS INSUFFICIENT BY ITSELF (14)

Textual Highlights

To be religious and to be Christian is not the same. To go by the religious traditions of a church or synagogue may not be equal to following the teachings of Scripture. Jesus' disciples did "transgress the tradition of the elders" (Matthew 15:2), by not going through the prescribed ritual washings. The Master accused the accusers, "Why do ye transgress the commandment of God?" He considered the Pharisees' "tradition" an unacceptable substitute for the Father's will expressed in revelation (15:3). He quoted Isaiah's warning that God-pleasing doctrines are not "the precepts of men" (15:9). That prophet also emphasized that the praise of "lips" counts for naught, when not followed by the practice of life. Tourists may be interested in the "arts" at God's temple. Angels are concerned with the "hearts."

"Out of the heart come forth . . .the things which defile the man" (15:19, 20). When on the silver screen at a cinema actions appear or words are heard that you want to stop, the punching of holes in the canvas accomplishes little. The need is to stop the camera in the projection room. Hands only do what the mind orders. Feet only go where the heart desires. Criminals have bodies similar to constructive members of society. The difference is in the will, for "out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, railings" (15:19). The body is an instrument doing what its master wishes it to do. Heart change accomplishes life change.

SERMON 23

Suggested Incident
Attack Against Jesus by Pharisees and Sadducees

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 16:1-12

Suggested Title
The Evil of Seeking Signs from Heaven

Suggested Outline

Introduction

I. THEY ASKED A "SURE SIGN FROM HEAVEN" (Matthew 16:1-4)
   A. God already had given them the heavenly predictions of Christ
   B. God already had given them the heavenly birth of Christ
   C. God already had given them the heavenly deeds of Christ
   D. God already had given them the heavenly teachings of Christ
   E. God already had given them the heavenly life of Christ
   F. God soon would give them the heavenly resurrection of Christ

II. THEY EVIDENCED A SURE SIGN OF HELL (Matthew 16:5-12)
   A. There was the leaven of the Sadducee: few convictions
   B. There was the leaven of the Pharisee: false convictions
   C. There was the leaven of Herod: compromise convictions (Mark 8:15)

Textual Highlights

Can a Christian today be non-denominational? Was it possible for a first century Jew to be unclassified—neither Pharisee, Sadducee nor Herodian? Jesus is the highest example of one doing the Father's will. He had no doubts about the goodness of God. He held without question to all his Bible (the Old Testament) taught. Christ endorsed both "the law" and "the prophets," asserting that "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law till all things be accomplished" (Matthew 5:17. 18). In his mind, "the scripture can not be broken" (John 10:35). Believer, he is. Pleasing to God, there is no doubt. Yet while an Israelite indeed, he can not be pigeonholed into a sectarian slot. He warned his disciples to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matthew 16:11). He wished for them to go to the pure word of God and not to the adulterated mixture that comes when human opinions are placed like yeast into God's revelation. Would that all the Lord's followers were content to be Christians only.

SERMON 24

Suggested Incident
Confession at Caesarea Philippi

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 16:13-28

Suggested Title
When Eyes of Faith Get Out of Focus

Suggested Outline

I. PETER HAD A CLEAR VISION OF CHRIST'S PERSON
   A. The blur of human opinion (13, 14)
   B. The clarity of divine revelation (15-20)

II. PETER HAD A DIM VISION OF CHRIST'S MISSION
   A. There was to be a cross for the Christ (21-23)
   B. There was to be a cross for the Christian (24-28)

Textual Highlights

"No creed but Christ. No book but the Bible. No law but love." That slogan is rich with wise counsel, when rightly understood. Matthew 16:13-20 speaks to the creed of the church that Christ "will build." The word "creed" is from the Latin "*credo*," meaning "I believe." Yet historically the creeds of Christendom have served, not alone to state an understanding, but to exclude from the orthodox all who could not confess to

each carefully worded statement. Hence, we have the divisions that scar our history.

From the first century to the last, every professed believer in Jesus has confessed to the oldest creedal statement of all: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16). This creed has not needed revision. This statement of faith has not led to division. This witness to the world is totally adequate, including all that God would include and excluding all that the divine Judge would reject. If a perfect grasp of every theological nicety was absolutely essential to be saved, who would be among the redeemed? Brothers in Christ, even mistaken brothers, are in the family of the born again.

The unwillingness to confess "God," places the atheists and agnostics beyond the pale of the church. To reject a "living" God, omits all idolators and pantheists. No dualist or polytheist will join the church that confesses faith in "the" living God. Likewise exclusive of other monotheistic religions, such as Islam and Judaism, is the Christian's belief in Christ as "the Son of the living God." No modern follower refuses to confess with the Ethopian eunuch, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37).

Although two and a half years with the teacher, who spoke as no other ever spoke, convinced the disciples of Jesus deity and messiahship, another year would be necessary to clarify what kind of messiah he would be. It was from this incident at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus "began . . . to show unto his disciples, that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things" (16:21). Each follower would likewise need to "take up his cross" (16:24).

SERMON 25

Suggested Incident
Transfiguration

Suggested Scripture
Luke 9:28-36

Suggested Title
The Genesis of the Exodus

Suggested Outline

Introduction
Luke 9:31 "decease" is the Greek word exodus

I. WE SEE JESUS IN A NEW LIGHT (28, 29)

II. WE SEE PRAYER IN A NEW LIGHT (29)

III. WE SEE DEATH IN A NEW LIGHT (30)

IV. WE SEE THE PASSION IN A NEW LIGHT (31)

V. WE SEE HEAVEN IN A NEW LIGHT (31)

VI. WE SEE OUR MISSION IN A NEW LIGHT (32, 33)

VII. WE SEE THE OLD TESTAMENT IN A NEW LIGHT (34-36)

VIII. WE SEE PROPHECY IN A NEW LIGHT (Matthew 17:9-13)

Textual Highlights

Deuteronomy 19:15 settled that "at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses shall a matter be established." Not every incident in Jesus' life must be observed by each apostle. A healing in a private home or an incident in a garden of prayer did not necessitate a full representation of apostles. The transfiguration was such an occasion. The "inner circle" of Peter, James and John would be adequate witness to this needed awareness of Christ's majesty just prior to his humiliating trial and crucifixion. Likely on Mount Hermon (that arose behind Caesarea Philippi) rather than Mount Tabor (not far from Capernaum), the event occurred. In Christ's true humanity his true deity showed through. Glory was evident. The Father spoke. Moses and Elijah attended to reminisce about the Son's soon return to heaven.

Peter, understandably desiring to keep the marvel of the occasion from fading, suggested the erection of three booths. These would house the dignitaries Moses, Elijah and Jesus. This gave Jesus an ideal opportunity to make manifest the eternal difference between his Deity and his servants' humanity. Those interpreters probably are correct in finding Moses the representative of the Law and Elijah the one to stand in the place of all the Prophets. Their mission was to make God's anointed known. But, even heralds of the King are not to be placed on the same level as the Sovereign himself. The Father's voice identified Jesus as His "Son . . . [and] chosen" (Luke 8:35). The Law and Prophets led up to the Coming One. Let Moses and Elijah fade. "Hear ye him." While the Old covenant was necessary preparation, the New Covenant has come.

SERMON 26

Suggested Incident
Lesson on Childlikeness

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 18:1-35

Suggested Title
How to be a Great Little Church

Suggested Outline

I. A GREAT LITTLE CHURCH IS CONCERNED FOR LITTLE PEOPLE AND RESPECTS THEM (1-4)

II. A GREAT LITTLE CHURCH IS CONCERNED FOR LITTLE TASKS AND DOES THEM (5)

III. A GREAT LITTLE CHURCH IS CONCERNED FOR LITTLE ENTICEMENTS AND AVOIDS THEM (6-11)

IV. A GREAT LITTLE CHURCH IS CONCERNED FOR LITTLE STRAYS AND FINDS THEM (12-14)

V. A GREAT LITTLE CHURCH IS CONCERNED FOR LITTLE RIFTS AND HEALS THEM (15-20)

VI. A GREAT LITTLE CHURCH IS CONCERNED FOR LITTLE OFFENSES AND AVOIDS THEM (21-35)

Textual Highlights

Little drops of water make the ocean. Small donations from many citizens enable communities to aid the needy. Mission work of tremendous significance has been accomplished by small clusters of Christian men and women who have cared.

Jesus' object lesson in Matthew eighteen dramatizes the power of small things to accomplish great ends. He begins by taking "a little child" into the midst of disciples who had been arguing regarding greatness. It is as if he foresees God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven through common men and women, boys and girls. It will not be the popes of Rome or the kings of earth that determine the church's future. It will be the ministry of a tax collector here and a fisherman there. "Young shall see visions . . . old shall dream dreams . . . servants and . . . handmaidents" (Acts 2:17) shall continue what "Jesus began both to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1).

How different are Christ's purposes than those of earthly sovereigns. How opposite are his methods! How unique are his ways! Those rulers of earth would make slaves, Christ makes kings. Persons counted intellectually inept or financially insolvent are deemed usable for building towards eternity. What is considered big or important in the eyes of men is measured by God's standards and found wanting. What is cast aside by the world's potters as useless clay, is molded by Christ into a life of beauty.

Look at the child who could sing, "I am weak but thou art strong." Hear the Master encourage the impotent or unlovely to believe that through Him they can be "the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:5). Whosoever will can come into stature through Christ.

SERMON 27

Suggested Incident
An Adultress Brought to Jesus

Suggested Scripture
John 8:1-11

Suggested Title
People Who Live in Glass Houses

Suggested Outline

I. SINNERS SHOULD NOT THROW STONES OF JUDGMENT
   A. Criticism hurts the accused
   B. Criticism hurts the Lord (cp. Matthew 25:40)
   C. Criticism hurts the critic
II. SINNERS SHOULD FIND SHELTER IN THE ROCK OF AGES
   A. Christ protects sinners from deserved judgment
   B. Christ becomes the foundation on which to build

Textual Highlights

In your English version of John's Gospel, how does John 7:53-8:11 fare? It is often placed between brackets, italicized in print or placed in the footnotes. Comment in the margin will inform readers that most ancient authorities omit the account of the woman taken in adultery or vary in their telling of the

incident. This textual fact should not keep us from pondering a real happening in the ministry of of our Lord. Early in the church's preaching of God's grace this remembered historic event became a stirring reminder of God's ever-available grace. Upon the retelling of the story, the words of Christ to that needy sinner lift the load off the heavy heart of her modern counterparts: "Neither do I condemn thee: go thy way; from henceforth sin no more" (8:11).

This announcement of grace fits the immediate context and all that precedes. A few verses later the same son of Mary uttered, "I judge no man" (8:15). All instantly recall the key verse of the Bible (John 3:16), which leads to the Saviour's explanation, "For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him. He that believeth on him is not judged" (3:17, 18). A few pages later, Christ's words are, "And if any man hear my sayings, and keep them not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save it" (12:47).

Jesus' critics were troubled that this wonder worker was speaking words of forgiveness to sinners and endangering, in their eyes, God's holy and righteous law. They set a trap for him when he would have to stand clearly either with the Law or on the side of grace. "Trying him" (8:6), they called for overt choice: "in the law Moses commanded us to stone such: what then sayest thou" (8:5)? Will it be compassion, mercy and grace or will it be condemnation, justice and law? No wonder this story served to illustrate why the Church's message was gospel—good news.

SERMON 28

Suggested Incident
Healing of the Man Born Blind

Suggested Scripture
John 9:1-41

Suggested Title
The Day the Son Stood Still

Suggested Outline

Introduction

I. JESUS SAYS: I SEE A NEED AND I'LL MEET IT (1,3-7)

II. DISCIPLES SAY: I SEE A PROBLEM AND I'LL RAISE IT (2)

III. THE BLIND MAN SAYS: I SEE AN OPPORTUNITY AND I'LL ACCEPT IT (8-12)

IV. PHARISEES SAY: I SEE A SIGN AND I'LL REJECT IT (13-41)

Textual Highlights

The Old Testament tells of an extended day when Jehovah enabled Joshua to defeat the Amorites. Joshua said in the sight of Israel, "Sun stand thou still . . . and the sun stood still" (Joshua 10: 12, 13). When I read in John 9 the healing of the man born blind, my mind jumps back to the ancient miracle. Only this time it is not the sun (S-U-N) in the heavens standing

still, it is God's Son (S-O-N) from heaven standing still in the face of human tragedy. It was "as he passed by" (9:1) that the tragic sight caused compassion to stop him in his tracks.

It would be fitting to read the chapter from a Braille Bible, assured that on the day of resurrection a similar miracle will open the eyes of all who have been blind. At this present moment the crying need is to open the eyes of the mind that we may perceive with clarity the relationship between sin and suffering. The theological problem of theodicy plagues us. How can a righteous God be considered just in the face of human tragedy?

The disciples' minds connected suffering with sin, and prosperity with goodness. A man in sickness or pain was considered receiving just deserts for his earlier actions. A man "blind from his birth" forced the question, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents?" (9:1, 2). Since sin brings suffering, is this blindness attributable to sins that God foreknows the man would commit in his life? Or, could it be the son is paying for the sins of those who parented him?

Jesus' answer needs to ring loud and clear in every ear: "Neither!" While the fall of man brought sickness and tragedy to our planet, it is wrong to conclude that a particular multi-millionaire is exceptionally just and a certain agonizing cancer patient is out of the Father's will. The entire Bible confirms this. Read of the patience and suffering of righteous Job. Recall Timothy, the apple of Paul's eye and evangelist of Christ's gospel, remembering his "often infirmities" (1 Timothy 5:23). Epaphroditus can be Paul's "brother and fellow-worker" and at the same time be "sick nigh unto death" (Philippians 2:27). The sermon on the mount warns against the common error in its insistence that "evil and good . . . just and unjust" know God's sun and rain (Matthew 5:45).

SERMON 29

Suggested Incident
Parable of the Good Shepherd

Suggested Scripture
John 10:1-18

Suggested Title
The Lord is My Pastor

Suggested Outline

I. CONTRAST IN METHOD (1-9)
   A. Thieves use fear and force
   B. Christ uses voice and example

II. CONTRAST IN MOTIVE (10)
   A. Thieves are out to get
   B. Christ is out to give

III. CONTRAST IN MANNER (9-18)
   A. Of feeding (9)
   B. Of guarding (11, 12)
   C. Of loving (13)
   D. Of knowing (14, 15)
   E. Of finding (16)
   F. Of dying (17, 18)

Textual Highlights

It is with propriety and Biblical tradition that we speak of God as Shepherd and the people of the Lord as sheep. The Psalmist calls God's worshipers "his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (Psalms 100:3). In the Gospel, that so clearly identifies the divine Son with the Father, Jesus speaks of himself as "the good shepherd" (10:11). What a contrast is the ministry of this true shepherd with that of the "blind" Pharisees (9:40) who considered themselves Israel's appointed "pastors."

To understand what might appear as the mixing of figures, we need to visualize two different situations. One is during winter months when the flocks of several shepherds might be kept together in one place in the city. At the proper time to take the flocks again out to graze in the fields, each shepherd "calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out" (10:3). The other scene is that of a particular shepherd in the hills with his own flock. There at night he becomes "the door of the sheep" 10:7). That is, he makes an enclosure and lies down in the opening. No thief gets in or sheep gets out without his knowledge.

SERMON 30

Suggested Incident
Mission of the Seventy

Suggested Scripture
Luke 10:1-24

Suggested Title
Ten Commandments for Soul Winners

Suggested Outline

I. THOU SHALT NOT FAIL TO PRAY (2)

II. THOU SHALT NOT FAIL TO GO (3)

III. THOU SHALT NOT FAIL TO TRUST (4)

IV. THOU SHALT NOT FAIL TO HURRY (4)

V. THOU SHALT NOT FAIL TO BLESS (5, 6)

VI. THOU SHALT NOT FAIL TO BE CONTENT (7)

VII. THOU SHALT NOT FAIL TO AVOID SCRUPLES (8)

VIII. THOU SHALT NOT FAIL TO HEAL (9)

IX. THOU SHALT NOT FAIL TO PREACH (9-15)

X. THOU SHALT NOT FAIL TO SUCCEED (16-24)

Textual Highlights

Luke 10 begins a large bulk of material on the life and teaching of Jesus not preserved by the other Gospel writers. Much of the information is of special interest to the Gentiles such as Luke. Each Synoptic writer told of Christ's commission to the twelve (Matthew 9:35-10:15; Mark 6:6-11; Luke 9:1-6), but Luke alone gives the similar commissioning of the "seventy." Some texts have "seventy-two." Just as the sending of the twelve was suggestive of their taking the kingdom message to Israel's twelve tribes, the assigning of seventy (or seventy-two) suggested that the story was for all nations. It is said that this number was the number of countries in that day. Perea was beyond the borders of Judea and Samaria and foreshadowed "the great commission" which would follow Christ's resurrection. Then the order came to be, reach "all the world" (Mark 16:15), "all the nations" (Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:47).

To refuse the message was soul-endangering. Heaven's King sent the messengers. Their shortcomings or smallness relieved the hearer of no responsibility. Christ's words were, "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that rejecteth you rejecteth me; and he that rejecteth me rejecteth him that sent me" (Luke 10:16). The tragic plight of Sodom (10:12), Tyre and Sidon (10:13) was nothing compared to the horrible fate awaiting those who cast off his gracious offer from heaven.

The "more tolerable" of verse 12 is a comparative. The extinction of an ancient wicked city like Sodom was bad. But eternal separation from God will be worse. Certain modern sects preach a hell of extinction. Jesus paints a picture of a future far worse than non-existence.

SERMON 31

Suggested Incident
Good Samaritan Story

Suggested Scripture
Luke 10:25-37

Suggested Title
A Moving Motion Picture

Suggested Outline

I. THE COMMON PICTURE (SELFISHNESS) (30)

II. THE EMOTION PICTURE (INDIFFERENCE) (31, 32)

III. THE MOTION PICTURE (HELPFULNESS) (33-35)

Textual Highlights

Many Jews in Jesus' day would never have used the word "good" and the word "Samaritan" in the same sentence. In this world famous story Jesus married forever the two terms in unbreakable wedlock. For two thousand years the parable of the Good Samaritan has been burned indelibly into human hearts. Paintings in our books, stained glass windows in our churches and hospitals in our cities have memorialized the story in Luke 10.

Genuine Torah teaching was to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart . . . and thy neighbor as thyself" (10:27). "Pure

religion" required adherents "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction " (James 1:27). Real Christianity was to be sifted out at the judgment by the King on the throne. He would ask his professed followers about benevolent acts toward the needy. His warm welcome to the redeemed would be "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came to me" (Matthew 25:34-36). True stewardship before our Maker demanded not only bringing "tithes into the storehouse" (Malachi 3:10) but giving alms out to the poor without "thy left hand knowing what thy right hand doeth" (Matthew 6:3).

Harry Emerson Fosdick's sermon on the Good Samaritan contrasted the three philosophies of possessions shown in the parable. The robbers, waiting to pounce upon the unexpectant traveler, represented the view, "What is yours is mine, so I'll take it." The unmoved priest and the not-to-be-bothered Levite held the philosophy, "What is mine is mine, so I'll keep it." The Samaritan best illustrated Jesus' theology, "What is mine is yours, so I'll share it."

"Compassion" (10:33) was the motivation that led to the commendable acts of brotherliness. The lawyer's test question to Jesus about what to "do to inherit eternal life" (10:25) drew out the man's quotation from Deuteronomy and Leviticus. Christ replied: "this do, and thou shalt live (10:28). After the parable made clear who proved to be "neighbor unto him that fell among the robbers," Christ advised the lawyer, "do thou likewise" (10:36, 37). That counsel is still good. But such advice is never cheap. It costs effort, time, money and pride.

SERMON 32

Suggested Incident
Warning to Christs' Disciples

Suggested Scripture
Luke 12

Suggested Title
Beware

Suggested Outline

I. CHRIST WARNS AGAINST HYPOCRISY (1-3)

II. CHRIST WARNS AGAINST COWARDICE (4-12)

III. CHRIST WARNS AGAINST COVETOUSNESS (13-21)

IV. CHRIST WARNS AGAINST ANXIETY (22-34)

V. CHRIST WARNS AGAINST INACTIVITY (35-48)

VI. CHRIST WARNS AGAINST REJECTION (49-59)

Textual Highlights

It is the third and final year of Jesus' ministry. Shortly he will have ascended back to the Father. Will his spokesmen be ready to carry on the work? Equipping them for what lies ahead is the goal of these final months. Crowds are so deceptive. Power can

corrupt. Will the twelve succumb to the world's influence? Christ's word to them is "Beware" (Luke 12:1).

Note the setting: "Many thousands of the multitude were gathered together, insomuch that they trod one upon the other." Myriads following can bring pride and that is what comes before a fall. Jesus' embryo workers needed his words of warning in the first century, as do all who take up the banner of the cross in any generation. Several pitfalls can bring down the servant of God. The first snare is "hypocrisy."

Pharisees were bitten by the bug of play acting. It was easy to pretend to be more than they were, since the populace would feed a leader's ego by their applause. To let in a small quantity of insincerity was to guarantee a whole life soon leavened by such yeast.

Each following paragraph calls to mind other dangers that so easily beset the church's ministers. Fear is real. Martyrdom is an actual possibility. The devil is "a roaring lion. . . .seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Let each one remember that facing God at the judgment is no easy out for one who trembles before men here (12:4, 5).

While fear of death is Satan's tool in countries that are openly anti-Christ and anti-God and anti-missionary, it is not the Devil's only sword. In other lands open to the gospel a different snare is used. Weaning the heart from the true riches to the lust for things becomes the demonic plot. So Jesus further called for strict attention to the need for fleeing "all covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not on the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (12:15). Learn the secret of Philippians 4:11-13.

SERMON 33

Suggested Incident
Teaching in Perea

Suggested Scripture
Luke 13:22-35

Suggested Title
Will the Saved Be Few?

Suggested Outline

I. THE PATRIARCHS WILL BE IN HEAVEN (28)

II. THE PROPHETS WILL BE IN HEAVEN (28)

III. THE GENTILES WILL BE IN HEAVEN (29, 30)

IV. THE AUDIENCE COULD BE IN HEAVEN IF THEY BUT WOULD (24-27, 34, 35)

Textual Highlights

Luke 13:22-35 seems to end with a teaching quite contrary to that with which it began. Hear verse 34, "how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her own brood under her wings, and ye would not!" Now listen to verse 24, "Strive to enter . . . for many . . . shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." In case number one, they could but would not. In situation number two, they would but could not.

The rest of divine revelation asserts that God is "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Paul agrees that "God our Saviour . . . would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3, 4). John's theology harmonizes, claiming Christ "is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world" (I John 2:2). The church always has preached the good news that "he that is athirst" and "he that will" can come to "the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). Christ's tearful words "often would I . . . but ye would not" (Luke 13:34), fits this thinking. What about, "many shall seek . . . and not be able?"

Perhaps punctuation is the problem. The earliest Greek manuscripts were called "uncial manuscripts." That is, they were entirely in capital letters. In addition, the words were not spaced from one another, plus there were no punctuation marks. Consider the possibility that verse 24 should not end a sentence. Eliminate the period and change the capital "W" to a small "w" as you read on into verse 25. Then the sentence reads, "many . . . shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able when once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut the door, etc." Now the theology is consistent and whoever comes to Christ will not be cast out.

The meaning of the passage becomes this: While all can be saved who come now, the opportunity will not be there forever. At the end of a life or at the close of history, the door of opportunity will be closed. "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15). "Today if ye shall hear his voice, Harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7).

SERMON 34

Suggested Incident
Warning to Count the Cost

Suggested Scripture
Luke 14:25-35

Suggested Title
The High Cost of Living for Jesus

Suggested Outline

Introduction

A phone call to the church inquired what it cost to be baptized.

I. DISCIPLESHIP CAN COST LOVED ONES (25, 26)

II. DISCIPLESHIP CAN COST LIVES (27)

III. DISCIPLESHIP CAN COST POSSESSIONS (28-33)

Textual Highlights

It is expected that salt be salty (Luke 14:34-35). Iron must be hard to be iron. Perfume of necessity has to have a fragrant aroma. Heat cannot be cold. Light is not by nature darkness. Let it be known that it is expected that a Christian have the quality of Christlikeness. To be a disciple is demanding. Disciple of Christ is not a title to wear, but a life to live.

"There went with him great multitudes: and he turned, and said" (Luke 14:25) what the crowd needed to hear. It is demanding to follow Jesus. The church to be built is not to consist of poor and faulty material. The army of heaven's king is not to be a shabby, undisciplined, slovenly mob. Let it be understood, none should enlist unaware of what is expected of a soldier of the cross.

To catch the attention of the crowd, Jesus had to use jolting terms. "If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (14:26). He, who taught us to honor one's parents and not lead astray a little child, is demanding of us a higher allegiance to him than to others. Such love will appear to be "hate" by comparison. No natural and heaven-approved love for the family can cause hesitance in responding to Christ's call. We shall love our wives and kin, but it ought to be with awareness of our highest allegiance. We shall love them less and never more than we love our Saviour.

The carpenter of Nazareth will not accept shoddy workmanship. He can not approve a builder who would commence a construction without carefully checking his ability to finish that project (14:28-30). It is beyond him to appreciate a military leader who would enter the fray with an army inadequate to win the battle (14:31, 32). He wants everyone who elects to be one of his followers to do so with every intention of enduring to the end. It is to picture this total dedication that baptism will become the initiatory ordinance of the church. Total immersion in water suggests total commitment of body and mind to the Lord.

SERMON 35

Suggested Incident
Parable of the Prodigal Son

Suggested Scripture
Luke 15:11-32

Suggested Title
Amazing Grace

Suggested Outline

I. WE HAVE A FATHER THAT GIVES US FREEDOM

II. WE HAVE A FATHER THAT DESIRES OUR RETURN

III. WE HAVE A FATHER THAT MAKES US WELCOME

IV. WE HAVE A FATHER THAT ENCOURAGES OUR SERVICE

Textual Highlights

What can today's preachers learn from Jesus to attract the world as their hearers? It was not the "faithful few" that sat at the Master preacher's feet. It was the "unfaithful many." Luke reports that "all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him to hear him (Luke 15:1).

We are often told that the key to success is to find a basic need and minister to it. Humankind's most basic need is to find help for their problem of sin and guilt. Religionists were all around whose sermons increased the burden of guilt and shame. But Jesus of Nazareth had a message with a joyful sound. People went from his presence with a new-born hope, a lilt in their walk and God's smile in their heart. There was no

compromise with evil, but there was release from sin's power. There was forgiveness in abundant supply. Paul's later affirmation, that there "is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1), was a truth evident from the beginning of the Lord's ministry. God seeks for straying sheep (15:3-7), lost valuables (15:8-10) and prodigal sons (15:11-32). To hear Jesus talk one drew the conclusion that our Heavenly Father does not give up easily. He rather goes after the "lost, until he find it" (15:4, 8).

The story of the prodigal is unforgettable. In this one simple parable we see the gradual but certain degradation of sin. We observe the process of conversion. We grasp the meaning of forgiveness and coming home. Or, do we? It is clear that the filth of sin's pigpen is covered completely by the robe that God provides. It is evident that the feast in the father's house shows the joy of heaven at a sinner's return. But have we appreciated to the full what the ring and the shoes say about grace?

The signet ring tells us that returned prodigals can do business for the father. The shoes mean we, who have come home, are trusted to go in and out. We are no longer suspect and kept on a leash or put aside on a shelf not to be used. Grace is grace. God's favor is unmerited. Past sin is forgiven and forgotten. Those whose pasts marked them as chiefs of sinners are openly sealed as future leaders of saints. Paul proves that. You can too.

The elder brother in the story was not as gracious as God. He objected loudly to the father's kindly treatment and total acceptance of his brother. Jesus was painting a word picture of the contemporary scribes and Pharisees of his time. It would be the tragedy of tragedies if any of Christ's disciples at any time could be characterised more by the attitude of his critics than that of the Saviour himself.

SERMON 36

Suggested Incident
Parable of the Prodigal Son

6

Suggested Scripture
Luke 15:11-32

Suggested Title
Looking Through the Eyes of Christ

Suggested Outline

I. SEE SIN THROUGH JESUS' EYES
   A. It does attract (12)
   B. It does waste (13)
   C. It does disappoint (14)
   D. It does enslave (15)
   E. It does degrade (16)

II. SEE CONVERSION THROUGH JESUS' EYES
   A. A person comes to himself (17)
   B. A person comes to a decision (18, 19)

III. SEE SALVATION THROUGH JESUS' EYES
   A. It means a robe for one's back (22)
   B. It means a ring for one's finger (22)
   C. It means shoes for one's feet (22)
   D. It means a banquet for the family (23)

Textual Highlights

Have you ever considered the parable of the prodigal son to be a compliment to Joseph? Jesus grew up in the home of Joseph and Mary. Mary was the mother of Christ and her husband his foster father. Many of the teacher's stories were drawn from his home life in Nazareth. Leavening the lump, putting patches on garments, placing a lamp on the stand were a part of each day's practices. The major parable of Luke 15 about a loving father comes from the lips of one who had that kind of an understanding father.

No ghetto child, that did not know who his father was, created this story. A drunken sot, coming home and beating his wife constantly, would not stimulate this parable of parables. A child running in fright and hiding in fear from a tyrant who ever left welts on his body, could not envision this tale of magnificent filial love. To pray "Our Father" is to see God in tender terms.

SERMON 37

Suggested Incident
Jesus Teaches on Divorce

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 19:1-12

Suggested Title
The Divine Arithmetic of Marriage

Suggested Outline

I. 1 + 0 = 1/2 (The sacredness of marriage equation)

II. 1 + 1 = 1 (The oneness of couples equation)

III. 1 + 1 = 0 (The futility of divorce equation)

IV. 1 - 1 = 2 (The secret of love equation)

Textual Highlights

Questions from honest inquirers are always welcomed by teachers of truth. Jesus had the misfortune of facing carefully honed questions that had the single purpose of trapping him. Matthew records that "there came to him Pharisees trying him" (19:3). Jesus' enemies studied how to destroy the Master's growing popularity with the masses. Their strategy was to find a volatile issue upon which the populace would have divided opinions. Legitimate grounds for divorce was such a topic. "Is it

lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" (Matthew 19:3). That was the perfect question for stirring up strong feelings.

The Rabbis Hillel and Shammai held opposite views. The first was lax, the latter strict. Whichever side Jesus took would prove his undoing with half the people. Thus, the Pharisees sought to win in dividing Jesus' following. They cared not which side he would take. Their interest was not in his view, but in his downfall.

We note that their trap question is, "Is it lawful?" They never desired to inquire, "Is it kind? Is it fair? Is it helpful?" Legalism is a perversion of the laws of God which were made for the good of men.

Jesus' answer uncovered their nakedness. He inquired of those who posed as Bible experts, "Have ye not read" (19:4)? He implied that to start at the beginning of Scripture would reveal God's purpose for the home. Genesis tells the beginning of the world and also the origin of marriage. Love is there. Anger is absent. Man is to "cleave to his wife" (Matthew 19:5), not to take a cleaver to his wife. They are to become "one" in name, in aim and in destiny. They are to be "one flesh." That was the gracious Creator's plan at the start and remains His desire for the present and future.

If the Designer of marriage envisioned one man for one woman, why does his Old Testament give rules to govern divorce? That became the Pharisee's next problem for Jesus to solve. His answer explained that human resistance to God's perfect will made it necessary for guidelines that would protect the innocent where stubborn minds chose against heaven. Once again the loving heart of the Lawgiver must aid us in applying His laws. Mercy must temper judgment. Healing must be our aim, not adding further scars.

SERMON 38

Suggested Incident
The Rich Young Ruler

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 19:16-30

Suggested Title
The Point of the Needle

Suggested Outline

Introduction

Matthew 19:24-26 speaks of the camel and the needle's eye. The point of the needle? "With men this is impossible"

I. THE RIGHT QUESTION WAS ASKED (16)
(eternal life)

II. THE RIGHT PERSON WAS ASKED (17)
(Jesus)

III. THE RIGHT ANSWER WAS GIVEN (17-21)
(keep the commandments)

IV. THE WRONG CHOICE WAS MADE (22)
(went away)

V. THE RIGHT CONCLUSION WAS DRAWN (23-26)
(it is impossible)

VI. THE RIGHT COURSE WAS FOLLOWED (27-30)
(left all)

Textual Highlights

No man looks for a saviour who does not sense that he is a sinner. Those, who feel "poor" in the spiritual realm, will find blessing in the offer of Jesus (cp. Matthew 5:3, 6). A rich young ruler in the Matthew 19 story was in the opposite condition. Regarding God's commandments, he expected a high mark on judgment day. When Jesus listed some sample commandments, the young man said with confident pride, "All these things have I observed" (19:20).

To open the youth's awareness of personal need, Jesus gave an electrifying order, "go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor" (19:21). The tenth commandment condemns covetousness as well as other commands rebuke murder and theft. Self-righteousness is smashed by the awareness that gold had his trust for the future rather than God. Down to the wire would it be God or mammon that held his loyalty? This story has a sad ending for "he went away sorrowful; for he was one that had great possessions" (19:22).

This incident led Jesus to explain to his disciples how "hard" it is for the rich to let go of their materialism and enter the kingdom. "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye" (19:24). Efforts to soften Jesus' words explain that a minor shift in spelling the Greek word would make it a "rope" instead of a "camel." Others tell of a small gate within the larger gate of Jerusalem called the needle's eye. Christ says conversion is not difficult, it is "impossible," except for God (19:26).

SERMON 39

Suggested Incident
Jesus Foretells His Passion and Resurrection

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 20:17-28

Suggested Title
I'm Forever Bursting Bubbles

Suggested Outline

I. JESUS BURST THE BUBBLE REGARDING THE KING AND HIS MISSION (17-19)

II. JESUS BURST THE BUBBLE REGARDING THE KINGDOM AND ITS NATURE (20-23)

III. JESUS BURST THE BUBBLE REGARDING THE KINGLY AND THEIR GREATNESS (24-28)

Textual Highlights

The Jewish mind dreamed of the day when Jehovah's Messiah would come and the Kingdom of prophetic writings would be established. King David's seed would be crowned in Jerusalem and world conquest would begin. Jesus' disciples were convinced that their Master was the fulfillment of those hopes.

Scripture needed to be interpreted by Scripture. Texts

required other texts to inform with meaning. The Lord knew that his contemporaries had isolated the predictions of a conquering king from the other passages that spoke of a suffering servant. Matthew 20:17-19 contains one of Jesus' efforts to help his followers see the whole picture. Seven facts they needed to know about coming events in Jerusalem. (1) He would "be delivered unto the chief priests and scribes." This is a hint of the coming betrayal by Judas. (2) He would be condemned to death. Cross would precede crown. (3) He would be delivered unto the Gentiles. Roman authorities would be involved. (4) He would be mocked. That some one of his gentleness would be a king was subject for satire. (5) He would be scourged. (6) He would be crucified. Jewish stoning would not fulfill the prophecies. (7) He would be resurrected from death. This historic happening would be on "the third day."

Not only was Jesus' kingship to be other than they expected, their own position was to be that of servant and not of master. Like their Lord, they too would drink the bitter "cup." James would be the first apostolic martyr and his brother John would be the last of the twelve to die for the cause. It was hard to learn that their beloved Messiah was meant to suffer. It was more difficult to accept that they too were called to go the way of the cross. Modern voices still are heard calling followers to look for the earthly kingdom of health, wealth and power. A spiritual kingdom appears too other-worldly.

Exercising authority over others is the concept of ruling among the Gentiles. Power to control is the ripe apple waiting to be picked by seekers of authority. Christ exemplified the opposite but proper way to live. He called for restraint of power. He preached loving care for others rather than lusting greed for the possessions of others. Greatness is in ministry.

SERMON 40

Suggested Incident
Healing of Blind Bartimaeus

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 20:29

Suggested Title
On the Jericho Road

Suggested Outline

I. BARTIMAEUS WAS NOT TOO BLIND TO SEE HIS OPPORTUNITY (29, 30)

II. BARTIMAEUS WAS NOT TOO DUMB TO CRY FOR AID (30)

III. BARTIMAEUS WAS NOT TOO WEAK TO RESIST DISCOURAGEMENT (31)

IV. BARTIMAEUS WAS NOT TOO DEAF TO HEAR CHRIST'S CALL (32, 33)

V. BARTIMAEUS WAS NOT TOO LAME TO FOLLOW JESUS (34)

Textual Highlight

Matthew tells of the healing of two blind men in Jericho. Mark gives the name of one of them, as "Bartimaeus" (Mark 10:46). Luke also preserves the story in his Gospel. John states the reason such miracles were recorded saying, "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31).

What is a miracle? Joyce Kilmer's poem "Trees" ends with the line, "only God can make a tree." Is a tree a miracle? Is every birth a miracle, or only a virgin birth? There would be neither trees in the forest or babies in the nursery without God, but is everything worthy of the name "miracle?" From the days of Adam and Eve to the present, God has been pleased to answer the prayers of his children when they call on Him. Is the way God always works what is meant by miracle?

Bartimaeus was healed "straightway." Often, in answer to our prayers, those for whom we petition find health and strength returning to their bodies over the days. When restored to us, we rightly praise the One who heard our cry. God is ever good. He is ever gracious. Yet we reserve the word miracle to describe what he does instantly.

Miracles are instantaneous and perfect. The sick are not made better. They are made whole. Reformation is not a strong enough word. Restoration fits more exactly. The one who has been racked by demons or disease is said to be restored. That is, the person has been returned to the wholeness enjoyed before the evil had done its work.

The miracle on the blind men in the story before us is a miracle indeed. There is perfect vision and it returned immediately. The cause is stated in the words, "[he] touched their eyes." Mark adds that the reason Jesus chose to extend the blessing

was the trust Bartimaeus manifest. "Thy faith hath made thee whole" (Mark 10:52).

Behind every healing the Gospel writers tell is love. Miracles manifest omnipotence. Who else but the Almighty could restore sight to the blind? But power alone could destroy as well as heal. It is benevolence that uses power for the good of others. Bible writers always make God's love clear. "Jesus, being moved with compassion, touched their eyes" (Matthew 20:34).

SERMON 41

Suggested Incident
Jesus Visits Zacchaeus

Suggested Scripture
Luke 19:1-28

Suggested Title
Up a Tree

Suggested Outline

I. THEY SEE JESUS WHO DO NOT ALLOW THE CROWD TO GET IN THEIR WAY

II. THEY SEE JESUS WHO GET WHERE THEY CAN VIEW HIM

III. THEY SEE JESUS WHO RESPOND TO HIS INVITATION

IV. THEY SEE JESUS WHO WELCOME HIM INTO THEIR HOMES

V. THEY SEE JESUS WHO PRACTICE RESTITUTION

Textual Highlights

Zacchaeus "sought to see Jesus" (Luke 19:2). Does it seem strange to you that one so despised by his countrymen would hanker to see Jesus? Publicans are classed with sinners and presumed to have little time for religion. One would be right to expect that this curiosity about Christ was kindled by the zeal of another tax collector named Levi (Matthew). This Matthew had hosted a dinner exclusively for fellow publicans upon his decision to become a follower of the Messiah. Everybody was talking about the world of difference between Jesus and the other religious leaders they had known.

"Separatist" would describe a Pharisee. Staying aloof while fearing contamination would define his activity. Seeking fellowship would describe Jesus. "Today I must abide at thy house" (19:5), are his words. A nod of the head or a momentary wave of the hand toward the sinner was not enough. Jesus desired to "abide" with him. It was something he "must" do. He was compelled by compassion to demonstrate God's willingness to be with those in the deepest need.

This often told incident, as Christ headed for Jerusalem concludes with Jesus' express reason for his life ministry. "Today is salvation come to this house."

That purpose begins in a search and ends in a finding. "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." Many have called Luke 19:10 the key verse of the entire Gospel of Luke. I nominate the passage as the key description of the entire incarnate life of Christ. It further declares his continuing ministry through the Holy Spirit during the entire church age.

The hound of heaven keeps searching for the lost. Saving is the mission of a Saviour. It becomes the purpose of all who are

rescued by that Jesus. They need to get started at their business. They must resist getting tired in the pursuit. It is not like the Captain of their Salvation to begin and turn aside. "Seek and find," "Seek and save" are the slogans. "Seek and write off," "Seek and stop after two tries" are not the words of a Christ-impressed vocabulary. The church was not established for the good guys. It was to scour the world and rescue every person sinking deep in sin.

PRIESTLY DAYS OF
PASSION

SERMON 42

Suggested Incident
The Triumphal Entry

Suggested Scripture
Luke 19:29-44

Suggested Title
Hurrah for Jesus

Suggested Outline

I. THERE WERE THE CHEERS OF THE MULTITUDE (36-38)

II. THERE WERE THE JEERS OF THE MOB (39-40)

III. THERE WERE THE TEARS OF THE MASTER (41-44)

Textual Highlights

All four Gospels place special emphasis on the last week of Jesus' earthly life. They are called passion and resurrection narratives with extended introductions. That is, the writers are preachers more than biographers. They proclaim the saving significance of the Christ's death and resurrection. In some Gospel harmonies, the three years of the Lord's ministry are titled, (1) the obscure year of introduction, (2) the popular year of public favor, and (3) the intensive year of opposition. One is impressed by the fact that the largest bulk of information follows in the next section labeled "the priestly days of passion."

The final week caps the story and gives eternal significance to all that preceded.

This week begins with the day of triumph (Sunday). Monday is called the day of authority, Tuesday the day of conflict, Wednesday the day of retirement, Thursday is the day of fellowship, Friday the day of suffering and Saturday the day of rest.

Palm Sunday in the church calendar recalls the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In a very real sense the incarnation was God's triumphal entry into human history. Each conversion, in every land of the world, is Christ's triumphant entry into a human life. When "the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more," then will be the second advent or the King of kings triumphal return to climax all the past. But, that entrance into Jerusalem in 30 A.D. was an important point in the long story reaching from creation to the final judgment.

Purposefully, and in fulfillment of prophecies, Jesus chose the lowly ass's colt rather than the military steed. He, who came to bear our burdens, selected a beast of burden to portray his mission. Israel longed for an earthly king. He did the will of the Father by stooping to serve, to suffer, to save.

Palm branches, shouts of Hosanna and multitudes of people did not blind Jesus to the coming reality. He knew what lay ahead for his nation. The "chosen people" had chosen the ways of their pagan neighbors rather than the way of their God. Jesus heard the din of a shouting mob, but it did not drown out the still small voice of God's prophetic word about coming desolation. Jesus saw the garments strewn before him, but he foresaw the coming destruction by Roman armies just a generation away. Tuesday, in Christ's apocalyptic discourse, the city's coming fall will be more fully described.

SERMON 43

Suggested Incident
Cursing of the Fig Tree

Suggested Scripture
Mark 11:12-20

Suggested Title
Nothing but Leaves

Suggested Outline

Introduction
Jesus viewed Israel for fruit and found only leaves

I. RELIGIOUS RITUALISM'S CLAIM TO BE MORE WORSHIPFUL IS ONLY LEAVES

II. RELIGIOUS SPECTACULARISM'S CLAIM TO BE MORE POWERFUL IS ONLY LEAVES

III. RELIGIOUS SOCIALISM'S CLAIM TO BE MORE PRACTICAL IS ONLY LEAVES

IV. RELIGIOUS PURITANISM'S CLAIM TO BE MORE HOLY IS ONLY LEAVES

V. RELIGIOUS LIBERALISM'S CLAIM TO BE MORE INTELLECTUAL IS ONLY LEAVES

VI. RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM'S CLAIM TO BE MORE ACCURATE IS ONLY LEAVES

Textual Highlights

God is good. "His lovingkindness endureth forever" (Psalm 136:1). This is the emphasis of heaven's message, but it is not all the message. God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). Believers are saved. Rejectors are damned (Mark 16:16). The miracles of Jesus reveal the total truth. The many healings cry out that God is love. The single miracle of withering the fig tree reminds that judgment is also one of Christ's ministries. His apostles continue to work miracles of benevolence in Jesus' name from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the world. But the book of Acts does record that one miracle of judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira, lest we forget that disobedience brings death (Acts 5:1-11).

The cursing of the fig tree illustrates Jesus' disgust with pretense. God had planted Israel in Palestine. From deliverance by Moses to conquest by Joshua, it was Jehovah that providentially placed Jacob's descendants into the land he had promised. The Jews had been protected by the hedge of the law. They had been pruned, fertilized and irrigated by the prophets. Patiently God watched for fruit. What he got was leaves.

Whenever a fig tree brought forth leaves, it simultaneously produced its figs. To see the first was to promise the second. No fruit grower spends his energy and efforts to see greenery. He rightly expects to reap a crop as the reward of his patient efforts. Jerusalem had the appearance of being the city of God. The gorgeous temple radiated in the rising sun's rays. Robed priests were visible in abundant supply. Smoke rising from sacrificial altars scented the air. Pilgrims were arriving from every direction. Psalms of ascent were heard as the multitude ascended toward Mount Zion. The appearance of religion was all around. But Jesus was looking for holiness, loyalty . . . "fruit."

SERMON 44

Suggested Incident
Monday of Christ's Last Week

Suggested Scripture
John 12:37-50

Suggested Title
The Case Was Closed

Suggested Outline

I. THEY HAD CLOSED THEIR MIND (37)

II. THEY HAD CLOSED THEIR BIBLE (38)

III. THEY HAD CLOSED THEIR HEART (39-41)

IV. THEY HAD CLOSED THEIR MOUTH (42, 43)

V. THEY HAD CLOSED THEIR HEAVEN (44-50)

Textual Highlights

John's Gospel traces both the growth of faith and the advancement of unbelief. From the first chapter to the last, conviction of Christ's messiahship and deity develops from embryo-belief to full-grown assurance. At the very same time, opposition intensifies from inner seeds of animosity to outer shouts for Jesus' crucifixion. The apostle John pens the moving

account, hoping for an affirmative decision on the part of his readers. He declares his purpose saying, "these are written that ye may believe" (John 20:31).

The miracles were "signs" pointing to who Jesus was. They fulfilled their purpose both among the common masses and the leadership of the Jews. "Even of the rulers many believed on him" (John 12:42). Yet when fully adequate evidence is presented, men of free will can choose to shut their eyes. This is what the record says some did. It reads, "But though he had done so many signs before them, yet they believed not on him" (12:37). As the saying goes, "You can lead a horse to water; you can't make him drink." Down through the centuries of time, the preached gospel has produced unwavering certainty that Jesus is Lord in the minds of people from every strata of society. Yet some of their peers rejected the claim. That is the way it has been, still is and ever will be. "Many signs" were done "before them." God extended the offer of salvation and presented adequate evidence, but he would not force himself upon the unwilling. Rejection does not surprise the Almighty. He both foresaw it and foretold it.

Another sad fact revealed about mankind is their sometimes lack of courage. John tells that "even of the rulers many believed on him: but because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that is of men more than the glory that is of God" (12:42, 43). Had someone suggested they sign a commitment card in private, they would have done so. But openly confessing before men asked too much. Such an act would be raising the banner openly before the world. Both "the fearful and the unbelieving" face "the second death" (Revelation 21:8).

SERMON 45

Suggested Incident
The Battle of Question Marks (The Day of Controversy)

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 21, 22

Suggested Title
Hiding Behind the Fifth Amendment

Suggested Outline

Introduction

Jesus answered the Pharisees' and Sadducees' questions with questions they dare not answer lest they incriminate themselves.

I. IS BAPTISM FROM HEAVEN OR MEN? (21:25)

II. WHICH DID THE WILL OF HIS FATHER? (21:31)

III. WHAT WILL HE DO WITH THOSE TENANTS? (21:40)

IV. HOW DID YOU GET IN WITHOUT A WEDDING GARMENT? (22:12)

V. WHOSE IS THE IMAGE? (22:20)

Textual Highlights

Matthew 21 and 22 record a battle of wits, a contest of questions, a war of words. Jesus' religious opponents will attempt to ensnare him with the carefully honed questions that successfully had impaled previous adversaries. Sadducees, Pharisees and trained lawyers knew well how to make their points. In response to their inquiries, the Master Teacher will pose some soul-searching questions of his own. There will be little doubt at the end who came forth unscathed.

On Monday Jesus had cleansed the temple. Money-changers and animals had been driven out. The ones in charge hurled out the challenge, "By what authority doest thou these things?" (Matthew 21:23). Jesus routed them with a soul-revealing probe about the prophet John's source of authority. To answer why they were disobedient to heaven's messenger, would bare their guilty souls before the people.

Soon the Pharisees had joined their normal opponents, the Herodians. To ask Christ publicly about God's nation paying taxes to a pagan foreign power was designed to destroy him, whatever his answer. To call for withholding tax money would bring Rome's wrath. To favor such taxation would turn patriots against him. Little did they expect in answer a question that would silence them. The object lesson drawn from the tribute money called for rendering to both God and Caesar, if we accept benefits from both (11:15-22).

The Sadducees had created in their imagination a scenario to stop in their tracks all believers in a resurrection. Based on the Old Testament provision for a living brother to marry and produce seed through his dead brother's wife, the story of multiplied deaths up to seven made belief in the next life absurd. "Whose wife shall she be of the seven?" (22:28), was asked

with a chuckle. Jesus answer was that they made but two fatal mistakes. They knew not their Bible. They knew not their God (22:39).

SERMON 46

Suggested Incident
Denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 23:1-39

Suggested Title
Heathen Ideas About the Christian God

Suggested Outline

Introduction

It is a heathen idea that God can be fooled with our substituting something less than he has asked.

I. JEWISH LEADERS HAD SUBSTITUTED PREACHING FOR PRACTICING (1-3)

II. JEWISH LEADERS HAD SUBSTITUTED LAWS FOR LOVE (4)

III. JEWISH LEADERS HAD SUBSTITUTED TITLES FOR TASKS (5-12)

IV. JEWISH LEADERS HAD SUBSTITUTED PARTIES FOR PURITY (13-15)

V. JEWISH LEADERS HAD SUBSTITUTED LOOPHOLES FOR LOYALTY (16-22)

VI. JEWISH LEADERS HAD SUBSTITUTED MONEY FOR MERCY (23, 24)

VII. JEWISH LEADERS HAD SUBSTITUTED RITUALS FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS (25-28)

VIII. JEWISH LEADERS HAD SUBSTITUTED AESTHETICS FOR ETHICS (29-39)

Textual Highlights

Some texts of Matthew 23 omit the 14th verse. Without it there are seven woes. With it, eight times Jesus warns, "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" (13-29). Be it seven or eight times, these strong words should catch the attention of every religious leader. Neither clerical garb or religious titles of honor should deceive those who wear them. The Lord of heaven is gentle with sinners and prodigals. He is hard on pretentious clergymen. "Be not many of you teachers . . . we shall receive heavier judgment" (James 2:1).

Play acting will not suffice. "Genuine" is the right word to describe a gospel proclaimer. Sheep have the right to expect sincerity in those who would lead them. Many Rabbis and priests were weighed by the incarnate Lord and found wanting.

The heart-rending verses of chapter 23 prepare us for the harsh predictions of chapter 24. We will not be ready for the prophecy of the desolation to come at the fall of Jerusalem, until we see the falling tears from Jesus' eyes in the preceding passage. There the Lord reviews his Bible's history from its first book, Genesis (the account of Abel's murder), to its last book, 2 Chronicles (with its story of Zachariah's slaughter). Christ knows the crucifixion is awaiting him in just three more days.

His crying heart weeps the tearful words, "how often would I . . . and ye would not" (23:37). Free will is a heavenly gift to those made in God's image. It is a frightful responsibility for rebels. Desolation, as Daniel prophesied, was their lot.

SERMON 47

Suggested Incident
Last Supper

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 26:17-30; John13:1-20

Suggested Title
Dinner Date With Destiny

Suggested Outline

I. THE SUPPER WAS IN A VERY COMMON ROOM

II. THE SUPPER WAS AROUND A VERY COMMON TABLE

III. THE SUPPER WAS WHERE SAT VERY COMMON PEOPLE

IV. THE SUPPER WAS WHERE THEY ATE VERY COMMON ELEMENTS

V. THE SUPPER WAS PRECEDED BY VERY COMMON COURTESIES

VI. THE SUPPER WAS REVEALING A VERY UNCOMMON LOVE

Textual Highlights

Since the Exodus from Egypt, Jews had gathered in their homes for the spring time passover meal. Their national history was relived, lest they forget the God who delivered them. Lamb

was the main course to call the mind to the blood of the lamb which had been applied to door posts and lintel so that the death angel would pass over that home. Bitter herbs before the meal caused the remembering of the bitter bondage from which they had been delivered. Even the red sauce was to help the family visualize the bricks that Jacob's descendants in their slavery had to make without straw. Reclining on couches now as free men marked what a difference Jehovah had made for them. In place of the usual leavened bread, the unleavened would be substituted this night as a reminder of the hasty flight essential to escape Pharaoh's pursuing army. Around the table cups of wine were shared and Psalms were sung, as the family relived the story. The father explained for the children the meaning of each act and substance. On the Thursday night of Christ's last week, it was he that lead the thoughts of his disciples. Not only were they helped to see the deliverance back in the days of Moses, they were readied to accept the greater deliverance just ahead in his coming death as the lamb of God. The bread was his body, unleavened by the sin that so easily beset others. He would break it so that others might share in the life. The fruit of the vine by its color spoke of the blood he would pour out upon the cross. All were invited to share its forgiveness. "Drink ye all of it" (26:27) did not call on the disciples to totally empty the cup of its contents. It invited everyone at the table to share in the supper and its meaning. There is no reason that today each worshipper at the feast should not drink in all of the meaning that is there. Drink in the hope of the new day in the Father's kingdom. Drink in the assurance that your sins are forgiven. Drink in the joy of being in covenant with the Lord himself. Drink in the awareness that you are counted as one of Christ's disciples.

SERMON 48

Suggested Incident
Farewell Discourse

Suggested Scripture
John 14:1-31

Suggested Title
Crumbs From the Master's Table

Suggested Outline

I. THE HUNGER FOR HEAVEN (1-6)

II. THE HUNGER FOR GOD (7-15)

III. THE HUNGER FOR THE SPIRIT (16-27)

IV. THE HUNGER FOR THE CROSS (28-31)

Textual Highlights

What a Saviour! It is the night before his trials, his scourging and his crucifixion. Yet his first concern is the sadness that shall come upon his disciples, rather than the anguish that shall come upon himself. "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1), calls for his followers to stop what has already begun to happen.

The command "believe in God" is so easy to obey on a sunny day. Who would be foolish enough to say "there is no

God," when every flower and every bird and every sunset cries out otherwise? Turn the telescope on the stars or the microscope on a snowflake and atheism seems a faulty philosophy. But then there are other days when everything goes wrong. Holiness and goodness are nailed to a cross. Hopes and promises lie buried deep in concrete tombs. Clouds of despair block out every ray of light and darkness covers the heart. Now pessimism reigns and evil has righteousness with its back to the wall. Faith says, "believe in God." Trust says, "believe also in me" (14:1).

Centuries of time and decades of experience have proven Christ to be right. The crucifixion is not the end of the story. Life is stronger than death. Love will master hate. Light overcomes darkness. A new day is dawning. Resurrection will be followed by ascension. Ascension precedes coronation. Let the world sing, "Hallelujah, Christ arose."

The test of faith is when the furnace of adversity burns white hot. "Believe in God." The acid test of belief is when a child is born blind (John 9:2), a worshipper is slain (Luke 13:1,2), a loved one dies when the tower falls (Luke 13:4), or a Job loses health, family and property all at once. "Believe also in me." Ultimately faith will be vindicated. We have Christ's word on it. His gospel is historic demonstration that every Good Friday will know a Resurrection Sunday, because Jesus has "the keys of death and of Hades" (Revelation 1:18).

To help us face the hard times Jesus promised "another Comforter" (14:16). While Christ's mission on earth was for a limited time, the presence of the Holy Spirit would remain "forever." This "Paraclete," or "Helper," is not restricted to one locale. As he was with the early apostle, he remains with today's believers on every mission field.

SERMON 49

Suggested Incident
Farewell Discourse

Suggested Scripture
John 14, 15, 16

Suggested Title
When Jesus Sang Tenor

Suggested Outline

Introduction
Matthew 26:30

I. THE NOTE OF FAITH. (John 14)
   A. Faith looks forward to Heaven (1-6)
   B. Faith looks upward for power (7-15)
   C. Faith looks inward for peace (16-31)

II. THE NOTE OF LOVE (John 15)
   A. The love disciples have in Christ (1-11)
   B. The love disciples share with each other (12-17)
   C. The love disciples share with the world (18-27)

III. THE NOTE OF HOPE (John 16)
   A. The basis of the disciples' despair (1-6)
   B. The cause of the disciples' hope (7-33)

Textual Highlights

According to Jesus, his Father is looking for "fruit," (John 15:1), "more fruit" (15:2), yea "much fruit" (15:5). Our lives, like the vine and branches in the simile, may bear leaves, produce shade and demonstrate beauty. These additional blessings will not suffice as substitutes for "fruit." It appears that the two classes under consideration are the fruitless and the fruitful.

Apple trees bear apples. Pear trees produce pears. Peaches come from peach trees. A productive Christian brings forth other Christians. The old saying is true that sheep bear sheep. It is not the shepherds that bring forth the new lambs, although they are helpful in the process.

Have you ever asked how you can glorify God? Are you interested to learn how to best praise the Lord? Jesus' teaching on the theme is as needed as it is informative. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit" (15:8). In just two more chapters John will record a significant phrase from a prayer of Jesus. Toward the end of his ministry Christ's words are, "I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do" (17:4). It may be that the highest form of praise is not the raising of our hands in worship but the telling of salvation's story to a traveler along some quiet road.

SERMON 50

Suggested Incident
Gethsemane

Suggested Scripture
Matthew 26:36-46

Suggested Title
Neath the Old Olive Trees

Introduction

Gethsemane means the place of oil presses. The many uses of oil are similar to the many blessings of prayer.

I. PRAYER AND OIL BRING STRENGTH (1 Kings 17:12; Ezekiel 16:13)

II. PRAYER AND OIL BRING COMFORT (Psalms 23:5)

III. PRAYER AND OIL BRING HEALING (James 5:14; Mark 6:13)

IV. PRAYER AND OIL BRING LIGHT (Matthew 25:3)

V. PRAYER AND OIL BRING BEAUTIFICATION (Exodus 30:23-25; John 12:3)

VI. PRAYER AND OIL BRING CONSECRATION (1 Samuel 10:1)

Textual Highlights

Every posture in prayer is significant. To stand looking toward heaven points to the source of every petitioned blessing. To bow the head shows reverence. To close the eyes and fold the hands is to shut out all other thoughts and to cease all other activity. Kneeling reflects humility and submission. But, in Gethsemane, the Master "fell on his face" (Matthew 26:39). The crushing anguish that lay immediately ahead made no other posture adequate for the hour.

"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me," was the burden of his petition. He long had known that the purpose of his incarnation was "to give his life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). Even back then he referred to the passion as his cup, asking, "Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" (20:22).

In the upper room at the institution of the Lord's Supper, he chose the blood of the grape ("the fruit of the vine") to be the memorial of his sacrifice. "He took a cup . . . saying . . . this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins" (26:27, 28). From that upper room to the Second Coming is the unbroken chain of communion. In every land on every Lord's Day, every time believers "drink the cup" they "proclaim the Lord's death" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Amid the olive trees and near olive presses that crushed out the oil, Christ petitions "if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me." Was it possible? Could Jesus avoid the cross by calling legions of angels to his side? The answer is both yes and no. Of course he had the power to turn aside from the cross. Yes, the cup could pass, but not if sinners were to be redeemed. God's will of salvation was to be done.

SERMON 51

Suggested Incident
Crucifixion

Suggested Scripture
John 18, 19

Suggested Title
Countdown at Calvary

Suggested Outline

I. SEVEN SAYINGS
- A. Word of forgiveness (Luke 23:34)
- B. Word of salvation (Luke 23:43)
- C. Word of filial care (John 19:27)
- D. Word of agony (John 19:28)
- E. Word of song (Matthew 27:46)
- F. Word of victory (John 19:30)
- G. Word of committal (Luke 23:46)

II. SIX TESTIMONIES
- A. By Pilate (John 19:19-22)
- B. By Thief (Luke 23:42)
- C. By Centurion (Matthew 27:54)
- D. By Joseph (Mark 15:43)
- E. By Populace (Luke 23:48)
- F. By Nature (Matthew 27:45)

III. FIVE PROPHECIES
- A. About transgressors (Mark 15:28)
- B. About lots (John 19:24)
- C. About vinegar (Matthew 27:48)
- D. About bones (John 19:36)
- E. About piercing (John 19:37)

IV. FOUR CHALLENGES
- A. Of Christ's word (Matthew 27:39)
- B. Of Christ's deity (Matthew 17:40)
- C. Of Christ's work (Matthew 27:42)
- D. Of Christ's power (Matthew 27:42)

V. THREE INSCRIPTIONS (John 19:20)

VI. TWO THIEVES (Matthew 27:38)

VII. ONE SAVIOR (Mark 15:38)

Textual Highlights

The story of the cross cannot be told too often, for it is the clearest demonstration of God's love. "The word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God" (I Corinthians 1:18).

Every instance of water baptism is the proclamation of Jesus' death for the new convert. Each Lord's Day's observance of the Lord's Supper is the re-telling of history's greatest event. All gospel preaching takes the listener's mind to Calvary's sacrifice, where God's lamb was offered, becoming

the only giving of life in all time adequate to remove the sins of the world.

Lift up the Christ of the cross. It has drawing power.

KINGLY YEARS OF TRIUMPH

SERMON 52

Suggested Incident

Appearance of the Resurrected Jesus to Mary Magdaline

Suggested Scripture

John 20:11-18

Suggested Title

The Resurrection is the Answer

Suggested Outline

I. WHY CHRISTIAN?

II. WHY SUNDAY?

III. WHY COMMUNION?

IV. WHY IMMERSION?

V. WHY OPTIMISM?

Textual Highlights

The resurrection of Jesus from the grave is a historic fact. It can be dated. Matthew's account speaks of "the first day of the week" (28:1). Mark agrees, "he was risen early on the first day of the week" (16:9). Luke's last chapter begins with the phrase, "on the first day of the week" (24:1). Lastly, John confirms with the words "on the first day of the week" (20:1).

The tomb was empty (John 20:2). The "linen clothes," which had been wound around his body, were empty (20:5). The disciple's hearts, that previously had been overflowing with hope, were now empty and turned to "weeping" (20:11). Once Mary found him alive and her joy had returned; she never wanted to lose that confident joy again. Her tendency was to hold on to her "Rabboni," lest he disappear again.

Jesus spoke to her, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto the Father" (20:17). How can Christ claim he had not ascended to God, when on the cross he promised the penitent thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43)? His prayer at Calvary was, "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Perhaps we are reading too much into the English translation, "Touch me not." The Greek could just as well be translated, "Take not hold on me," or "Do not cling to me." That is, he will remain on earth forty days before his bodily ascension. Mary need not fear his immediate physical departure. From the cross Christ's spirit went to Paradise and His body went into the tomb. Spirit and body reunited at the resurrection. Bodily, Christ "was taken up" before the eyes of the eleven apostles after forty days of appearances (Acts 1:3, 11). That is the ascension of John 20:17.

This appearance to Mary, the first of the Risen Lord's appearances, was not listed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8. At far away Corinth, where Mary would be unknown, they needed to know of official witnesses with wider repute. Wherever the gospel was known the names of Peter, Paul and the apostles would be familiar. The name of the Lord's brother James, as a respected leader of the Jerusalem church, would not have escaped them.

SERMON 53

Suggested Incident
Ascension

Suggested Scripture
Acts 11:11 (Matthew 28:18-20)

Suggested Title
Devilish Answers to the Angelic Question

Suggested Outline

Introduction
Why "gaze" when he said "go"

I. IS CHRIST'S CLAIM TOO GREAT FOR US TO ACKNOWLEDGE? (Matthew 28:18)

II. IS CHRIST'S CHARGE TOO GREAT FOR US TO KEEP? (Matthew 28:19)

III. IS CHRIST'S PROMISE TOO GREAT FOR US TO TRUST? (Matthew 28:20).

Textual Highlights

Each written Gospel ends with instructions for the church on earth. Mark quotes Jesus' order to tell his story to "all the world . . . the whole creation" (16:15). Luke recalls Christ's desire that the word get to "all the nations, beginning from Jer-

usalem" (24:47). The burden of John's final chapter is that people, like sheep and lambs, be fed and tended (21:15-17). The Matthew account makes clear that "all the nations" are to be discipled (28:19).

"Baptizing them" is enrolling them in the school of Christ. The order is sometimes held to be "teach, baptize, teach." More exactly it is "Preach, baptize, teach." Preaching is announcing the good news. Those who receive that gospel accept Christ as their Saviour and Teacher. They commit themselves to remain under his instruction. Baptism is that act of commitment.

To baptize "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" is more than to utter aloud a formula. A sincere believer finds he has entered a relationship with the Godhead, whether the one administering baptism speaks the words or fails to say them. A convert now has a union with the Father as his newborn child. God's Son has become his Redeemer and Elder Brother. The Spirit indwells him and seals the relationship.

To be "baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38) is the same as to be baptized into the threefold name. "In the name of Jesus" means "by the authority of Jesus." Every immersion in water of a penitent believer in the name of Jesus Christ unto remission of sins has the commission of the Lord behind it. Matthew 28:18-20 is one clear statement of the church's marching orders. "Unto the end of the world" those instructions will not change.

Persons baptized are to be instructed in Christ's commands. No teaching of the Master is to be left out. "All things whatsoever I commanded" is the uncompromising imperative. The knowledge of Jesus' will, in itself, is not the end goal. Each disciple of Christ is expected to "observe all . . . commanded."

SERMON 54

Suggested Incident
Great Commission

Suggested Scripture
Mark 16:15-16

Suggested Title
Another Look at the Great Commission

Suggested Outline

I. LOOK AGAIN AT THE GREAT COMMISSION

II. LOOK AGAIN AT THE GREAT REMISSION

III. LOOK AGAIN AT THE GREAT EMISSION

IV. LOOK AGAIN AT THE GREAT PERMISSION

V. LOOK AGAIN AT THE GREAT OMISSION

VI. LOOK AGAIN AT THE GREAT SUBMISSION

Textual Highlights

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Baptism is a once-for-all-time act. Believing is to be our condition from the day we enter Christ's church and it is to remain our state into eternity. The Christian life is a life of faith.

Believers accept every propositional sentence that came from the mouth of Jesus or any of his inspired spokesmen. But, trust is the basic meaning of faith. We totally trust in the person of God's Son.

Some wish that Mark 16:16 had said more. It is claimed, "He that disbelieveth shall be condemned" does not clarify the state of the unbaptized. Had Christ added, "he that disbelieveth and is not baptized shall be condemned," it would have left more confusion. How about a disbeliever who is baptized? The way Jesus put it, a baptism every Monday morning would not save an unbeliever. But God has covenanted to give the benefits of Jesus' cross and resurrection to all who meet him in his ordained way.

"He that eats food and digests it will remain healthy, but he that doesn't eat will grow weak." Is that a parallel? Does it need to be stated, "He that eats food and digests it will remain healthy, but he that doesn't eat and doesn't digest what he doesn't eat will grow weak?" God did not give us the beautiful ordinance of baptism to be argued about but to be experienced. The drama of Christ's burial and resurrection before the world declares the faith that fills the heart. Faith is invisible. It is inside the heart of a man. Baptism can be seen. It bears witness to the acceptance of the gospel facts and promises. It is time to stop arguing and start obeying. No person in my experience has ever regretted his or her immersion. Many in my acquaintance have wondered why they waited so long. Many say, "The Bible says it, I believe it and that settles it." Regarding baptism, I teach "Jesus commanded baptism, his apostles practiced baptism and I cannot go wrong in obeying."

SERMON 55

Suggested Incident
Great Commission

Suggested Scripture
Mark 16:15-20

Suggested Title
Evidence of the Spirit's Presence

Suggested Outline

I. IN MY BODY THERE IS A NEW MASTER
   A. He drives out the demonic
   B. He enables holy living
II. IN MY MOUTH THERE IS A NEW TONGUE
   A. The early gift of "tongues" enabled evangelism
   B. Our changed daily talk witnesses God's presence
III. IN MY WILL THERE IS A NEW STRENGTH
   A. Christ has defeated the serpent
   B. Christ enables us to defeat the serpent
IV. IN MY HEART THERE IS A NEW CONFIDENCE
   A. The deadly poisons of earth
   B. The life-giving promise of God
V. IN MY HAND THERE IS A NEW TOUCH
   A. The "laying on of hands" communicated concern
   B. The physical healings dramatized the spiritual healings
VI. IN MY WORLD THERE IS A NEW WITNESS
   A. The apostolic word was confirmed by God
   B. The church's word is made effective by the Spirit

Textual Highlights

Every incident recorded in the Acts of the Apostles was past history when Mark wrote this Gospel. The imprisonment of Paul that concludes Luke's second book to Theophilus is generally dated 61-63 A.D. Mark, remembering Jesus' promise to accompany apostolic preaching with signs, relates that history verifies their appearance. "They went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed" (16:20).

Acts records the first miracle of church history to be the phenomena of Pentecost when Galilean apostles spoke "with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). Its final chapter speaks of a viper's bite having no effect on Paul (28:3-6).

SERMON SAMPLE #52



WHY CHRISTIAN?

WHY SUNDAY?

WHY COMMUNION?

WHY IMMERSION?

WHY OPTIMISM?

The Resurrection is the Answer

It was dark to Mary of Magdala
As she stole from her lonely room
And sped away, 'ere the break of day
To the place of the rich man's tomb.

It was dark as night in her mournful soul
For the hope of her life had fled,
For sin had won and the deed was done,
And the Son of God was dead.

"Rabboni." Only one word she said,
But her heart was in the cry.
There he stood, her Christ, and the sight sufficed,
Although she had seen Him die.

And for Mary of Magdala, through the power
Of that Resurrection Day
All the dark and the night, all the sin and blight
Had forever passed away.[1]

It was Death that had been put to death. It was the Destroyer that had been destroyed. The single fact of Christ's resurrection brought to light the answer to humanity's everpuzzling questions.

When leading evangelistic meetings, I have the practice of having a "question box" at the entrance of the church. I want every person, who makes the effort to attend, to leave only after his specific problems have been answered. Preaching on but one subject a night, I might fail to meet the particular need of some guest. The question box is an effort to avoid that pos-

sibility. Also in the college classroom, I spend a great deal of time responding to the student's inquiries. Or, when it is my joy to pastor a local church and to go calling in neighborhood homes, I seek to bring forth some questions about the Bible or the church that has disturbed the man, woman or child residing at that address. Interested people like to ask questions about God's revelation.

Throughout the years I have received and responded to hundreds of inquiries. It is my present intention to select, from the many questions asked, the five that I have heard most often! They come out of the lips of young or old, something like this:

(1) "In this enlightened day, exposed as you have been both in secular college classrooms and in many confrontations with people of cynical doubt; why are you a Christian?

(2) "I want to know why you Christians meet on the first day of the week. What is wrong with the sabbath?" How often have you heard that question?

(3) "Why do the congregations that refer to themselves as either Churches of Christ or Christian Churches always have communion at their Sunday meetings?"

(4) One answer demanded everlastingly is, "Why do many insist on immersion as the only Biblical baptism?"

(5) The last question for now is sometimes the most curious of all. It is phrased: "In a day that some people are calling the 'post-Christian era,' why are you so incurably optimistic about the church? You talk about uniting God's people and evangelizing the world. You talk nothing but certain victory!"

Let it be noticed that when you take a "question mark" and straighten it out, it becomes an "exclamation point!" The New Testament is God's anvil on which human questions can be turned into strongly-forged answers. I read recently that an exclamation point is simply "a period that has blown its top."

That definition is a fitting description for the exciting affirmation of the New Testament. The varied questions of men find their singular answer from "the testimony in the Testament." The New Testament, in all its parts, is an abiding witness to the undergirding Christian conviction that Jesus rose again.

WHY CHRISTIAN?

Why are you a Christian? Why are you striving to make other people Christ's disciples? No more basic question can be asked. It demands a worthy answer.

Let me recall for you a line from the logical mind of Alexander Campbell, "If the resurrection of Christ is not a fact, then a lie has done more to civilize the world than all the truth that ever existed." That sentence is worth pondering again. "If the resurrection of Christ is not a fact, then a lie has done more to civilize the world than all the truth that ever existed."

I want you to listen also to the *rationale* of yesterday's great missionary to India, E. Stanley Jones. Wrestling with the apostolic testimony of Jesus' resurrection, he concluded, "Hoaxes do not produce Hallelujahs. Guilty secrets do not transform lives." You examine the unanimous witness of the men who knew Jesus best and you know that they must have seen the risen Lord. There is no other way to explain their total transformation of life.

Yet in fairness, we need to hear the other side. Let the witty French skeptic, Ernst Renan, speak. And, as you hear his words, feel the barb of his rejection of Christianity."You Christians are living on the fragrance of an empty vase." Go back again mentally to Jerusalem, 30 A.D. It is Easter Sunday morning. Watch the disciples as they go to the tomb where their

leader was buried. Behold, the "Lily of the valley" is not there. The "Rose of Sharon" is gone. Renan refers to this empty tomb in his words, "You are living on the fragrance of an empty vase." No wonder he was a skeptic.

Is the empty tomb the only evidence believers have for Christ's resurrection? Is that good enough? The empty tomb may corroborate other evidence. But Joseph of Arimathaea's bodiless tomb in itself is not sufficient proof to carry doubting Thomases from honest skepticism to unquestioning conviction. Maybe the disciples did go to the wrong tomb. Just possibly somebody did steal the body. As illogical as these claims may sound to your ears and mine, the "empty tomb" is not enough to substantiate Christ's resurrection beyond question. But God gave us much stronger evidence than that.

Luke assures Theophilus of the certainty that the risen Christ remained on this earth "forty days." Most of that time he appeared in the very city where the crucifixion facts were best known. This allowed that the resurrection claim could be tested by small groups and large. On one occasion, in more distant Galilee, five hundred brethren saw him at the same time. Those that had known him throughout his ministry could testify after his certain demise, "I have seen the Lord." Thanks be to God, every disciple rivaled Thomas with his honest doubts. Because of those real doubts that were overcome by overwhelming evidence, it becomes easier for us to believe today. Remember the Lord's brother, James, who refused to believe on him during his earthly ministry? He became the leading figure in the Jerusalem church. We seek an adequate explanation for his move from stubborn doubt to certain belief. It is that Jesus, after his death, appeared to him. James joined the ranks as a witness.

Let us imagine putting the key question to Paul. "Paul, you

are a Hebrew of the Hebrews. You are of the tribe of Benjamin. Why are you a Christian? You could be a non-believing Jew. You even could be a Buddhist, or a Hindu. Why do you follow Christ and say that he is your Lord?"

Paul would respond, "I did not want to be a Christian. I thought Jesus' claim to deity was blasphemous. But on the road to Damascus, I saw the formerly crucified Jesus alive. His resurrection from the grave proves him to be divine." In the early Saul we see an honest Jew who thought it was sheer blasphemy to call Jesus Lord. In the later Paul we see the same honest man become the greatest proponent of Jesus history has known. We ask why this total reversal of position occurred. Paul was a man who refused to believe a claim without adequate evidence. When, before his very eyes, Paul received that proof beyond debate, he could be nothing else but a Christian.

We call out, "Peter, others have given their testimony. Will you make a statement before the world? Simon of Zebedee, why did you become a follower of Jesus? You could have followed Moses. You could have followed many other men. Why Jesus?"

In Peter's first sermon after Christ's resurrection, we have his well known reply:

> Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know; him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay whom God raised up . . . whereof we all are witnesses. . . . Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified (Acts 2:22-36).

So Peter and Paul also blend their voices to confirm why

they were Christian. They were not followers of one of the dozens of other religions because only Jesus Christ ever came back from the grave to die no more. This established resurrection proved to them Jesus' claim to be God's only begotten Son. All the apostles could join John in the report, "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life . . . declare we unto you" (1 John 1:1-3).

Robert Lowry expressed the power of the resurrection fact upon the church, when he set to music his words:

> Lo in the grave he lay–
> Jesus my Savior!
> Waiting the coming day–
> Jesus my Lord!
> Up from the grave he arose,
> With a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
> He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
> And He lives forever with His saints to reign.
> He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose![2]

How can we, today, join in such a confident song? Because every New Testament doubter was presented with such credible evidence that he turned to the Lord and thereafter never wavered. Without exception, every apostle could have worn the name "Peter" after Pentecost, for every apostle had become a "rock." That is why we too are Christian! Romans 10:9 promises: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." The resurrection is not a fairy tale, not a myth. It is not just a beautiful symbol of life. It is not just an illustration of some ethical truth or some nice thought. It is a solid historical fact!

WHY SUNDAY?

We turn to another of these often-asked questions. One says, "All right, I can see why you are a Christian, but why do you Christians meet on the first day of the week for your public assemblies? What is wrong with the Sabbath Day?"

I want you to listen quite closely now to a response to this good question. There is nothing wrong with the Sabbath day. What a wonderful day it was! The descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had been toiling in slavery. The book of Exodus tells of their bondage under the Pharaoh of Egypt. They had to labor under the whip seven days a week and no day permitted rest-breaks of refreshment. Then, at the Exodus, God made them His theocratic nation. His covenant on tables of stone implied, "From now on you are not bowing your neck to any dictator. You are not becoming slave to any man or any job. As my people you are going to have time for your family, time for yourself, time for your God. 'Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.' Get your work done in six days. Take time to be human. You are more than an animal." Thank God for the historic Sabbath Day that set Israel free!

I know that Jesus was a Jew. I know that the twelve apostles of Jesus were Jews and so was Paul. I know that the church started in a territory where the habit of life had been to go into the synagogue on the Sabbath Day. That is indisputable fact number one. From Mount Sinai to Mount Calvary, the Jews always gathered for corporate worship on "the seventh day of the week."

But fact number two also cannot be refuted successfully. When the church started, it started on Sunday. When the Holy Spirit came from Heaven to inaugurate Christ's reign, he came on the day after the Sabbath (Acts 2:1 cp. Leviticus 23:15-16).

When the early Christians met for communion, according to Acts 20:7, it was on "the first day of the week" that they came together to break bread. They took their Christian offerings for benevolence both in Galatia and Greece "upon the first day of the week" (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Every member is said on that day each week to have laid by in the θησαυρος. This Greek word *thesaurus* means treasury. Revelation 1:10 talks about John receiving his vision on "the Lord's Day." The Second century writings only use this new term to apply to the first day of the week, the day of Christ's resurrection and the day of Christian assembly (See the *Didache* or such church fathers as Barnabas, Ignatius and Justin Martyr). Yet from the exodus of the Jews to the execution of Jesus, Jehovah's elect always kept "the seventh day."

What could have been such a dynamic cause to have produced the consequent effect of the Church of Christ always meeting upon "the first day?" What brought this obvious fact of history?

We might have anticipated that a change was coming by reading Hosea 2:11. The old prophet of the eighth century B.C. voiced Jehovah's word, "I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feasts, her new moons, and her sabbaths." The contemporary, Amos, raised the question when the sabbath would be gone and the new moon have passed away (Amos 8:5). The Lord's answer pointed to when "the sun" would "go down at noon" and referred to a sad day, "as the mourning for an only son" (Amos 8:9-10). In other words, the sabbath was to close when God's son—his "only son"—died on the cross. Then God's mourning for that son would be evident by his shrouding the earth in darkness. Your New Testament reports that when Christ hung on the cross, the world was darkened "from the sixth hour to ninth hour" (Mark 15:33). That would be from

twelve o'clock noon to three o'clock in the afternoon.

Are these the ancient Scriptures Paul had in view when he wrote to the "Judaizers" in Colossae? He spoke in Colossians 2:14 of the law being taken out of the way and nailed to the cross. In verses 16 and 17 he drew the conclusion: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day, or a new moon or a sabbath day: which are a shadow of the things to come."

We have learned that the Old Testament had foretold and the New confirmed that the sabbath would cease. Yet, we further ask, "What was that latter-day event that caused the Lord's Day to begin?" It was the resurrection of Christ on "the first day of the week." That resurrection is the answer to why we are Christians! It is also the answer to why we meet on "the first day of the week!" On that glorious day, Jesus won the decisive victory! That was the day of his resurrection from the grave. The Sabbath commemorated the greatest event of Old Testament revelation: Mankind's creation. The Lord's Day commemorates a later and greater event: Mankind's re-creation. Through the victory over the grave, Jesus conquered man's most frightening enemy, Death.

WHY COMMUNION?

Someone might continue to probe with the additional cross-examination, "I have known all my life that the church through the centuries has gathered on Sunday. But there are many Christians today that meet on the first day of the week and yet do not have communion on that day. Why do you also observe the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day?"

If you agree that the practice of the earliest church is norma-

tive for later ages, consider this. Many of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus recorded in the Bible are seen to be eating experiences. Resurrection Sunday afternoon Cleopas and another disciple were going down the way to Emmaus. They met the Lord and he was made known unto them in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:35). That very night Thomas made a mistake equivalent to skipping a Sunday night service. On this occasion, Thomas was not there when Jesus made his appearance. The door was closed for fear of the Jews, but when Christ manifest his presence his first question was, "Do you have anything to eat?"

Remember another occasion. Christ announced he would meet with the disciples in large numbers up in Galilee. All his previous appearances were surprises and unannounced. This anticipated manifestation was the occasion when he met the five hundred at the appointed mountain. The apostles arrived there early and Peter suggested that he wanted to go fishing while he waited for the Lord. He spent the night with the six other disciples. They had not caught a thing. Then a voice from the shore said, "Children, have you aught to eat?" They answered, "No." The voice suggested they let down the net on the other side of the boat. They were so far from shore they could not see who it was. But when they came up with one hundred fifty-three fish, John said, "It is the Lord," and Peter threw on his clothes. He did not even help to row the boat to shore, but rather sprang into the water in his hurry to swim to Jesus.When he got there, what was Jesus doing? He was making breakfast! (John 21:1-14).

A spirit would not get hungry nor have "flesh and bones" as Jesus was seen to have. Was Jesus preparing his day and ours for those who later might say that the disciples just thought he arose or that he lived on only in their memory? Fortunately for

our faith Jesus wanted to prove that he was the same one who so often before had dined with them around the table.

Peter made this same point of evidence when he addressed the house of Cornelius. "Him God raised up the third day, and gave him to be made manifest, not to all the people, but unto witnesses that were chosen before of God, even to us, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (Acts 10:40, 41). Christ has established a table fellowship, a dining relationship. By these post-resurrection appearances including "eating" before them, Jesus seemingly was setting the precedent for meeting with his disciples whenever two or three of them dined in his name. And even on those occasions, when he did not make himself known by a physical appearance, they came to realize he was there nevertheless. Consciousness of his presence explains Acts 2:46: "They ate their food with gladness." Re-examine Acts 1:3, 4 where Christ is said to have appeared to the apostles for the space of forty days. This passage is saying something far more important than the words our present translations give us. If you are looking at the American Standard Version, glance at the footnote for verse four. The translator's note indicates that in the Greek the meaning is stronger than "being assembled together with them." It literally speaks of Christ "eating with them" over that forty day period.

The Christians who observe the Lord's Supper monthly, or quarterly, or annually seldom claim other than human preference for their chosen interval. Early church records of the first three Christian centuries tell of believers, from the catacombs of Rome to the outskirts of the empire, meeting together "on the first day of the week to break bread." I've heard it proposed that to get across the idea of Jesus' Resurrection, we ought to put an Easter lily on the communion table. While that might not hurt anything, it is not necessary. Christ has already given us

the setting of the Lord's Day to hold the gem of the Lord's Supper. Together, the special time and the special emblems proclaim the Lord's death and resurrection until he comes.

On Saturday night the late James Earl Ladd, Sr. was preparing for the service of Communion the next day. While he was lying on his bed, a poem came to him. He jumped out from under the covers, found a pencil and scratched down the lines:

I have a date with the Lord:
He set the time for me
When I relive that sacrifice
He made on Calvary.

Recall that day up in the room?
He blest the fruit of the vine,
"This is my blood shed now for you,
I die for sins of thine."

He is not dead! He lives! He lives!
Above the rain and mist!
Yet once a week He keeps with me
A lover's holy tryst.

My sins press down. I cry for help!
O, cleanse me with Thy blood!
And so he says, "Keep thou the feast.
There touch the crimson flood."

And so I want to tell you, sir,
Whenever I am able,
I aim to keep my date with Him
At His Communion Table.

Jesus' rising from the death-grip of the Tomb is the answer to why we are Christians. It is the answer to why we meet on the first day of the week and why we commune when we gath-

er. The Lord's Supper is not a memorial for a dead Christ, it is a communion time with the Living Christ. At this point some brethren are in error when they call the bread of communion "the host." He is not "the host" on the table. Rather, he is the host at his table. We commune with him on his resurrection day.

WHY IMMERSION?

Here is a question that troubles many. Why do growing numbers of churchmen insist on immersion? Would it not be better to ignore the whole question of how baptism was performed in the first century? Again listen to "the testimony of the Testament" regarding the central gospel facts. Jesus died and was buried and rose again. One day Jesus had prophesied, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straightened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). On another occasion he had asked the question, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink? or to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Mark 10:38). In other words both the communion cup and water baptism were pictures of the "baptism of suffering" that Jesus underwent. That terrible baptism of his passion was climaxed by his rising from the grave. It becomes evident that the Lord's supper and Christian baptism are both dramatic acts. Immersion could be called our "Oberammergau" or our passion play. By our burial and resurrection in water we tell the story of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Similarly, our communion on the Lord's Day speaks about the same gospel truths. The late evangelist, James Earl Ladd, mentioned above, standing before his audiences, used to take the communion cup, tip it into his hand, and let the "blood of the grape" drip back into the cup. This was to remind the listeners of the nail-

pierced hands from which flowed the blood at Calvary. The communion emblems "proclaim the Lord's death." The victory day upon which we meet tells further of his resurrection. The action of baptism also declares the same gospel facts. What that feast is for the believers, baptism is for the new convert.

Immersion is the initiatory act that brings the former non-believer into the church of the risen Lord. Why is this action so vital? Because it is an action that speaks louder than words. Each new convert, by his action, tells the watching world that he too believes in the gospel that Christ died for him, was buried and rose again.

Suppose you had been with John the Baptist that day when Christ came to begin his ministry. Jesus had walked all the way from Nazareth. Ponder the words of Jesus' cousin as he speaks. "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." The audience on Jordan's bank is composed of Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Herodians and Zealots. They see this one whom John the Baptizer had called the Messiah and the Lamb. They watch as he is buried out of their vision and then resurrected to be seen again. We might say that Jesus starts his ministry by symbolizing how he is going to end it. He is buried from view. He is then resurrected into sight again.

Suppose I would say of the American flag, "Well, it's only a piece of cloth. If you want to tear it down and tramp on it, it is OK with me. At best it is only a piece of material dyed red, white and blue." You may not prefer red, white, and blue for favorite colors. You might rather opt for green, pink and orange. And when it comes to "thirteen" stripes, that could prove to be an "unlucky" number. Why not get more biblical? Think of the twelve tribes or the twelve apostles. Shall we change the number to twelve? And while we are at the work of replacing the standard by our preferences, let us substitute the

fifty stars in the field of blue by the number eighteen because that was the number of my football jersey.

You rightly would agree that it is no use to have a symbol if you are going to change it. I do not know what sprinkling drops of water from the finger tips may symbolize. But I surely know the meaning of lowering a person of newly found faith under the water to see him appear again. Do you see it? Christian immersion is telling the world we have come to believe in Christ's death, burial and resurrection. That is, baptism is a confession of faith. The action is confession to this world of mortal men that death does not end all. Resurrection follows death. Christian baptism proclaims that we live again after our funerals. It is also nice to know that, in a world where people are "hung up" on all kinds of habits and sins, you can die to the old way. A past can be buried. Life can start all over again. The baptism that pictures Christ's past resurrection, and our future resurrection, also portrays our present resurrection into newness of life. That is what the gospel is about.

Many years ago, after James Small had brought a message on immersion, a lady met him at the church door. She retorted, "Brother Small, are you trying to tell me that if I am not immersed I won't go to heaven?" Preacher Small said, "Sister, that is the wrong question. The question you ought to ask yourself is, 'Why do I want to go to heaven without being immersed?' " He opened his Bible and was going to read the story of the crucifixion, burial and resurrection. But he did not need to go very far. Tears started coming down the dear woman's cheeks as she confessed, "You are right, Brother Small. I do not want to stand before the Lord who died for me without having given this witness to what he did on my behalf. When can I be immersed?"

If you love the Lord and appreciate what he did for you, you

are proud to tell the world what Christian baptism proclaims. It holds high the resurrection fact. That is what the New Testament is all about. It is simply a collection of documents written in the afterglow of Christ's resurrection. They show clearly that Christians believe in the resurrection of Jesus and draw from that fact that he is the Son of God. Every Christian baptism keeps the hope alive that after death there is the resurrection. John Paul Pack called immersion "the total submission of the total man to the total will of God." It declares this total surrender of the baptismal candidate, while his baptism shouts the conviction that Christ is risen.

Did you ever attend a church where they had the baptistry under the floor of the platform? Every baptism in such a building demands that you move all the platform furniture, roll back the rug, open up the floor and fill the large tank. When Dean Frank Hamilton Marshall used to preach out of Enid, Oklahoma's Phillips University, he went to a nearby country town. One day he was going to share in a baptismal service. But on this occasion he determined to do the baptizing in quite an unusual way. On Saturday he made the usual preparation. To get things ready he moved the furniture, rolled back the rug, opened up the floor and filled the tank with milk cans of water. Then he went around the farming community to get flowers with which he could make funeral wreaths. He gathered some dirt from outside, brought it into the church building, and put a mound of earth beside the open baptistry. He then put the wreaths he had made on that mound of dirt, until the whole scene looked like an open tomb. And then, on the Sunday night following, when about thirteen people were to be baptized, he had a deacon standing by the light switch. Each time a candidate was slowly buried in the tomb of water the lights would be turned off one at a time. This was done until the

house was in stygian blackness, while the candidate was totally under the water. Then, when the ripple of resurrection was heard, the lights were flashed on in all the glory of an Easter sunrise. That staging was not changing baptism. It was just laying stress on a truth present in every case of immersion. In Biblical baptism the story of Christ is retold. Jesus died for us, he was buried, and he rose again.

WHY OPTIMISM?

Why are Christians Christian? Why do they meet on Sunday? Why do they observe communion when they meet? Why have they practiced immersion down through the centuries? We have promised to answer one more question in addition to these. Why are they so incurably optimistic? I preached on several occasions in a church in Southern California that had two balconies. Yet, later, on the best Sundays, the balconies were unused and there was much available space on the main floor. In Europe there are gigantic cathedrals where at one time many people came to worship. Now the "crowds" are in no sense "crowds." And in some cities the age of the praying worshippers indicates that few youth are interested in the church today. The population explosion is outdistancing evangelistic outreach. Some theologians actually are calling this "the post-Christian era." In the light of all this, what makes you so optimistic about Christianity's future?

Remember how the nineteenth Century Restoration movement started out to unite all Christians everywhere? Now in the 20th Century, out of that same unifying force, can be traced the "independent" Christian Church, the "non-instrumental" Churches of Christ, and the Christian Church ("Disciples of

Christ"). What a travesty! Do you really think Christians can be united and that they can evangelize the world? And the answer is, "Certainly! Of course we can!"

Do you think for one moment that the God who would not let His Son stay in that Jerusalem grave, is going to let Christ's present body—the church—remain buried in defeat? Just remember how black it was on that Friday. Christ was hanging there on the cross. Everything good was nailed there. Everything bad appeared victorious. And while it looked the darkest it ever had looked, Jesus Christ conquered! After black Friday is always Easter Sunday!! After things get humanly terrible, everything becomes divinely wonderful!!!

I like Billy Graham's illustration. He told about watching while his friend, Grady Wilson, played checkers one day. It was an all-school contest. It appeared that Grady Wilson was being trounced. Everytime Grady made a move, his "man" would get jumped. Billy Graham describes how sorry he felt for his friend. He wished the game would turn, but was confident that there was no chance of that. Then, all of a sudden, it became manifest that young Wilson had been in charge all along. Every move from the start had been intended to make the other player move as he did. Grady Wilson was setting up his opponent for certain defeat. Finally, all was ready for the pre-planned maneuver. This time, when Graham's friend moved, his "man" was crowned king. He quickly went back and forth across the board, cancelling one "man" after another. In one move he had swept away every foe and come forth victorious!

Ferber caught this confidence when he penned:

> Truth, crushed to earth will rise again.
> The teeming years of God are hers
> 'Tis error that wounded, writhes with pain
> And dies among its worshippers.

Error will not prevail. The church will win. The Book of Revelation, the Book of Acts, the Letters of the apostles, the Gospels of the evangelists—all the New Testament books—indicate that the church will win. This is evident because Jesus Christ is the head of the church and He is LIFE itself. Jesus Christ arose. Christ's resurrection is the answer to all the questions. Will you accept God's answer?

APPENDIX

METHOD OF SERMON PREPARATION

To make a touchdown the players must know where the goal post is. To preach an effective sermon the speaker must be clear in what he wants to accomplish.

Paul, according to the Revised Berkeley Version in Modern English, says that a prophet, like a preacher "gives people a constructive, encouraging and comforting message" (1 Corinthians 14:4). That is, the shepherd of a flock of God is to build up, stir up and cheer up His people.

Each message should be studied before delivery by such standards. Is it gospel, i.e. good news? Is it positive? Is it clear and simple, leaving the audience with more knowledge of God's will than they presently possess and certain direction as to what ought to be done?

If a public school teacher prepares a syllabus for a year of study, Bible teachers must have plans as to where the congregation is to be year by year.

Here are some annual and weekly steps I take to hit that target.

A part of my vacation schedule is to come back to my task with a tentative preaching schedule for the next year. Having morning and evening topics or texts for the next eleven months has two distinct advantages. Firstly, I can strengthen my library in the Bible books or areas to be covered. Using these additional resources weekly make them a profitable investment. Secondly, no hours or days of a given week are wasted deciding on a topic or text for the next Lord's Day.

Besides these advantages, the congregation is apt to enjoy a more balanced diet and I am saved from riding a hobby.

My weekly routine of sermon preparation follows a pattern. Mondays and Tuesdays are for immersing myself in a topic or a text. I try not to bring my preconceived ideas to the Scripture. Rather, I attempt to dig deeply until I find what the Biblical author had in mind in his writing.

By Wednesday I try to put down on paper the Bible author's proposition and how he divided his material to substantiate his point. Having saturated my mind with what God's Word says, I then seek to find a new way to state the old, old story. That will become my outline.

Only after many additional hours will the acrostic or alliteration come that will make the material easier to remember by either the speaker or hearer. My personal trait is to create a visual symbol or design for blackboard or overhead. This helps unify what is to be said and helps in sifting out what is not essential to the proposition.

Since Friday has been our family day off, Thursday is for finalizing the message and finding succinct illustrations that illuminate and do not hide the single train of thought. My secretary can type up Friday what I left on her desk.

Saturday I make very brief ink notes on a single piece of paper. My mind tries to photograph that one page so by Sunday morning I can preach it without notes in a seeming extemporaneous style. Such notes must be exceedingly brief and only second the major movement of thought.

Of course knowing the exact opening sentence you will use gets the sermon launched without wasting words. Likewise a planned conclusion brings you to the appeal that calls on the hearers for specific action.

One final word on my personal style. I learned from Alexander Campbell to avoid being a "textuary." That is, to stay clear of using such tiny portions of Scripture for a message that you are bound to bring in your own ideas (opinions) rather than exposing only what the Bible really says. Sermons are to have scope.

I prefer short sermons with an audience wanting more than *vice versa*. I am basically a New Testament preacher using the Old Testament as illustrative and background material.

It goes without saying that, unless I am calling in the homes of my people four or five days a week, they will not be open to listen to me nor will I be preaching to their needs.

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