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FROM THE EDITOR

Regular readers of our journal have been aware of the section called “Panorama,” which has been published rather frequently in our pages. Only our oldest readers, however, will know that this column was the brainchild of its earliest contributor, Professor emeritus C. M. Gullerud. On the occasion of Prof. Gullerud’s retirement from the editorship of the Journal of Theology, it seems fitting to express gratitude for his labors and accomplishments as editor and contributor of many articles.

Volume I, Number I of our journal was published in February, 1961. Following are the words which introduced the first “Panorama” column:

As the curtain is being raised on this department of our Journal of Theology, it may not be amiss to make a statement on our purpose, our policies, and our aims with respect to the reporting of the doings and sayings of men. Panorama -- as the word implies, is a comprehensive presentation of a subject, with due regard for all that comes to view in every direction. While the picture can be seen only a section at a time, it is not separated from the scroll which is being continually unrolled and of which it is a part. A panoramic view reveals not only those things which

appear in the foreground but also the details of the background which give to the picture its dimension as well as its perspective. All of these things are involved in a proper reporting and evaluating of the news. For instance, one does not rush into print with an accusation of ‘heretic’ as soon as a man makes a wrong statement of doctrine, nor does one cover up and call a man a ‘weak brother’ when he causes divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned.

It shall be our aim to report historical events not for the mere purpose of disseminating information after the fashion of a news magazine but for the purpose of discovering and evaluating the temper of our age, that we might be forewarned and forearmed. And if, by the grace of God, those who have fallen into unscriptural and unionistic ways are awakened and aroused by what they find on these pages, it will be in fulfillment of a hope and prayer which shall follow along with the penning of these lines.

It is our intention to report facts without prejudice and to guard against distortion. We pray for grace to see and recognize good when it comes to view and to give it its due; and for grace to recognize evil when it raises its head, to label it, and to warn against it without fear or favor. When we find that our opponents publicly criticize what we have publicly written, we shall not run to Matthew 18 for cover. Concerning matters which have come to public attention we shall by the same token feel free to write after the manner described in Gal. 2:11-14 and I Tim. 5:20-25, and for the same reasons.

It is not our wish to engage in a battle of wits with those who love to cross swords for the pleasure of it or to bother with those who use smear tactics, for nothing is gained in either case. Vindication of personal honor and the advancement of a false synodical loyalty shall be eschewed. We have seen enough of these road-blocks to last for a lifetime.

Those who walk in the ways of the Athenians and the strangers which were there (Acts 17:21) will need to look elsewhere for their material. And we do not propose to cover the church news so that every area is given consideration, for we have neither the time nor the space to enter upon such a program. But we shall endeavor to sift and select with the view of offering that which would best serve the readers of our Journal. With respect to this process of selection we realize our choice may not satisfy the desires of all nor always agree with their judgment. Since a certain amount of subjectivism is here involved, we invite the suggestions of our readers and solicit materials for our consideration.

With these introductory words which we thought fitting and necessary we open these columns, remembering the words of Paul to Timothy: ‘Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.’ II Tim. 1:13-14.

C. M. G.

Prof. Gullerud’s last ‘Panorama’ column was published in the December, 1982, issue, on the subject of the new Lutheran merger. In the view of this writer, ‘C.M.G.’ has been, by the grace of God and with the help of the Holy Spirit, eminently successful in achieving the goals he set out for himself and all subsequent contributors to the column.

In the twenty-six year history of its publication, our Journal of Theology has had, until now, three editors: Professors E. Reim, E. Schaller, and C. M. Gullerud. We surely are grateful to the Lord for granting these men the gifts and abilities which they demonstrated in their writing and editing.

As their successor, the present editor enters upon the work with the confession of Jeremiah: ‘Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak; for I am a child.’ But the Lord gave Jeremiah the words, and he spoke. May the Holy Spirit grant a large measure of His grace to this work, that our pages may present that which is true to the inerrant Word of our Lord and holds fast the form of sound words. To this end we humbly solicit the prayers of our fellow members in the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

John Lau

ESPECIALLY AS THEY RELATE TO CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.

[Prepared for the Minnesota Pastoral Conference, meeting at Fridley, MN, Nov. 10-11, 1986.]

Elton Hallauer

Over a century ago, the Iowa Synod, at its inception in 1854, took the position that there were “open questions” in the area of Lutheran doctrine which should not be considered impediments to pulpit and altar fellowship. Seventeen years later, a statement justifying the formation of the Synodical Conference called Iowa’s position a “dangerous teaching.” In an effort at clarification, Iowa defined “open questions” as doctrines “on which no consensus has been reached in the Church.” Under this topic, the Toledo Theses of 1907, an agreement between the Iowa and Ohio synods, while stating that no one has the authority to depart from any truths clearly revealed by Scripture, “whether they are considered fundamental or non-fundamental, important or seemingly unimportant,” at the same time proposed that “complete agreement in all non-fundamental doctrines cannot be attained here on earth, but is nevertheless the goal after which to strive.” The Chicago Theses of 1929, while it failed its purpose, did introduce another term for “open questions.” It spoke of “a so-called problem in theology,” concerning which “a difference in conviction must not be regarded as a cause for church division.” In 1932 the Brief Statement appeared with its forthright statements regarding church fellowship (“We repudiate unionism, that is, church fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God’s command...”) and open questions (“Those questions in the domain of Christian doctrine may be termed open questions which Scripture answers not at all or not clearly... . Open questions must remain open questions.”). The American Lutheran Church accepted this statement, together with and in the light of their Sandusky Declaration of 1938, “as sufficient doctrinal basis for Church fellowship.” The ALC added, however, “that we are firmly convinced that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines.” This statement was emphasized in the Friendly Invitation of 1947, which spoke of an “area where there exists an allowable and wholesome latitude of theological opinion on the basis of the teachings of the Word of God.” All of the above terms are to be found also in our own Concerning Church Fellowship (CCF): “We must not confound non-fundamental doctrines with theological problems, must not relegate them to the realm of open questions (questions which are not answered by the Word of God)” (§ 60).

As long as the terms “non-fundamental doctrines,” on the one hand, and “open questions” or “theological problems,” on the other hand, in their proper definition are precisely understood, they offer no difficulty at all, and there is no cause for confusion. But if anyone wants to confuse questions at issue and fish in troubled waters, the easiest way to do this is to mix and muddle these three terms. Our CCF states: “The distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines has its place... . Theologians of the Church have made this distinction in connection with **saving faith**. Of fundamental doctrines we speak in the sense that a denial or falsification of certain teachings of Scripture undermines the very foundation of saving faith. But non-fundamental doctrines are also Scripture doctrines, just as well as the ones called fundamental. They are all doctrines of faith, i. e., doctrines to be accepted in faith” (§ 59).

All doctrines of Scripture are important, of course, and binding. No one has the right to ignore any part of the Bible. Christ specifically commissioned His disciples of all time to teach “*them to observe all things that I have commanded you*” (Matt. 28:20). Nothing in Scripture may be regarded as worthless or superfluous. “*Whatever things were written before were written for our learning*” (Rom. 15:4). No one dare presume to abrogate, augment or diminish the written Word. “*If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book*” (Rev. 22:18-19). And yet, it is proper to make a distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines in connection with saving faith.

A simple distinction might be this: “fundamental doctrines” are such biblical doctrines as must be known to the believing Christian, such doctrines as are connected with the fact of salvation through Christ, with the fact of the forgiveness of sins through the atoning power of His blood. “Non-fundamental doctrines” are all other biblical doctrines, all of which are also to be accepted in faith. Whoever denies or falsifies a fundamental doctrine undermines the very foundation of saving faith. Whoever adheres to erroneous views in non-fundamental doctrines, despite ample information, openly rebels against God and His holy Word and endangers faith.

The most fundamental of all articles is the doctrine of justification by faith, through grace, for Christ’s sake, without the deeds of the Law. Only that person whom the Holy Spirit has led to accept this article is a true believer. “*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus*” (Gal. 2:16). Whoever does not believe the article of justification by faith is not numbered among the believers, is outside

the Christian Church. This most fundamental of all articles presupposes and includes certain other doctrines:

- 1) the conviction of sin and its consequences;
- 2) the conviction that Christ is God and man, Son of the living God, one with the Father and the Holy Ghost;
- 3) the conviction that Christ, as Mediator between God and men, vicariously made satisfaction for the guilt of all mankind;
- 4) the conviction that faith can lay hold of Christ only by laying hold of the Gospel; and
- 5) the conviction that there shall be a bodily resurrection of the dead and a life eternal.

These articles, only briefly outlined here, are called **primary** fundamental doctrines, because they are absolutely essential as basis for saving faith. Without these saving faith cannot exist.

Other fundamental articles which are intended to support faith are called **secondary**, because a person may through ignorance lack the foundation of faith which they supply but still have true faith in the forgiveness of sins if he trusts the Gospel. Thus it could happen that certain errors would not cause a Christian to lose his faith. F. Pieper states that the Sacraments surely are fundamental doctrines, since they contain the promise and offer of the forgiveness of sins, which is the foundation of faith. Yet, he writes:

The Christian who does not make the right use of the Sacraments, but trusts in the Gospel, has the true saving faith though he lacks the additional support for his faith which God has provided in the Sacraments. Baptism and the Lord's Supper, important as they are, do not have the same importance and necessity as basis of faith as the Word in the form of the Gospel and are therefore appropriately called secondary fundamental doctrines. [In the footnote he cites an example:] This is the case with the children of God in the Reformed bodies, who, misled by their teachers, fail to use Baptism and the Lord's Supper as divinely appointed means of justification. Believing the Gospel, they have the full forgiveness of their sins, full salvation. (86)

To deny or falsify secondary fundamental articles while purporting to uphold the primary, however, is inconsistent because of the close connection between the two. The greater danger is that the erring Christian might cling to the error in spite of clear passages of Scripture to the contrary. Then, erring from weakness, in which faith still survives, is replaced by the defense of error, which can destroy faith.

Properly speaking, non-fundamental doctrines are all those biblical doctrines which are not basic to, nor the object of, saving faith in so far as faith makes believers out of unbelievers by appropriating the forgiveness of sins. Non-fundamental doctrines, although they do not engender faith, serve for the profit of faith, being part of Holy Scripture. *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine"* (2 Tim. 3:16).

Non-fundamental doctrines are also Scripture doctrines, just as well as the ones called fundamental. They are all doctrines of faith, i. e., doctrines to be accepted in faith. Hence it is by no means a negligible matter when one adheres to erroneous views in non-fundamental doctrines. If adhered to despite ample information, errors in non-fundamental doctrines become open rebellion against God and His holy Word, and threaten to lead into perdition. (CCF § 59)

It must be emphasized that the term "non-fundamental doctrines" should not be made to give the impression that anything clearly revealed in Scripture, although not absolutely necessary for salvation, may be denied.

In the category of non-fundamental doctrines belong such articles as the following: the doctrine of the Antichrist, because it warns the believer against the dangers threatening Christian faith; the doctrine of the angels, because it gladdens the believer with the revelation of God's goodness and grace in providing *"ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation"* (Heb. 1:14); and all historical, geographic, archaeological and scientific references of Scripture, because they support faith and cannot be denied without endangering saving faith.

It is improper to speak of non-fundamental doctrines as open questions. The Brief Statement (# 44) supplies us with a fine definition of open questions.

Those questions in the domain of Christian doctrine may be termed open questions which Scripture answers either not at all or not clearly. Since neither an individual nor the Church as a whole is permitted to develop or augment the Christian doctrine, but are rather ordered and commanded by God to continue in the doctrine of the apostles, 2 Thess. 2:15; Acts 2:42, open questions must remain open questions. Not to be included in the number of open

questions are the following: the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry, of Chiliasm, and of Antichrist, these doctrines being clearly defined in Scripture. (quoted in Wolf, 391-392)

Open questions, then, are such questions as may arise in our study of Christian doctrine for which Scripture does not supply any answers, or does not answer them fully. In this sense, open questions may also be called “theological problems.” Since we are forbidden to add our own opinions to God’s Word and teach men so, we must let them remain open; we can in good conscience say, “I don’t know.” Every true theologian, according to Pieper, should learn to speak where God speaks and keep silent where God is silent. Christian truth is obtained only by continuing in the Word of Christ (John 8:31-32). To pretend to know what cannot be known is the height of arrogance and conceit. *“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God”* (1 Pet. 4:11).

Perhaps the most prominent open question is the one that arises in connection with the doctrine of conversion: *Cur alii, alii non?* (or *Cur non omnes?* or *Cur alii prae aliis?*) The Formula of Concord does not warn against acknowledging the problem, but it warns against any attempt to solve it. Some others are: Is the soul created by God immediately or mediately through the parents? How could sin originate, since Scripture informs us that God made all creatures, including the angels, “*very good*”? Since Scripture does not answer these questions we would be foolish to spend much time on them, when there is so much else in our ministry to busy us.

Many will not agree either with the definition nor with the examples of “open questions” as outlined above. In fact, some have made a distinction between “open questions” and “theological problems.” Some will relegate non-fundamental doctrines “to the realm of open questions.” For them, then, such doctrines as are mentioned in the Brief Statement (# 44) are not clearly defined in Scripture; therefore, disagreement in these doctrines, they say, need not be divisive. Such confusion fosters unionism, a malady that has infected the churches of our country at least since the days of the General Synod and the General Council (early nineteenth century).

Others will agree that the term “open questions” is not to be applied to *doctrines*, whether fundamental or non-fundamental and will cite such examples as: the number of angels, the exact time of their creation and the time of their fall. With regard to *doctrines* they say:

If there is a teaching, a doctrinal statement in the Bible, then all Christians are to accept and believe such teaching. Here we have no liberty to believe or to disbelieve, or grant a false freedom to others, for all doctrines, as taught in Holy Writ, require all Christians to believe without condition or reservation. (Toward Lutheran Union, quoted in Lussky, 23)

Theological problems, however, take on a somewhat different meaning. They speak of these as “such difficulties within the sphere of theology as have not yet been satisfactorily solved,” and, unlike open questions, “it cannot be said of theological problems that they must necessarily remain problems.” They cite such examples as, the meaning of the word “Selah” in the Psalms, the exact nature of the “*urim and thummim*” of the high priest in Old Testament times, and the like.

Still others, particularly liberals in the Lutheran Church of today, try to justify their liberalism by saying that open questions are certain matters about which the Lutheran Confessions have not spoken; consequently, a person may be a good Lutheran no matter what attitude he takes on these questions. This is not too different from the observation regarding the General Synod and Council, mentioned above. So, for example, the Confessions did not treat the subject of evolution *per se* nor close it. With this kind of reasoning one could lay claim to being a good Lutheran while espousing theistic evolution, progressive creation, or the development of man from the brute, all of which are contrary to Scripture and therefore closed questions. (Cf. Heb. 11:3 and 1 Cor. 15:39.) In fact, with this kind of reasoning one could even deny the doctrine of verbal inspiration, since the term is not spelled out in the Confessions, even though the Bible knows only of plenary verbal inspiration. Other doctrines that liberals might include in this category are: millennialism, Sunday, immortality of the soul, devil possession and the like.

There is yet another slight variation on the theme of “theological problems.” Pieper speaks of this in connection with the section on “*Theology and Certainty*”:

(Modern theologians) have reduced such doctrines as are clearly revealed in Scripture to “problems.” They speak of the “problem” of creation and the preservation of the cosmos, the “problem” of the person and office of Christ, of conversion and justification, of the inspiration of Holy Scripture, of the relation of the Christian religion and the non-Christian religion; everything has become a “problem.” And, indeed, on the basis of their principle of cogni-

tion, everything must be treated as a problem. (119)

When doctrines which are fundamental to Christian faith are so manhandled we grieve at the consequences. There can be no certainty of faith except that which is founded in Holy Scripture; and where Scripture has spoken, there is no room for speculation. In matters about which Scripture is silent, we could become engaged in endless wrangling about empty trifles.

It is proper, then, to distinguish between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines, but **only** when there is a question of how much of the doctrine is necessary to accept for saving faith. There is no non-fundamental doctrine in the Bible on which it is not necessary to be agreed in order to establish and practice church fellowship. Departure from some non-fundamental doctrine, which is **unconscious** because of ignorance or weakness, does not destroy church fellowship. But if one clings to such a departure after instruction and admonition it is no longer a question of ignorance or weakness. It is neither biblical nor Lutheran to contend that some of the doctrines of the Bible are non-fundamental in the sense that they are unnecessary for church fellowship.

Pieper (89-91) lists four points that every teacher in the house of God must never forget:

1. Scripture nowhere gives any man the license to deviate in any point from God's Word (Matt. 28:20).
2. Every departure from the Word of Christ, as found in the Word of His Apostles, is expressly designated an offense (Rom. 16:17).
3. Everyone who rejects the testimony of Scripture concerning one doctrine, actually, though he is not fully aware of it, undermines the authority of Scripture.
4. Like sin in the sphere of morality (1 Cor. 5:6), so every error in the sphere of doctrine has the tendency to spread and to infect other doctrines with its virus. Unchecked it will corrupt the entire body of doctrine (Gal. 5:9: "A little leaven leavens the whole lump.").

While there are no biblical teachings which are open and not church-divisive, open questions and theological problems, properly defined, need not be divisive, as long as nothing in Holy Scripture is thereby denied, diminished or augmented. It is when these are equated with non-fundamental and, in some cases, even fundamental doctrines that fellowship must cease. When this happens, it causes the faithful to ask :

If one maintains that also such doctrines which are clearly found in God's Word can be counted among the open questions in what way would that be different from maintaining that one can at least "diminish" a part from God's Word (cf. Deut. 4:2; 12:32), that one need not at all times go "to the doctrine and to the testimony" (cf. Isa. 8:20), that "a little leaven" of false doctrine does no harm (cf. Gal. 5:9), and can therefore be tolerated, that Scripture can sometimes "be broken" (cf. John 10:35), that one does not really have to believe "all that the prophets have spoken" (cf. Luke 24:25), that not all Scripture is "profitable" (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16,17), that it must be permitted to "break" at least a part of Scripture (cf. Matt. 5:18,19)? What does one do therefore when one accepts the new theology's view of open questions except contradict the Holy Ghost to His face?

If the Bible is God's Word, then all the statements that are found there are such as have been decided by the supreme, divine Majesty himself. Is it then not horrifying when someone looks upon that which has been decided by the great God as not yet decided? That someone, when the great God has spoken, gives men the freedom to contradict Him? That someone, when the great God has handed down his final judgment, can still say that some created being has a right to come with a differing opinion?

No doctrine which is clearly presented in God's Word and no doctrine which contradicts God's clear Word can be considered or treated by us as an open question.

Departure from God's clear Word, even in the smallest point, negative or positive, direct or indirect, can never be a free matter in the orthodox church. Every departure from God's Word within the orthodox church, even if it were only a denial that Balaam's ass spoke, demands action ... From God's Word we see that we are obligated to hold this position. (Walther, Lehre und Wehre, 1868, quoted in Erlandsson, 32-33)

When some contend that it is "neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines," and that, therefore, they "should have the liberty to propound differing views without laying themselves open to the charge of disturbing the unity of faith or breaking the ties of church-fellowship" (CCF s 58), they do err. Such a contention denies the

clarity of Scripture, the inviolability of Scripture, and grants equal status to error and Truth as well as license to preach and teach unscriptural doctrines.

Therefore, while we acknowledge that the category of ‘non-fundamental’ doctrines exists in the Holy Scriptures, yet we believe and declare the entire Holy Scriptures, in all of its parts and in all of its statements, to be the divine truth which must be proclaimed to mankind. It is only because of the indifference of so many teachers and lay members in churches today toward these non-fundamental doctrines that we see so many inroads of false teaching in Lutheranism. (Bernthal, 4)

There may be an ‘allowable and wholesome latitude of theological opinion’ in matters that have been instituted by men, such as, rites and ceremonies; but, ‘on the basis of the teachings of the Word of God,’ latitude of opinion is neither allowable nor wholesome. Where such ‘latitude’ is permitted faith is at risk and church fellowship cannot exist.

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

When it is a question of how much of the doctrine of Scripture is necessary for true unity and the exercise of church fellowship the answer is clear: “*the doctrine of Christ,*” all that Scripture teaches, all its doctrines!

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[Note: Bible quotations not included in quotations from other sources are from the NKJV.]

THE EIGHT NIGHT VISIONS OF ZECHARIAH (Zechariah 1-6)

by Paul F. Nolting

Zechariah means ‘Jahve remembers.’ He remembers the sins of His people.. But more: He remembers the covenant that He had made with His people. Thus the prophet’s name was an encapsulation of His message.

Every prophet of the Lord was the Lord’s spokesman, first and foremost a forth-teller of the Word of the Lord to his own contemporaries. That Word of the Lord frequently was a foretelling. It had meaning and value for those who first heard it, even as its value and meaning continue on; for every utterance of a divinely called prophet was and is the living Word of the living God for all generations.

Because the prophet's message was directed to a specific people, living in a specific geographical area under specific historic conditions, the historic setting of the prophecy (Sitz im Leben) is of utmost importance for its understanding. In some instances the prophecy had a definite setting, as the eight night visions; in other instances the prophecy had an indefinite general setting within the parameters of the historic situation, as the two burdens of Zechariah, chapters 9-14.

Zechariah was the younger contemporary of Haggai. The Babylonian captivity had run its course. A congregation of 42,360 people (Ezra 2:64), together with their male and female slaves, had responded to the decree of Cyrus, granting permission to the captives to return to their homeland to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. Some sixteen years had passed by. Construction on the temple had ceased; the people had rationalized the delay (Hag. 1:2). They were preoccupied with their own lives; the glory foretold by Isaiah(40-66) was nowhere visible on the current historic horizon. Spiritual malaise gripped the people. It was the second year of King Darius, the year 520 BC--time for a spiritual shakeup. The Lord raised Haggai who delivered four words of the Lord. The first was on the first day of the sixth month; by the twenty-fourth day the message had taken effect: the work on the temple was resumed. Less than a month later Haggai proclaimed the second Word of the Lord. The Lord would shake the nations that opposed the coming of His Kingdom. The "latter temple" would be greater and more glorious than the former --a staggering promise to people who had wept when they saw the modest foundations of the second temple, Ezra 3:12.

In the eighth month the Lord raised up a younger prophet, Zechariah, of priestly extraction. His basic forthtelling was the ancient but ever relevant cry: "Return to Me, and I will return to you!" The King wanted greater allegiance--not in the form of stooping and bowing, scraping and flattering, taxation and service, but in penitence and faith, in humility and praise, in justice and righteousness. But the King never demands what He does not provide. The call to repent was followed by the promise, "I will return to you." The Lord assured His people that He was remembering them despite their unworthiness and despite all appearance to the contrary.

The message for both the faint-hearted and hardhearted in Israel came to Zechariah in eight visions seen in one night. That message was:

THE KINGDOM IS COMING!

- | | |
|---|--|
| I. Vision of the Horsemen
among the Myrtles | - The resting of the kingdoms of this world does not mean that the Lord has forgotten His KINGDOM. |
| II. Vision of the Four Horns
and Four Smiths | - The four successive world kingdoms shall be destroyed and so shall not prevent the coming of the KINGDOM. |
| III. Vision of the Man with
the Measuring Line | - The King shall come and establish His worldwide KINGDOM of many nations. |
| IV. Vision of Joshua, the
High Priest | - The Messiah-Priest shall purify the citizens of His KINGDOM. |
| V. Vision of the Lampstand
and Olive Trees | - The Messiah-King shall send His Spirit to enable His citizens to shine as lights. |
| VI. Vision of the Flying
Scroll | - The King shall hunt down and expel all sinners from His KINGDOM. |
| VII. Vision of the Woman in
a Basket | - The King shall again scatter His covenanted but covenant-breaking people among the kingdoms of this world. |
| VIII. Vision of the Four
Chariots | - The King shall bring judgment upon the anti-KINGDOM kingdoms of this world in preparation for their salvation. |

I

It was night. Zechariah saw a horseman on a red horse. The horseman had come to a stop in a clump of myrtle

trees in a hollow. Behind him were horses--red, sorrel, and white. The riders aren't mentioned; the colors are significant, but undefined. The final vision pictures four chariots--drawn by a red team, a black team, a white team, and a dappled team. Centuries later the Apostle John saw the four horsemen of the Apocalypse riding on a white horse, a red horse, a black horse, and a pale green horse. If the myrtle tree is a symbol, it is so used only in this vision. The myrtle is a small, but beautiful tree, completely overshadowed by the oak and the cedars of Lebanon. Nebuchadnezzar once saw himself as a great tree, reaching to the heavens (Dan. 4), not as a lowly myrtle. The clump of myrtle trees in a hollow could only symbolize the KINGDOM in its contemporary form, for the nation of Israel, struggling to be reborn but in whose midst the KINGDOM was, was as a myrtle in contrast to the oaks and cedars of the nations of the earth. But the Angel of the Lord stood among the myrtle trees!

A distinct feature of this series of visions is the interpreting angel. Zechariah asks him questions, and he gives answers. Zechariah asked the identity of the man on the red horse and the troop of cavalry in his command. The Man who stood among the myrtles answered, not the interpreting angel. He is identified as the Angel of the Lord. He gave the information that the cavalry troop had been patrolling and reconnoitering throughout the earth. The cavalry troop reported, presumably through its captain, the man on the red horse: "We have walked to and fro through - out the earth, and behold, all the earth is resting quietly."

Daniel had foretold that one great anti-KINGDOM kingdom of this world would replace another. Zechariah's audience knew that the Medo-Persian kingdom had overthrown the Babylonian Empire. Daniel had also foretold that a he goat would come at a terrific speed and break the two horns of the ram, the Medo-Persian Empire (Dan. 8). But nothing was happening. All was quiet and at rest on the international front. Haggai had just foretold that the Lord would shake the nations, but all was at rest. Was the Lord forgetting His people?

It was then that the Angel of the Lord interceded for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah (1:12). The Lord answered, transmitting His message through the interpreting angel to Zechariah who was to transmit it to the people:

'I am zealous for Jerusalem ...
'I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease ...
'I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy ...
'My house shall be built in it ...
'My cities shall again spread out through prosperity.'

The Lord remembered. His KINGDOM was, at that time, inseparably connected with the nation of Israel. That nation had to recover from its captivity. Its capital city of Jerusalem had to be rebuilt. Its temple had to be restored, for the KINGDOM was coming. Only 'return to Me, and I will return to you!' The Lord remembered; his KINGDOM would come!

II

Zechariah lifted up his eyes and saw four horns. The horn is an established figure of power and strength (Amos 6:13, Jer. 48:25, Ps. 148:14, Rev. 5:6). As such, it became a symbol for a world power, as the ram with the two horns (Medo-Persia, Dan. 8:3) and the goat with the "notable horn" (Greece, Dan. 8:5), and the fourth non-descript beast with the ten horns and the "little horn" (Rome, Dan. 7:7-8).

Again the interpreting angel is present and informs Zechariah that 'these are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. Judah is named as the sole remaining political unit of the former twelve tribes, Israel as the symbolic name for the twelve tribes, and Jerusalem as the capital of the nation of Israel. Zechariah saw the four horns as having scattered Israel simultaneously, whereas historically the scattering occurred successively. So also Daniel interpreted the Great Colossus of Nebuchadnezzar, made of four distinguishable metals, as four successive world powers, Dan. 2. In Daniel 7, Daniel saw four beasts arise from the sea, which symbolized the same four succeeding world powers.

Thereafter the Lord showed Zechariah four craftsmen, who could have been artisans in wood, stone, or metal. In response to his question Zechariah learns that the craftsmen--visualize smiths with hammers--are to terrify the horns who have so devastatingly scattered Judah.

The thrust of the vision is as plain as it is vivid. The KINGDOM is coming, but not in the immediate future. The four world kingdoms, seen by Nebuchadnezzar in their unity as the Great Colossus and in beastly diversity as four beasts by Daniel, shall afflict, but not destroy, the KINGDOM in all its weakness in the nation of Israel. The wheels of divine justice would grind both the nation of Israel and the nations finely, but slowly. Despite appearances to the contrary, the Lord had remembered His people! He had returned to them. His KINGDOM was coming. Of that no one should have

any doubt.

III

There are five characters that cross the stage in the Vision of the Measuring Line. Chief of these is the Man with the measuring line, who is to be identified with the Angel of the Lord. There are two angels, the interpreting angel and "another angel" who came to meet him. Zechariah sees the vision and becomes a part of it, for he is the "young man" who received the interpretation of the vision from the interpreting angel. The message becomes that of the Lord of hosts.

The Man with the measuring line (cf. Ezra 40:3) was not measuring the city as it appeared at that time as an un-walled village, but rather as it should be or one day would become. The message from the angel was that Jerusalem would become an un-walled megalopolis. The all-consuming task of Nehemiah was to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, but the city being measured in the vision would have no walls and no need of walls, for the Lord would be a "wall of fire around her" (2:5). For the people of Zechariah's day the vision must have seemed to be a divine hallucination, impossible of every becoming reality.

The visions were divine sight and sound prophecies of that which was to come. The sight was the Man with the measuring line, measuring the future Jerusalem. The sound was the message of the Lord (6-13). The cry arose to "flee from the land of the north," a cry raised earlier by Jeremiah (51:6). The land of the north was Babylon, the ancient seat of the anti-KINGDOM kingdoms of this world. Flee, for Babylon is to be destroyed; the smith will smash the horn of Babylon (1:20-21). The fall of Babylon is one of the great judgment themes of prophecy (Isa. 13, Jer. 50-51, Rev. 14:8;18). "He sent Me after glory!" The Lord sent the Angel of the Lord after the glory of destroying Babylon. The oppressor of Zion--God's people, the citizens of His KINGDOM shall be destroyed.

What of Zion? "I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven"--not scattered in judgment, but spread abroad victoriously over the face of the earth. The KINGDOM, geographically confined to the Land of Palestine while hidden within the nation of Israel, was to burst forth in its worldwide form.

Then shall occur that amazing feature of the prophetic vision--that the oppressor nations shall become spoil for God's oppressed people. Haggai prophesied of this phenomenon (2:7), although his prophecy has been obscured by interpreting it as directly messianic (Desire of all nations). Isaiah foresaw this development in the Epiphany prophecy (60:5-6).

This shall occur because "many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and they shall become My people." When the King came, He confined His ministry chiefly to the lost sheep of the House of Israel, but there were already indications of things to come--the wise men from the East, the woman at Jacob's well, the Roman centurion of Capernaum, the Syrophenician woman, the Greeks who came to see Jesus. The "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16) was to be formed of all nations.

When this would come to pass, as it has and is continuing to come to pass, "then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you" (v. 11). Here again we have the Lord of hosts sending "Me," the Angel of the Lord--the unfolding of the mystery of the incarnation.

"Return to Me, and I will return to you!" The Lord remembers His people. Though it seemed He had cast off His people, yet He would take Judah as His possession and inheritance. Doubt it not, but rather "be silent, all flesh!" The Lord is aroused! Woe to the enemies of His people! Blessing for His people! His KINGDOM is coming.

IV

"Return to ME" was the opening cry of the Lord. Seventy years of captivity had not purified the people. They still stood in desperate need of the Old Testament institution for obtaining forgiveness. That institution revolved about the high priest.

The Lord showed Zechariah Joshua, the high priest who represented the People of God, administering before the Angel of the Lord, while Satan stood at his right hand to oppose him with accusations (Rev. 12:10). The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan!" The sin of God's people was fact, undenied! But the sinfulness of His people did not cancel the historic fact that the Lord had chosen them and would remain faithful to them. "Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" Had the Lord not delivered His people from the fire of seventy years of captivity? Indeed, He had!

Joshua was standing there in a most unseemingly way--clothed in excrement-covered garments, as Isaiah had previ-

ously described the People of God (64:6). There was no human cleansing available for the people, but the Lord had provided a way. He spoke to the attendant standing by, "Take away the filthy garments from him." That there be no possible misunderstanding, the Lord immediately explained that action: "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes," "the garments of salvation" (Isa. 61:10). The prophet enthusiastically got into the act, requesting a clean turban for the high priest. And so a clean turban was put on his head, as the Angel of the Lord stood approvingly by.

Then the Angel of the Lord made a solemn declaration, promising Joshua the continuance of his office of cleansing the people, if he would remain obedient to the command of the Lord. Even more: He would be given access "among those who stand here," the heavenly beings. Joshua was a functionary under the Old Covenant, cleansing his people from their sins, but he and his fellow priests were simultaneously a wondrous sign of a new order of cleansing which the Lord was preparing for His people.

"For behold, I am bringing forth My servant the BRANCH," a name for the Messiah that Isaiah and Jeremiah had impressed upon the consciousness of the people. Then the Lord laid a stone with seven eyes watching over it before Joshua. The "stone" is not the Messiah (though elsewhere it is used as a symbol for the Messiah, Ps. 118:22, Isa. 28:16), but His KINGDOM of kings and priests over whom He watches, for He had returned to His People and had remembered them. His returning and remembering would culminate in a once-and-for-all-time removing of iniquity from the land. That is the day that Isaiah described so vividly in the Song of the Suffering Servant of the Lord (Isa. 53). The writer to the Hebrews was the Holy Spirit's exegete of that day (chapters 7 and 10).

That would be the day when "everyone will invite his neighbor under his vine and under his fig tree." That was a familiar (1 Kings 4:25, Micah 4:4, Isa. 36:16) picture of peace and tranquility which occurred when God's People lived in obedience under His grace, but not when they brought upon themselves the fire of His judgment because of their sins. The New Testament equivalent is the apostolic blessing, "The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7).

"Return to Me, and I will return to you" --with the greatest of all blessings, forgiveness and righteousness. I have remembered!

V

The four preceding visions had dulled Zechariah; the interpreting angel had to arouse him as from sleep. What did he see? He saw a lampstand made of solid gold, similar to the one in the sanctuary. But this lampstand had a bowl on top of it to hold the oil supply for the seven lamps. That supply of oil flowed through seven pipes connecting each lamp to the supply bowl. That means that there were forty-nine pipes, seven for each lamp. But more! On each side of the supply bowl stood an olive tree. Each olive tree had a branch that had, as it were, clusters of olives that dripped their gold--their golden olive oil--into a funnel-shaped receptacle that had a golden pipe to convey the oil into the supply bowl above the seven-armed candlestick. How was this different from the seven-armed candlestick in the Holy Place? That candlestick stood alone; the priests were responsible for keeping it supplied with oil that the people brought. But in this vision Zechariah sees, as it were, an automated system. The two olive trees on either side of the lampstand each have a branch laden with olives that drip their golden oil into a funnel-like container that is connected by a pipe to the supply bowl above the menorah. That supply bowl keeps the seven lamps burning by feeding oil through seven pipes for each lamp. That's the vision! The Old Testament system was to be replaced by an automated system by which the oil would naturally and spontaneously be supplied to the lamps.

Zechariah asked for an explanation and was encouraged by the angel to figure the vision out for himself, but was then aided by the angel. Three well-defined symbols appear in the visions:

oil	= the Holy Spirit
mountain	= an anti-KINGDOM kingdom of this world
lampstand	= citizens of the KINGDOM (members of the Church)

Zerubbabel, the political leader of the post-captivity nation of Israel was guaranteed success in rebuilding the temple, but "not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit!" The contemporary mountain of the Persian Empire would not thwart his work. He would see the capstone set in place amidst the jubilant shouts of "Grace, grace to it" or exclamations of how great and glorious the completed temple was. There was a word of rebuke to the contemporaries of Zerubbabel who "despised the day of small things." There was a word of encouragement to the faint-hearted, for "the eyes of the Lord which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth" were supervising, guarding, and protecting the project.

As Joshua was the priestly representative of the people, so Zerubbabel was the royal representative of the people. Both of them were historic personages, exercising separate and distinct functions in the nation of Israel, but both were also types of the coming Messiah who would combine the priestly and royal functions in His one Person.

The KINGDOM was to shine as a light to the Gentiles from within the nation of Israel, but Israel as a nation fell short of its divinely appointed historic purpose. What Israel was to be, Jesus was--the Light of the world. What Israel of old failed to be, the new Israel of God, composed of the spiritual stock of Abraham gathered from Israel and the Gentile nations, was to be; for the LIGHT proclaimed, "You are the light of the world! ... Let your light shine before men" (Matt. 5:14-16). Thus the vision is a continuing testimony of what KINGDOM citizens should be and can be by the power of the continuing indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but what they may fail to be by reason of their own might and power.

VI

Two visions are now dedicated to the problem of the non-KINGDOM members of the nation of Israel, or Israel according to the flesh. The first vision had pictured "all quiet on the kingdoms front," but that was but a temporary respite for the nations. The nations remained horns determined to destroy the KINGDOM, but they would in turn be successively hammered into smithereens by the smiths. The Lord would establish His KINGDOM as a worldwide, international city. He would make provision for the once-and-for-all-time cleansing of His people, even as He would make provision for the citizens of His KINGDOM to function as lights. But what of the members of Israel who were not citizens of the KINGDOM? What of the hypocrites who are members of local churches, but are not citizens of the KINGDOM?

Zechariah saw a flying scroll as a huge banner towed by a small plane. It was 30' x 15--the size of the Holy Place and the Porch on the Temple. The interpreting angel explained: "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole earth." The thief, individualizing sinners against the second table; and the perjurer, individualizing sinners against the first table of the Law, will be expelled and pursued unto ultimate destruction--"timber and stones," that is, lock, stock, and barrel. Separation and judgment begin here in time and will be consummated on the final Day of Judgment. There is no escape!

VII

The next vision is even more threatening. Zechariah saw an ephah going forth, the largest measure of the Jews, formed more like a barrel than a basket. The interpreting angel explained with an enigmatic statement, "This is their resemblance throughout the earth!" Whose resemblance? The sinners, such as the thieves and perjurers marked in the previous vision. But what happened over the next five hundred years? The majority of the nation, in whose midst the KINGDOM was and from whose midst the promised Messiah-King came, became covenant-breaking sinners!

The ephah had a lead disc as a cover. It was lifted up. There was a woman sitting in the ephah. The interpreting angel explained, "This is wickedness." Then Zechariah saw two other women with wings like the wings of a stork. They lifted up the ephah and carried it to the land of Shinar where it was set upon a foundation. Amazing! Portentous! The prophet Hosea had warned, "My God will cast them away, because they did not obey Him; and they shall be wanderers among the nations" (9:17). The prophet Daniel, while praying to the Lord to restore His people, received the shocking revelation that, after the Messiah had come and had been cut off, desolation was again determined for His people (9:26-27). Zechariah saw an ephah, resembling his people, containing a woman who was Wickedness, being carried off to Shinar to be established there in the capital of the anti-KINGDOM kingdom of this world. The Messiah-King wept over Jerusalem because she did not know the time of her visitation (Luke 19:44). In AD 70 and 135 the fulfillment came with judgment being meted out by the Romans; it continues to this day. Judgment falls upon individuals, communities, cities and nations when they come to resemble the ephah filled with Wickedness.

VIII

Visualize again what Zechariah saw. He saw four chariots coming from between two bronze mountains, their base of operations. The location of these mountains isn't given; it's not important. The bronze mountain gates make one think of a strong and secure base of operations. As in the cavalry troop in the first vision, so in this vision the horses are of various colors--red, the color of war and bloodshed; black, the color of mourning and death by famine; white, the color of victory; and dappled or hail-like, the color of multiple judgments. Zechariah asked the interpreting angel, "What are these, my lord?" He was told that the four chariots were the four spirits or winds that were at the beck and call of the Lord of the earth. The same Hebrew word is used for wind and spirit, but here the modifier, "of heaven," would lead one to think of winds, even as Daniel had seen the four winds of heaven stirring up the Great Sea. Note again that there are four winds, the number symbolizing the four points of the compass and so worldwide. The Lord is Sovereign over all the earth; His judgments and His salvation reach to the ends of the earth.

The interpreting angel continued by reporting that both the chariot with the black horses and the chariot with the white horses were going to the north country, that is, towards the territory once ruled by the Assyrians and Babylonians, but at that time controlled by the Medo-Persian Empire. The chariot with the dappled horses was dispatched to the south country, the land of Israel' s ancient foe, Egypt. So far the chariot with the red horses hasn' t been mentioned, but a chariot with the strong horses, possibly the red team, was eager to go out and patrol the entire earth. So they were dispatched. It appears as though the Lord Himself dispatched the strong horses. He informed Zechariah that the two chariots dispatched to the north country had given rest to His Spirit in that country. The Lord had expressed His anger with the nations of the north (1:15), for in exercising His indignation against His own people they had been excessive in their cruelty and attributed their success to their idols. So, even as Daniel had previously indicated, each empire that arose would be judged and destroyed by a succeeding empire, the Medo-Persian Empire destroying the Babylonian Empire, the Greek destroying the Persian Empire, and the Roman the Greek Empire. Divine judgments always have a double purpose, retribution for evil and purification. Centuries later when THE BRANCH came to earth in the person of the Messiah-Child, it was wise men from the judged East who first came of the Gentiles to lay their treasures at the feet of the King in the manger. The chariots drawn by the black and white horses did, indeed, over the centuries bring the Lord' s judgment upon the north country, but left in the north country the ancient prophecies of the coming Messiah, Priest-King of His KINGDOM.

“LEARN OF JESUS CHRIST TO PRAY”

A Sermon Study on Jesus' Sacerdotal (High -Priestly) Prayer in John 17

(Continued)

by Paul Fleischer

SERMON STUDY #3: John 17:9-11

‘I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.

‘And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them .

‘Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.’ (NKJV)

THE UNIQUENESS OF BELIEVERS

We are in that portion of Jesus' sacerdotal prayer in which He prays for His disciples. In our last sermon study we noted that Jesus was here praying specifically for the apostles. However, there is evidence in this text that Jesus includes all of His disciples, including future believers, in His intercession. All believers, past, present, and future are among those whom the Father has given to the Son. Therefore Jesus is concerned alike for all of these persons who are gifts to Him from the Father.

Just how much Jesus loves His believers is emphasized in this portion of His farewell prayer which begins: ‘I pray for them; I pray not for the world... .’ Perhaps we are surprised to hear the Savior exclude the world from this part of His prayer. The term ‘world’ refers to unbelieving, ungodly men. Isn't Jesus concerned for these? If He is, then why is He selective here? Yes, Jesus is concerned about the unbelieving worldlings. Proof for this is plentiful. The first word of the Savior from the cross was a prayer for His crucifiers: ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’ (Luke 23:34). Later on in His sacerdotal prayer we shall hear our great Intercessor pray: ‘that the world may believe that You sent Me.’

Why, then, is Jesus at this point limiting His prayer to believers? He does so because He wishes to underscore the uniqueness of His believers. These are dear to Him in a way that others cannot be. For example, when Christian people pray, they know they are to pray for all men, as St. Paul exhorts Timothy (1 Tim. 2:1f), and yet their prayers for their loved ones, and for their fellow-believers in the household of faith, will be special to them. This is not a sign of selfishness, but of intimate love. So it is here where Jesus excludes the unbelieving worldlings from His prayer. What an impression this ought to leave upon us who call ourselves disciples of our Lord! Our great High Priest singles us out from all those who belong to, and are of, the world. Believers hold a unique, distinct position in the world. May our Lord re-impress upon our hearts and minds this fact of our unique standing before God as we look further at how Jesus prays for

His disciples who are distinct from the world.

THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF BELIEVERS IS A GIFT

We dare have no misleading dreams as to how it is that believers find themselves in their special standing before God. Jesus prays in the ninth verse for “those whom You have given Me.” This standing of believers is not by their own choosing or selection. It is wholly God’s doing. St. Paul stresses this to Titus: “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:3ff). We are heirs. Now an heir is one who receives a gift. God is the Giver in this case. Believers are the recipients of the gift of salvation. Thus the believer’s distinctiveness from the world is an outright gift, without any merit or worthiness in or of himself!

“ALL MINE ARE YOURS ...”

Jesus continues: “And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine... .” Since the believer’s relationship to God depends solely on what Jesus did and effected for him, no believer can say what Jesus here prays. Let us hear Luther’s remarks on these words of Jesus: “Everyone may say this, that all we have is God’s. But this is much greater, that Jesus turns it around and says, all that is thine is mine. This no creature is able to say before God... . all that is thine is mine leaves nothing whatever excluded. Are all things His, then the eternal deity is also His; otherwise Jesus could not and dare not use the word all!” Yes, consider what Luther here says: what a powerful attestation this petition of the prayer is to the deity of Jesus!

“... AND I AM GLORIFIED IN THEM”

How is Jesus glorified in His believers? Since believers are those who recognize Jesus as the One Who came forth from God, and as the One commissioned by God, these believers glorify Jesus simply by believing in Him as the Savior. But this becomes also a very practical matter. Believers glorify Jesus by striving to live their lives as distinct from the world. True believers glorify Jesus by their willingness to take up their cross daily and follow Him; by their setting their affections on things above and not on things in the earth; by their striving to live their lives as what they are, namely, strangers and pilgrims here; by their daily drowning the old Adam with its sin and evil lusts and putting on the new man by contrition and repentance; by their living as a salt and a light on the earth; and finally, by their living in the world, but not of the world. In such believers Jesus is glorified. For these He prays in this part of His sacerdotal prayer.

“... THESE ARE IN THE WORLD ...”

Jesus now shows the reason He is praying for His precious believers: “And now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You... .” Jesus foresees the close of His earthly ministry. He also foresees something which causes Him to come to the Father with a special request. He foresees the great danger to which His believers, who would be remaining behind Him, would be exposed. While He was with them in the world, Jesus could give them personal attention, guarding them against all the assaults of ungodly, unbelieving men. Jesus had done this. But what now? How would His believers fare since He would no longer be with them in person?

For example, what would happen to bold and brash Peter, whom Jesus had saved from drowning on the lake, and whom Jesus had recalled to repentance by a look? Or what would become of doubting Thomas who always seemed to need signs before he would believe? Would Matthew, the publican, again resort to dishonest ways typical of tax collectors of the day? Or what about the converted Pharisee, Nicodemus, and the other publican, Zacchaeus? Would they be reclaimed by the world from which Jesus had extricated them? And Mary and Martha who had been instructed in the one thing needful, would they persevere in the midst of the many things that troubled their oft anxious hearts? And there were so many, many others of His precious believers who must have flashed before the Savior’s mind as He prayed these words!

He was including believers down through the centuries, including you and me! In this part of His prayer Jesus must have thought also about us. Will this one, will that one forget his or her baptismal covenant or confirmation vows and return to serving the world? Will the deceitfulness of the world be too much for him or her to withstand? Will the cross become too heavy that he or she will stumble and fall under its weight? Will the blasts of trial and tribulation be too fierce for this one or that one to endure? Yes, it was Jesus' foreseeing the things to which His precious believers are exposed that moves Him to pray thus in this part of His prayer.

‘HOLY FATHER, KEEP THROUGH YOUR NAME ...’

As much as to say that Jesus knew just how powerless by themselves His believers would be against these attacks of the world, He prays: ‘Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, ...’ Jesus foresaw that the only hope for His believers to remain true to Him and the Father would be that the Father Himself would keep them through His name. We have previously shown that the Name of God is synonymous with the Word of God. We also showed that the word ‘keep’ has the connotation of ‘guard.’ So it is also here! God must keep, guard the believers through His Word. Christ’s believers, such as Peter, Thomas, Matthew, Nicodemus, Zachaeus, Mary and Martha, and Mr., Mrs., or Miss Member of our churches are safe only when guarded by the Father through His Word and Spirit. Only in that way will believers be able to maintain their individual distinctiveness from the world!

Listen, dear Christian friends! Listen to Jesus as He pours out His soul in your behalf and mine. We dare not be deceived into thinking that we are safe in this world apart from the Word of God! It was God’s Spirit working through the Word Who originally called us out of the world and placed us into His earthly kingdom of grace. As Luther says in his explanation of the Third Article: the Holy Spirit ‘has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith...’ Note the word ‘kept.’ It is only God and His Spirit Who can keep us in the true faith unto our end. St. Peter writes: ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time’ (1 Pet. 1:3ff). Therefore, how we ought to treasure the Word of God! How we ought to use it regularly and at every opportunity! How we need to encourage those among us who may be despising that Word through negligence and indifference, lest any of us lose our distinctiveness from the world!

‘... THAT THEY MAY BE ONE AS WE ARE.’

Jesus closes this portion of His sacerdotal prayer by adding the following reason for the Father to guard the believers: ‘that they may be one, as We are.’ As comforting as these words are, we must be careful with them. They are used by religious unionists and by the espousers of the ecumenical movement to support the idea that Jesus wants all churches, regardless of doctrinal differences, to get together as one grand, worldwide church. That this is a misuse and misinterpretation is clear when we understand that Jesus is speaking of the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the Church which cuts across all denominational lines and has members in every visible church in which the Gospel is taught and the sacraments are properly administered. Even as the Father and the Son are spiritually one in being and essence, so Jesus prays that, spiritually speaking, all believers may remain in unbroken unity.

This part of our Lord’s prayer is being realized on the part of all those who guard and keep the Word of God. On the other hand, whenever doctrines are taught which are contrary to that Word, then the unity for which Jesus here prays is endangered. Let us be reminded that the reason there are such fractures in the unity in visible Christendom is that false teachings have broken that unity. This evident disunity, however, in no way affects the perfect harmony which exists between believers in the Holy Christian Church. So let us not succumb to appeals for outward unity of the church on earth when doctrinal differences exist. As has been noted previously, a sign of the distinctiveness of true believers is that they will be willing to guard the Word of God from every aberration.

May God the Father keep us distinct from the world. May we ever thank Him for giving us His Word to guard our Christian faith. Realizing that Word as the Guardian of our eternally blood-bought souls, may we ever guard and keep it to the saving of our souls. In Jesus’ Name we ask it.

OVERALL THEME: LEARN OF JESUS CHRIST TO PRAY

Theme for 17:9-11: ‘Jesus Prays for His Disciples

Who Are Distinct from the World.”

- I. This distinctiveness is a gift of God.
- II. Believers are preserved in this distinctiveness alone through the Word.

Liturgical suggestions: Antiphonal reading: Psalm 56;
hymns 150, 423, 430, 159:1.

SERMON STUDY #4: John 17:12-13

“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name . Those whom You gave me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

“But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.”

THE CERTAINTY OF FAITH

There is no joy in uncertainty. It is often the fear of the unknown that finds the world of men beset with anxious cares and concerns about life with its unknown and unexpected twists and turns. It is the fear of the unknown which leads even scientifically and technologically advanced modern man to cry out for help. Isn't it so that just when the world seems about to give up all religion so that it can live as though God were dead, the next thing we hear is that old and new ideas about God are resurrected? This is testimony to the fact that, no matter how hard man tries, he cannot shake God entirely out of his existence. This is so because God, and He alone, can relieve mankind of fear and anxiety and uncertainty. Only God can give seeking sinners reliable answers to his doubts and misgivings about life now and life hereafter. You have heard how St. Augustine put it: “O Lord, the soul of man is restless until it rests in Thee.”

But not just any god can really and truly relieve man's anxieties or answer his deepest spiritual questions and needs. It is only the God revealed in the Bible, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Who can supply sinful mankind with joy in the midst of the uncertainties of life now and hereafter. This is so because the triune God is the only true and living God. As such He has revealed Himself in the Holy Scriptures as the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of the sinful and otherwise doomed human race. God tells man that the cause of trouble, fear, anxiety, and uncertainty is man himself who, once created in God's image, fell into sin and self-estrangement from God. But God goes on to reveal that His own love moved Him to provide His only-begotten Son as the sinner's Escape from sin and its wages. As the sinner's Substitute, Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, endured innocent suffering and death so that “whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” It is through the workings of the third person in the Holy Trinity, the Holy Ghost, that sinners come to accept and believe in Jesus Christ, thus appropriating to themselves the merits and blessings which Christ brings. Through the same Holy Spirit the believer, regardless of outward conditions and circumstances, is daily assured and reassured of his status as a child of God. As such the Christian is able to face the twists and turns of life in this world, and to face the world to come, with the certainty of faith and joy--a joy which the Savior describes as a “joy no one will take from you” (John 16:22).

However, since he is saddled with the sinful flesh, the old Adam, even the believer will be tempted to forget, and even lose, the joy that is his in Christ Jesus. The devil, the world, and the flesh will seek to lead him to doubt and uncertainty. This is why we hear the Savior praying fervently for His disciples on the night of His betrayal. Time and again in His sacerdotal prayer Jesus prays that His disciples may be preserved, guarded, and kept safely in the faith. And we hear it again in this text which we might summarize this way: Jesus prays that His joy be fulfilled in His disciples.

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

The doctrine or teaching of the Scriptures known as the doctrine of election generally receives little detailed attention in sermons. However, we would study this doctrine in some detail on the basis of these words of Jesus, and we must pay close and careful attention. We know that there are those who teach and believe that, since Judas is here called

“the son of perdition” by Jesus, that this means that Judas was elected or predestinated by God to eternal damnation. This not only accuses God of being responsible for the damnation of certain sinners, but it is--we intend to show--unscriptural and is therefore blasphemy. If such false teachings about election or predestination are dangerous, we should know that the true scriptural teaching on this subject serves to fortify the believer's faith greatly. At the same time, this doctrine heightens the believer's joy in his Lord and Savior by assuring him of the certainty of his salvation. May the Holy Spirit accomplish the latter in us as we study this subject.

“... THOSE WHOM YOU GAVE ME ...”

For the sixth time in this prayer we hear Jesus speak of the disciples as ones “given Him” by the Father. By thus referring to His disciples Jesus refers to the doctrine of election. You will recall that, when these words have come up previously in our studies, we emphasized how the grace of God was the cause, the motivating factor, behind the Father's activity. The salvation of any sinner is an outright gift from God. And we have previously spoken also of Luther's explanation of the Third Article, in which he states that the Holy Ghost has “called, enlightened, sanctified, and kept” believers in the true faith. Note here especially that word “called.” The Scriptures teach (and now you must listen carefully): “(God) has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Tim. 1:9). And St. Paul writes to the Ephesian Christians: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:3-7). No one can miss the clear testimony of these words! As a summary statement we quote from Koehler's Summary of Christian Doctrine: “Whatever God has done, is doing, and will still do for us during our life on earth to bring us to faith in Christ, and to preserve us in this faith unto eternal salvation, is not a matter of chance (our emphasis); neither is it motivated by any personal merit and worthiness, or better conduct, which God foresaw in some people; but God has from eternity purposed and planned it and by grace for Christ's sake He has chosen and predestinated us to salvation before the foundation of the world” (p. 182).

Though our Savior Himself does not give a lengthy dissertation anywhere in the Gospels on this doctrine, yet it is clear that He taught it to His disciples. He speaks, for example, of how His angels shall on the last day gather His “elect” from the four winds (Matt. 24:31). Time and again in His sacerdotal prayer, which, we remember, was prayed aloud so that the disciples could hear it, Jesus prays for the ones “given Him by the Father” out of the world. Thus does our Savior wish to impress upon His disciples that it was entirely the activity of God the Father, in and through His Son, that they were brought to discipleship and that they would be preserved therein! And as with the disciples then, so with us today! What comfort the doctrine of election is for believers when they realize that God has called them to salvation “before the foundation of the world” and “before time began.” This inspires joy and confidence in believers regarding the certainty of their salvation!

“I HAVE KEPT THEM ...”

But now we must be careful! Satan, the god of deception, doubt, and uncertainty, would cause this teaching of Holy Scripture to mislead believers. He would use the doctrine of election, for example, to trick believers by lulling them into a false sense of security. We learn from Jesus' prayer that it is still necessary for believers to be kept in the faith lest they fall from it. The doctrine of election dare never mean for any of us that we let up in the daily struggle against the devil himself, the world, and the sinful flesh!

In this connection let us bear well in heart and mind that it is possible to believe for a while and then to fall away and become one of the damned. This becomes clear from the repeated warnings and admonitions directed to believers by Jesus Himself and the rest of the Scriptures. In the parable of the sower and the seed Jesus speaks of those who “for a while believe” but in time of temptation fall away. This is not a fake faith. Some actually do believe for a while and then fall away. As is evident in the sacerdotal prayer and elsewhere, Jesus never slacked up for a moment in protecting, guarding, and keeping His disciples from their temptations to sin, their false dreams regarding His kingdom, their mistaken ideas about their discipleship to Him. Also it can be pointed out in this connection that “once saved, always saved” is not a teaching of the Scriptures. Such a teaching, which is embraced by Calvinism, is a tool of Satan to deceive misguided

souls. That teaching caters to the devil, the world, and the flesh. From at least one case we are personally aware of, such a teaching causes the misguided person to ignore warnings against back-sliding. Such a teaching leads sinners into carnal, fleshly security. If it were unnecessary for a one-time believer to be kept in the faith, then all of the time Jesus spent in guarding and keeping His own was wasted time and effort! But, no! Jesus used His Word to keep them, and He was successful in keeping them, as He indicates in this portion of His sacerdotal prayer.

“AND NONE OF THEM IS LOST ...”

Yes, Jesus was successful in guarding all those whom the Father had given to Him so that none was lost. Well, what about Judas, then? Was he an exception to the rule? No, he was not! No one who is among the chosen and elect of God can fall from that status. There is no such thing as God failing to realize His holy purpose with regard to one of the elect. The truth is that Judas never was one of the elect. Nevertheless, let us note carefully that Judas no doubt at one time did believe. The Apostle Luke reports regarding Judas: “for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry” (Acts 1:17). We note also that Jesus had labored just as hard and long with Judas as He had with the other disciples. Jesus had sought to save Judas from the temptations and sins which threatened Judas’ soul. On a previous occasion Jesus spoke this word of warning which was heard also by Judas: “Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?” (John 6:70). The word “chosen” used here by Jesus does not refer to eternal election. It rather indicates that Jesus had called Judas to be in Jesus’ presence, hearing and learning the Gospel. Thereby Jesus had sought to extricate Judas from his sinful, evil ways. But Judas would have none of it in the end! It was not that Jesus had failed in Judas’ case, but that Judas had failed! Judas had permitted himself to be choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of the world in spite of the loving treatment of the Lord. So it is that, when Jesus here calls Judas the “son of perdition,” Jesus is not indicating cause! Judas had not been foreordained to perdition by God. Rather, because Judas would not repent in godly sorrow over his sins, he is here called a son of perdition--one headed for eternal damnation.

“THAT THE SCRIPTURE MIGHT BE FULFILLED”

Nor does the fact that Jesus here speaks of Judas as the son of perdition “that the Scripture might be fulfilled” indicate that Judas was from the start hopelessly a child of hell! Scripture does not teach a so-called “double election” --one to salvation and another to damnation. This is another error of Calvinism which seeks to rationalize this doctrine of the Scripture. If it does not conform to human reasoning we must let it rest and say with St. Paul: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33). So with regard to Judas. To be sure, his action is forecast in the Old Testament: “Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me” (Ps. 41:9). God had indeed foreseen and therefore He recorded the fact that the betrayer would come from among Jesus’ intimate followers. Yet, it does not therefore follow that God foreordained either Judas or any other lost soul to eternal damnation. Scripture is clear that eternal damnation is always and only the result of man’s own unbelief and rejection of God’s grace in Christ. Recall Jesus’ weeping over Jerusalem which had rejected Him, when He said of its inhabitants: “... but you were not willing” (Matt. 23:37). Scripture is also clear that it is God’s will that all men be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth. (Cf. 2 Pet. 3:9, 1 Tim. 2:4) The cause, then, for any sinner’s languishing in eternal death is ever to be found in man himself, not in God! So in Judas’ case. Jesus is simply reporting the facts of Judas’ working out his own damnation contrary to the will and grace of God!

A GOSPEL TEACHING

The Christian’s joy and comfort in the doctrine of election can exist only if it is remembered that this doctrine belongs under the Gospel, not the Law. For the certainty of your election, fellow believer, do not look back into eternity, but look to the Gospel! This is what Scripture would have us do. It encourages us to look to the cross of Jesus, there to find our assurance that we are forgiven and numbered with the elect of God. In this regard hear Dr. Luther: “Now if someone wants to know whether he is elected or in what relation he stands to God, let him but look upon the mouth of Jesus, that is, upon these and similar verses. For though a person cannot say of a certainty who will be elected in the future and remain to the end, yet this is certainly true, that whosoever is called and comes thereto, namely, to hear this revelation, that is, the Word of Christ, provided he accept it in all sincerity, that is, fully hold and believe that it is true, they are the ones that are given to Christ by the Father. But those that are given to Him He will surely keep, and insist that they do not perish.”

“... THAT THEY MAY HAVE MY JOY FULFILLED IN THEMSELVES”

Thus Jesus ends this portion of His sacerdotal prayer. He desires all of His believers to be certain about their salvation and thus be filled with His joy. Ever remember that this certainty comes to believers through the Word of the Gospel. In that Word we hear all that God in Christ has done for us, from His holy life in our behalf, to His innocent sufferings and death, to His resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of God as our Intercessor before the Father's throne. It is to the regular use of the Word that St. Peter directs us when he writes: "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:10-11). Finding joy in that Gospel message, we can be "confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

From eternity, O God,
In Thy Son Thou didst elect me;
Therefore, Father, on life's road
Graciously to heav'n direct me;
Send to me Thy Holy Spirit
That His gifts I may inherit. (TLH 411:1)

OVERALL THEME: LEARN OF JESUS CHRIST TO PRAY

Theme for 17:12-13: "Jesus Prays that His Joy be
Fulfilled in His Disciples."

- I. The comfort and joy that is the believer's through the doctrine of election.
- II. How Satan seeks to rob us of the joy and confidence this doctrine affords (the example of Judas).
- III. For joy and certainty in your election, look to the Gospel-- the cross of Jesus.

Liturgical suggestions: Antiphonal reading: Psalm 33:
hymns 148, 417, 411, 159:1.

(To Be Continued)
