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Christmas Day Sermon: John 1:11-13

David Lau

He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

We all know that we celebrate Christmas as the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to this earth and His birth of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. But there is another birth to celebrate on this day besides the birth of Jesus Christ. As the familiar hymn spells it out, Jesus was born to give us second birth. If we personally believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, then we can celebrate the fact that God has given us this second birth. In other words, as Christians we can celebrate not only the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, but also the birth of Jesus Christ in our hearts, that is, that we have been born again by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And this second birth is very important. For our text from the Gospel of John tells us that Jesus' coming to the Jewish people in and around Bethlehem and Jerusalem did them no good, because they did not receive Him. "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him." Jesus was born as a Jew, of a Jewish mother, as the legal heir to the Jewish kingdom of David, in fulfillment of the many Messianic promises given to the Jews down through the years; but the Jews as a nation did not receive Him. Jesus' birth meant nothing to them, because there was a birth lacking in their own lives. They had not been born again, and therefore they did not receive Jesus or rejoice in His birth.

Therefore, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus on this day, let us recognize the importance of RECEIVING THE LORD JESUS into our own hearts and into our own lives. Let us also work and witness and pray for others, that they may receive the Lord Jesus by a second birth so that they know Jesus as their Savior and trust in Him for eternal life.

As we begin our study of this text, we must admit that the phrase, "receiving the Lord Jesus," which is used here, has been abused by many in our time. People talk about receiving Jesus as their personal Savior as though this were something we could accomplish by our own powers. For example, there is a tract from an evangelistic society that puts it this way: "Jesus died for me. My part is to accept by faith what Christ did for me." Another tract says: "When you have believed on Jesus and received Him as your Savior, your part of the miracle of the new birth is complete."

Our text clearly rules out all such ideas of God first doing His part and then our doing our part. Receiving the Lord Jesus is not something that any of us can do as our part of the miracle of the new birth. Let us look at this text and see what it means to receive Jesus. First of all, note that RECEIVING

JESUS IS THE SAME AS BELIEVING IN HIS NAME. For John describes those who receive Jesus as being "those who believe in His name."

Jesus' name includes everything God has revealed to us about Him in the Holy Scriptures. For example, He is the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the One who saves us from our sins, the One who died on the cross and rose again. Believing in His name means accepting Jesus as God's Son and trusting in the salvation that He has won for us. When we believe in His name, we are relying on Jesus as our only Hope for eternal life, as our only Way to escape the punishment we deserve because of our sins.

When we believe in Jesus' name, then, only then, do we become the children of God. John says: "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." IT IS BY RECEIVING JESUS THAT WE OURSELVES BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD.

Please notice that God's Word makes a clear distinction between persons who are children of God and those who are not children of God. "Jesus came to His own, and His own did not receive Him." Are these persons who did not receive Jesus the children of God? No, they are not. Only those who receive Jesus have the right to call themselves the children of God. Of course, the Jews who rejected Jesus did not appreciate having Jesus tell them that they were not in God's family. They claimed that God was their Father. But Jesus said to them: "If God were your Father, you would love Me. . . . You are of your father, the devil."

We have to keep this distinction in our minds today also. Some people are children of God, and some people are not children of God. It does us and them no good to pretend at Christmastime that everybody everywhere is a child of God. God wants everyone to be His child, but not everyone is His child. For when Jesus comes today in His Word, not everyone receives Him. In fact, there is evidence that a large number of people do not receive Him, for they do not receive His words or rely on Him as their Savior. We cannot afford to be deceived by the sentimentality of our American Christmas celebrations so that we accept the popular notion that God is the Father of us all, and that we are all the children of God. It is not so. For it is written: "You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Only to those who believe in His name has He given the right to become children of God.

The last verse of our text teaches us plainly that RECEIVING JESUS IS NOT A HUMAN ACT BUT A WORK OF GOD. Those who believe in Jesus' name—those who receive Him—are "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." No one can believe in Jesus by his own will power. No one can receive Jesus simply by deciding to receive Him. God is the only one who has the power to create life where there was nothing but deadness before. It is written: "You who were dead in trespasses and sins God made alive. . . . By grace we have been saved through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. We are His workmanship, . . ."

Jesus was born to give us second birth. The only way we can help people receive this second birth is by telling them of Jesus' love. The Holy Spirit uses this message to work the miracle of the new birth in ourselves as well as in others. ". . . in this world of sin / Where meek souls will receive Him still, / The dear Christ enters in." But remember: only God can lead us to receive Christ. Our rebirth is the work of God. That is why we pray: "O holy Child of Bethlehem, / Descend to us, we pray; / Cast out our sin and enter in, / Be born in us today."

We pray that all of us may receive the Lord and all of His blessings by the powerful workings of the Holy Spirit. "No one can say that Jesus is the Lord except by the Holy Spirit." Amen!

EVANGELISM IN THE EIGHTIES*

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The word "evangelism" has different connotations for different people. To some it is a pleasant word. It may arouse in their minds thoughts of Saint Paul standing in the Aeropagus in Athens, speaking to people about the God who does not live in temples built by hands. To some, the word evangelism may bring to mind a friend who shared with them a loving message which revolutionized their lives. Unfortunately, to many, the word evangelism also has negative connotations. Perhaps they are reminded of the Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormon missionaries who never tire of coming to their doors to "convert" them.

Many people, even Christian people who regularly attend church, have misconceptions about evangelism. They may equate evangelism with a Billy Graham or Jimmy Swaggert crusade. To others evangelism may call to mind a huckster who comes to town and robs naive people of their hard-earned savings, all in the name of God. It is unfortunate that such a powerful word is misconstrued by so many.

Misconceptions about evangelism have caused people to become intimidated by its very mention. Some may believe that the only way to evangelize is to confront another with a set of "Spiritual Laws" and then push for a decision. They may feel that if you are not doing something similar to this on a regular basis, you are not meeting our Lord's Great Commission and are living in disobedience. What a heavy, unnecessary burden for a timid Christian to shoulder.

The intent of this paper is not to provide new revelations concerning evangelism which have been lost sight of for the last 2,000 years. I simply want to bring to light possible misconceptions about evangelism which may be frustrating and hindering us from being more effective witnesses for Christ. Additionally, I want to portray evangelism as an exhilarating activity in which everyone may participate in some capacity. As a true evangelism consciousness is raised in our pastors, so also will a true evangelism consciousness be raised amongst our people. As we think, write, pray, and study what the Word says about evangelism, we will see success in this very challenging area of ministry!

How Does The Bible Define Evangelism?

The word evangelism is derived from the Greek word **εὐαγγελίζω**, meaning "to preach good news." Simply put, evangelism is preaching or proclaiming the Good News.

Let us investigate the use of the word **εὐαγγελίζω** in a few portions of Scripture. This will give us a better feel for the different shades of meaning which the Spirit has infused into it.

The first passage we will examine is Luke 20:1. It reads, "One day as he was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him." Jesus was at the temple in Jerusalem. A few days before this He had driven out the buyers and sellers who had made God's house into a "den of robbers." Because it was customary among rabbis at that time, we may assume that Jesus was sitting down in front of His audience. As He sat, Jesus taught. We learn that the content of Jesus' teaching was the proclamation of the Good News.

How does this passage help us to understand the meaning of evangelism better? We see that Jesus evangelized; therefore it is a righteous work. As we participate in the work of evangelism we are happy to know that we are following in our Lord's footsteps. We see that evangelism is carried on in connection with the public teaching function of the church. This verse informs us that Jesus was preaching the Good News in a public forum. So, today a legitimate form of evangelism occurs whenever a called servant of the Word publicly preaches the Good News. This may be in a Sunday sermon, an adult instruction class, a confirmation class, or any other public teaching situation.

Another set of verses which shed light on our understanding of the word *εὐαγγελίζω*, and our term evangelize, is Romans 1:14-16, "I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

In Paul we observe the ideal Christian; his attitude toward evangelism was no exception. He felt a debt to everyone. The debt he felt he owed was to preach the Gospel to all. The need to share the Gospel was so intense in Paul that he did not discriminate in preaching to those radically different from himself. This was something quite unheard of among Jews at that time!

Some modern Christians have experienced that same intense desire and feeling of indebtedness as Paul. They, like Paul, have been moved to identify with those radically different from themselves. One such example is a man named Cameron Townsend, the founder of the Wycliffe Bible Translators. He visited Guatemala and ministered to a tribe of Indians called the Cakchiquel. He desired to share the Gospel with the Indians in their native tongue. He spent 12 years learning their extremely complex grammar. For example, in the Cakchiquel language, a single verb of up to 12 syllables could take on 10,000 possible forms. After mastering the language, he presented the Indians with a New Testament in their native tongue.¹

The reason for the dedication and zeal of men like Paul and Cameron Townsend is the message they preached. The Gospel is the power (*δύναμις* - dynamite) of God unto salvation. The Good News they proclaimed had exploded in their hearts and leveled their unbelief, allowing the Spirit of God to enter and cause faith. They knew it could do the same for others.

Acts 8:35 is an informative passage on evangelism. An angel of the Lord told Philip, the evangelist, to go to the desert road which went from Jerusalem to Gaza. Unbeknownst to him there was an unenlightened man on that same road. This man was an important official in the administration of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia. The man was reading Isaiah 53:7-8 and could not understand to whom this passage referred. Led by the Spirit, Philip approached the perplexed man and "began with that very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus."

We should never forget the personal aspect of evangelism. As with Philip, the Holy Spirit guides us in our evangelism efforts. He uses our words and witness to lead others into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Evangelism is a very personal thing. Each individual has unique problems and needs. God guides just the right person to the individual at just the right time, and the result is a saving knowledge of God. From this passage we also see that evangelism is effective in private, one-to-one settings.

Galatians 1:8 tells us that not all "evangelism" is God-pleasing. "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned." There is a true and a false kind of evangelism. False evangelism may refer to Christ and His death on the cross. It may even speak of His resurrection and ascension. Yet, it invariably adds to, or subtracts from, the truth of the Gospel. False evangelism often subverts the Gospel by demanding from men some good work in addition to Christ's work in our behalf. How dangerous such evangelism is! God pronounces His ANATHEMA on those who subvert the Gospel.

What Is The Good News Which We Preach?

Yes, GOD IS SERIOUS about the message which is broad cast in every evangelism effort! How presumptuous for people to think that they may evangelize in their own self- chosen manner. In addition to His warning in Galatians 1, God also says in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

Most cooks are very careful about following a recipe exactly. A dash too much of one ingredient or not enough of another ingredient could easily ruin an otherwise delicious dish. Let us review God's "recipe" for salvation. The eternal effects of our evangelism efforts may rest on whether we follow God's plan or ours. There are many passages which clearly present God's plan of salvation, but I chose the following because they are the most familiar to us.

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Our evangelism or Good News preaching consists of relaying the message of God's great love for mankind. This is news to many people. God's love was so great that He sacrificed His own beloved Son on the altar of the cross to make atonement for our sins. God's love and forgiveness do not just extend to one group of people but to all mankind. They extend to those who consider themselves unworthy.

Ephesians 2:8-9: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith 4 7 - 7 4 and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God 4 7 - 7 4 not by works, so that no one can boast." Salvation is a gift. A true gift is not earned. It is given because the giver delights in the act of giving. God was delighted to give us freedom from the devil, death, and hell. If we earned the gifts given to us, they would no longer be gifts, but wages. The same is true of our salvation. If we earned our salvation, then the Bible would be wrong by calling it a gift. The only thing we ever earned from God is death. One of the greatest impediments to evangelism today is the false concept among many people that salvation is something we earn. How many times have we not heard, "In order to be a Christian you must do such and such." When it comes to our salvation, there are no musts. God just says, "Here it is. It is all yours. I am giving it to you free of charge." The slogan used by the Reformers was "SOLA GRATIA," BY GRACE ALONE. This is what makes the Gospel a balm to hearts burdened and oppressed by sin.

John 14:6: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." The Gospel is exclusive. All roads may lead to Rome, but every religion does not lead to God; not even most, just ONE 4 7 - 7 4 the religion of Christ and His Word. In our Good News preaching we make it clear that Jesus Christ is The Only Way to eternal life. The other world religions may appear to some to be alternate routes to the same God, but they are in reality only exercises in futility. The BEST the world religions can produce is a sham morality, an outward appearance of righteousness.

Second Corinthians 5:18-19: "God . . . reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." It was stated by a participant in a recent evangelism workshop that we Lutherans have a unique message to share with the world, a message we hear from few Protestant pulpits today. This is the message of "Objective Justification." God has declared all men righteous by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection. All men stand before God completely absolved, even if they do not know it or do not care. When the Holy Spirit moves us to believe it, salvation becomes our highly prized possession. God's pronouncement of "not guilty," made 2,000 years ago, is our confidence, rather than any good work we may perform.

As we evangelize, we preach the Good News. We preach the Good News from our pulpits and privately to friends and acquaintances. We preach the Good News in teaching situations like instruction classes or Bible classes. The Good News we preach is so exciting that it sometimes moves us to reach out

and identify with those with whom we would never otherwise have contact. The Good News we preach is that salvation has already been earned for us through Jesus' blood and merit. And the Gospel we preach is very specific. It does not center around a building, denomination, or a human being, but around the God-man, Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Different Evangelism Styles

One thing we should always keep in mind about evangelism is that God has not established one particular way to preach the Good News. He has given us freedom to communicate the truths of the Gospel in a manner which suits our particular personality and gifts. This is consistent with Scripture. Ephesians 4:11-12 states, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." In 1 Corinthians 12:27-30 this theme of diversity and uniqueness among members of Christ's Body is also emphasized. "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in other kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all interpret?"

God has given every Christian unique gifts for building up the rest of the Body. Some are gifted at public speaking, some are gifted at teaching, others are adept at counseling and encouraging. God has given some Christians what appears to be a multitude of gifts for use in preaching the Good News while others appear to have only a few. Some have gifts which seem to put them in the limelight while others have gifts which keep them occupied behind the scenes. God has given everyone gifts which may be used in His kingdom. He wants to identify them and put them to good use.

This is precisely the point where evangelism can be made into a very ugly thing or a beautiful and enriching enterprise for God's people. The diversity which exists in our midst can either be recognized and energized, or it can be ignored and stifled. People can be led to identify themselves as uniquely gifted individuals in the Body and freed to witness in harmony with their personality, or they can be pushed and crammed into a mold into which God never intended them to be placed. I fear the latter has happened all too often in the church.

Joseph Aldrich, in his book, *Life-Style Evangelism*, writes:

An evening at the symphony can be a glorious experience. . . . But I said "can be" because all of the ingredients are also present for a disastrous experience. If the symphony members refuse to play their own instruments, and insist on playing the instruments of others—the violinists demanding to be in the horn section, while those in the woodwind section want to try out their abilities in the percussion department—you will probably witness a less than harmonious recitation of Beethoven. And if each member prefers a different piece and a different composer, then you will undoubtedly listen to a rebellious mixture of discordant squeaks and sounds the likes of which you will never want to hear again.

There is a great need in the Christian community for believers to utilize their individual talents and play music together which is harmonious and sounds forth the beauty of the gospel. When this becomes reality, the Christian symphony provides the back ground music, the accompaniment, for the individual soloist to play the music in his or her own personal, private world. Evangelism then becomes effective. ²

Aldrich goes on to describe several different styles of evangelism which may be present in a local congregational setting. Some are: (1) Proclamational Evangelism; (2) Confrontational/Intrusional Evangelism; (3) Incarnational/Relational Evangelism. Of course, other titles could be used to describe the various evangelism styles, and I have no doubt that there are many other styles of evangelism which can operate within a body of Christians.

Proclamational Evangelism

Proclamational Evangelism involves usually one man and a group of listeners, which may be large or small in size. This style of evangelism was used frequently by the apostolic messengers in the early church, and with great success. Peter is an example of a Proclamational Evangelist. On Pentecost day, after the dramatic coming of the Holy Spirit and the gathering of a large crowd of Jews, he preached a sermon which dealt with prophecy and fulfillment. In this sermon he reminded the crowd of the Old Testament prophecies with which they were familiar. These prophecies spoke of the Messiah Who would free the people from their bondage of sin. He informed the people that this Messiah had come. His name—Jesus, whom they crucified. His proclamation included a call to faith and repentance. Many in the crowd who heard this message were cut to the heart. The Bible records that 3,000 people believed and were baptized as an outcome of Peter's sermon.

Other great Proclamational Evangelists include Stephen, Paul, Apollos, Augustine, and Luther. In recent history we might include C.F.W. Walther, the founding father of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod; or Walter A. Maier, the first preacher on the Lutheran Hour, and a host of others. Of course, all of us as preachers like to envision ourselves following in the footsteps of these "Greats."

With Proclamational Evangelism, the audience is passive. The people usually sit and listen to the speaker deliver a twenty or thirty minute message. This form of evangelism is rather impersonal. The preacher does not center his message around one person or even a few persons, but his goal is to meet the spiritual needs of the whole group.

Proclamational Evangelism is a method used by the Lord for centuries to gather people into the church, and it will continue to be used by the Lord.

We need to remember though, that Proclamational Evangelism is limited in some respects. Not everyone is called to this function. In Ephesians 4, God said He called some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers. Not everyone has the gifts to do this kind of evangelism. To force those who do not have the inclination into this office is disastrous for them and those who hear them. Also, most of the time those who come into contact with Proclamational Evangelism are those who are already followers of Christ. To be sure, there are occasions when unbelievers will hap pen into a church service, but most of the time church is the last place they will want to be.

When a body of believers limits its evangelism merely to supporting the proclamational work of one or two within its midst, it also limits the scope of those it influences with the Gospel. It is my conviction that churches today should broaden their horizons with reference to evangelism and get in touch with other methods of preaching the Good News. The church should be equipping people to understand who they are and what they have to offer in the realm of evangelism. Evangelism does not just involve proclaiming. There are other ways it can be accomplished.

Confrontational/Intrusional Evangelism

The confrontational/intrusional type of evangelism is exactly what the title implies. One person usually confronts another with the truths of Christianity. For instance, one may confront an unbeliever

with man's sinfulness and in ability to rescue himself from bondage, Christ's work of atonement on the cross, and other fundamental truths. This type of evangelist usually intrudes into someone's (usually a stranger's) private, personal world. We observe people preaching to others on airplanes, trains, park benches, school cafeterias, and other public places. However, the prospective convert may be in the process of preparing a presentation for his employer, studying for an exam, or thinking about how to handle some major problem or task. Many times the "evangelist" is insensitive to this and plows ahead with his presentation. At the end of his "witness," the other person may end up more hostile to Christianity than ever.

Another problem with such evangelism is that the potential convert may not be prepared to accept or understand the witness being brought to him. We sometimes take for granted that everyone understands the terms sin, hell, Christ, eternity, salvation, reconciliation, and so forth. But, in our secular society, many people have never encountered these concepts before. In the confrontational/intrusional setting there may just not be enough time to give an adequate explanation and context for these words. The hearer may be left more confused and perplexed about Christianity than before.

Also, in the confrontational/intrusional context, we usually are not aware of the misconceptions, fears, and bad experiences some may have accumulated in their lives in relation to Christianity and Christ. If we are not aware of these experiences, we could likewise make a statement or give an impression which could backfire.

There is a place, however, for this style of evangelism. The Lord may have gifted a few in our churches with the sensitivity, grace, poise, and intellect to do an admirable job in this area. But those who are gifted in this style of evangelism are few. Unfortunately, many of the evangelism training classes in churches presume that everyone has this ability. As stated before, sometimes people are led to feel that, if they are not engaging in confrontational/intrusional evangelism, they are living in disobedience. This is very sad and unnecessary. As pastors and leaders in the church, we need to dispel these myths concerning evangelism. Aldrich makes this comment concerning the confrontational/intrusional methodology:

How much more biblical to have a carefully nurtured church family whose members are released spiritually, emotionally, and physically to be Christ's servants in their own sphere of influence. The Christian loves his neighbor as a person and evangelism becomes a by-product of his self-giving love . . . and not the reason for it.³

Incarnational/Relational Evangelism

A person who is committed to Incarnational/Relational Evangelism needs no extraordinary gifts or abilities. He needs only to be himself/herself. Like the "proclaimer" and the "confronter," the person involved in Incarnational/Relational Evangelism acknowledges his sinfulness and is deeply indebted to our Savior God for the salvation freely given through Christ. This person also has a deep desire to spread the news of salvation to all.

This style of evangelism entails a long-range approach and commitment to individuals. It involves establishing relationships with people—getting to know them, getting to know their likes and dislikes, their strengths and weaknesses, their needs. It involves spending time with people, not just viewing them as objects. The person involved in Incarnational/Relational Evangelism wants to build a context which will naturally lead up to a sharing of the verbal message of the Gospel.

Studies have been done in communication which reveal that it is easier to persuade someone to a specific point of view if there is commonality between the one who sends a message and the one who receives it. The more commonality, the easier it is to clearly present a message to another person.

I realize that it is dangerous to mold our evangelism methodology after the findings of the "wise" of this world. We know and appreciate that the Gospel can and does dissolve barriers. But, I believe that the findings of psychology and communication research can be informative and helpful in aspects of our work with individuals, especially if these findings do not contradict or undermine the clear teachings of Scripture.

Jesus Himself put into practice these evangelism principles. In His evangelism He did not simply preach at people. He related to them, became their friend, ate and drank with them. This is one of the reasons He was so disdained by the Pharisees. It wasn't their style to relate with those they taught. They didn't like people doing things differently. Jesus attended the wedding feast at Cana and even provided the wine! (John 2:1-11). He was a friend of tax collectors and "sinners" (Luke 7:34). He was a friend of Lazarus, Mary and Martha. He was a friend to His disciples and to many others.

It is refreshing for Christians who are not extroverts, or who do not have the gift of being proclaimers or confronters, to know that they can still engage in evangelism. They can do it in the context of being friends, good neighbors, and servants of Christ. In a relaxed, informal manner, through living a good example of Christianity and verbally relaying the message of Christ at the opportune time, they become successful evangelists. This model of evangelism releases people from pretending to be someone they are not. It takes the pressure off and encourages the sharing of the Good News. When our friends hear the Gospel from our lips it comes across more genuinely. They have seen us live the Christian lifestyle. They have seen that Christianity is not just a philosophy to us. We know how they think and can put the Gospel into terms which they can understand and to which they can relate. We know their needs and hurts, and we can apply the Gospel to these.

Incarnational/Relational Evangelism seems to me to be the model of evangelism which operates best in our twentieth century society. In this cold, impersonal world people need others who will relate to them and not just treat them as a number.

Evangelism And The Pastor

Does the pastor have a role to play in evangelism? Yes, he has a vital role to play. In the Diploma of Vocation which most of us received when we were called to our parish it says:

WE AUTHORIZE AND OBLIGATE OUR CALLED MINISTER:

To promote and guide the mission activity of the congregation as it is related to the local community and to the conference and synodical endeavors, in particular to train workers and guide them in evangelism activities and to enlist the support of the congregation for mission work generally;

To assist the congregation in adopting administrative policies and procedures which will help it carry out the mission of a Christian congregation.

I interpret these words as meaning that the pastor is not only called to evangelize from the pulpit and in the class room; he is not only called to make mission calls on prospective members and contacts; he is also to be a facilitator and motivator in the area of evangelism. This means that he should be engaging in an on-going process of equipping the saints to proclaim the Good News in their areas of influence.

Sadly, in many congregations the pastor has almost become the ONLY one who is evangelizing. He is the only one, in many cases, who calls on prospective members. Usually, any canvassing which is done is coordinated by the pastor. Other forms of outreach, such as bulk mailing, radio ministry, or securing newspaper advertisements, often fall on the pastor's shoulders. With all the other duties of the ministry to take care of, in many instances not enough quality time is devoted to evangelism in the congregational setting. Many people are content with this situation. If not reoriented they will keep on living lives of passive Christianity.

How can we as pastors help to change this situation? Possibly a series of sermons, workshops, or Bible classes on evangelism, in which the Incarnational/Relational approach is discussed, would be helpful. Also, the formation of a permanent evangelism committee in the congregation would be useful. This committee would organize outreach ventures for the parish. It would assist the pastor in making calls on prospective members. It could work with the pastor in organizing workshops or retreats which deal with evangelism. The pastor would act as an advisory member of this committee. In this way, the work and fruits of evangelism would be shared with talented members of the congregation.

Another good way to promote evangelism in our congregations is to make a commitment to deliver the highest quality sermons and Bible classes possible. In this way the saints will be uplifted and equipped to be lights in the dark world in which we live. If good, edifying sermons are delivered each Sunday, people will be inclined to invite unchurched friends and relatives to come and listen.

We cultivate a good climate for evangelism in our congregations by developing relationships with non-members and sharing Christ with them. In other words, putting into practice what we are encouraging our members to do! We can easily fall into the "Professional Christian" rut. A minister who acts in such a way talks about Christ in professional settings when he functions in his office, but privately, when he takes off his ministerial cap, he leaves his "professional" talk behind. This may be all right for doctors and lawyers but not for ministers of the Gospel. When we develop the ability to witness in an effective, positive way in our personal lives, this is noticed by our people. Then, when we speak about evangelism in the pulpit or Bible class, they will listen because they know we are speaking from experience.

Conclusion

We live in a society which is coming apart at the seams. Illegal drugs are readily available. The family is in serious trouble, with staggering divorce statistics. Teen-age pregnancies are rising at an alarming rate. Once it was unusual to see a single parent family; now this is commonplace. Do we need to mention the increase in crime and international terrorism?

We stand in the midst of this disheartening situation, and we have hope. We have met the Prince of Peace. Through Him we know that all is made right between God and us. We know that whatever happens to this earth, we are safe. We are "convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

The challenge is to communicate our trust in God to other people who know nothing of our faith. In our fragmented, secularized society it is not enough simply to erect a church building, pay a pastor to conduct weekly worship services, and be content that we have evangelized. God says, "Go ye." Go with your talents, your life, your particular style and proclaim the Gospel. Cultivate the art of sharing the Good News of Jesus, using the unique personality God has given you. As we work towards this ideal, the results will be REMARKABLE!

NOTES

1. The Rev. Billy Graham, "Unforgettable Uncle Cam," Reader's Digest September 1986: 151.
 2. Joseph C. Aldrich, Life-Style Evangelism (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1981) 77-78.
 3. Aldrich 80.
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THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Paul F. Nolting

(Continued)

II. Immediate Perspective *

* We recognize that there will be differences of opinion in the interpretation of the prophecies in Jesus' "Olivet Discourse," particularly in its divisions, as well as with HE GENEVA AUTE. However, we have no hesitation in presenting Pastor Nolting's interpretation for our readers' study. - Editor.

We have observed that "The Olivet Discourse" was not an isolated prophecy concerning Israel and the Kingdom, but rather the culmination of prophecy from Moses till Christ regarding judgment upon Israel but blessing upon the Kingdom. Those twin prophetic themes our Lord laid once again upon the hearts of His disciples as they were traveling towards Jerusalem before Palm Sunday. There was confusion in the minds of the Twelve. "They thought the Kingdom of God would appear immediately." Their conception of the Kingdom was nationalistic, reflecting the conventional wisdom of the day. It remained so (Acts 1:6) until the Holy Spirit enlightened them with His coming on the day of Pentecost. Without entering into a discourse on the nature of His Kingdom, Jesus related "The Parable of the Minas." A nobleman left to receive a kingdom. He delivered ten minas to ten of his servants and instructed them to do business with them. "But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.'" When the nobleman returned, he announced judgment upon those rebellious citizens, "But bring those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me" (Luke 19:11-27). The prophecy is clear and unmistakable. Judgment would fall upon the nation of Israel, but the Kingdom would prevail. For two of three servants had done business with their minas and were graciously rewarded.

It had been soon after Peter's great confession that our Lord began to speak plainly of His forthcoming death and resurrection. He urged His disciples to take up His cross and follow Him. As encouragement He spoke of His future coming, "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works." The reference is obviously to our Lord's second coming. But then Jesus continued with these words, "Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom" (Matt. 16:27-28). Mark records Jesus' remark as follows, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the Kingdom of God present with power" (Mark 9:1). Luke's version is as follows: "But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:27). In all three versions Jesus is clearly promising His disciples that they will see the Son of Man and His Kingdom come in their lifetime. Could it not have been this promise that caused the disciples to muse as they approached Jerusalem whether the Kingdom of God would appear at that time (Luke 19:11)?

The discourse of our Lord on the Mount of Olives was occasioned by His prophecy of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. His discourse was concluded with the Lord's description of the Final Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46). So the prophecy covered the entire New Testament

era, from the judgment upon Israel to the final judgment upon the nations. How does the Kingdom fit into the picture? Jesus had previously assured His disciples that they, in their lifetime, would see Him and His Kingdom come in power. Just prior to His giving His discourse on the Mount of Olives, while yet in Jerusalem, Jesus announced judgment upon the city, "See! Your house is left to you desolate!" But Jesus didn't stop there. He continued with a note of hope, ". . .for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Matt. 23:38-39). How do these elements-judgment upon Israel, final judgment upon the nations, and the coming of Christ and His Kingdom-fit together?

The conventional conservative interpretation, as generally accepted in the old Synodical Conference, has been laid out by Joh. Ylvisaker in his work, *The Gospels*. Referring to Hengstenberg and other exegetes, Ylvisaker makes the generally accepted point that "prophecies are perspective as in a landscape painting." Applying this truth to the Olivet Discourse, Ylvisaker writes, ". . . it is this feature which characterizes the prophetic discourse of Jesus concerning Jerusalem and the end of the world. Jesus speaks of both events; but the destruction of Jerusalem is simply regarded as an important factor in the drama of the world's destruction, as a prelude to the last great catastrophe" (602). From this perspective the judgment upon Israel is a relatively minor event, the greater subject of the prophecy being the final judgment. All references to the Lord's coming and the coming of His Kingdom are interpreted eschatologically. It is also concluded that our Lord intertwined His remarks concerning the judgment upon Israel and the final judgment. So also Lenski. He interprets the first section, Matt. 24:4-14, as dealing with signs of the end of the world; 15-28 as dealing with the destruction of Jerusalem and introducing the Parousia of our Lord; continuing from 29 with the end of all things. In contrast to this perspective, interpreters like Philip Mauro in his *The Seventy Weeks and the Great Tribulation* and J. Marcellus Kik in his *An Eschatology of Victory* find that there is a definite division in our Lord's discourse. The division comes at verses 34-35 (Matthew 24). Up to that point Jesus was discussing the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish state. Thereafter He took up the matter of His Parousia.

This writer agrees with the latter interpretation. That is not to say that in the first section there are not overtones and allusions to the final judgment. That is in the nature of things, for all judgments are precursors of the final judgment, even as Jesus used the judgment of the flood in this discourse to describe elements of the final judgment and as He used both the judgments of the flood and upon Sodom and Gomorrah to the same effect previously (Luke 17:20-37). This writer also feels that the reference to the Kingdom and its coming, as well as the coming of our Lord, are not justifiably deferred to the Parousia, or second coming of our Lord. We have already noted the significance of the parable of the fig tree as it relates to the coming of the Kingdom. The forthcoming discussions will bring all these matters into clearer focus.

For discussion purposes it is extremely helpful to have the entire Olivet discourse before one's eyes in parallel columns, since Luke especially casts light upon the accounts of Matthew and Mark. It is here so presented according to the NKJV for the reader's convenience.

The Double Question: WHEN and WHAT?

Matthew 24

1. Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came to Him to show Him the buildings of the temple.
2. And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assured-ly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."
3. Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?"

4. And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you.
5. "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.
6. "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.
7. "For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.
8. "All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Mark 13

1. Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!"
2. And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."
3. Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately,
4. "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"

Don't be Deceived! The End is Not Yet!

5. And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you.
6. "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many.
7. "And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet.
8. "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows.

Luke 21

5. Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said,
6. "As for these things which you see, the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down."
7. And they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?"
8. And He said: "Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Therefore do not go after them.
9. "But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately."
10. Then He said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.
11. "And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

Instructions Regarding Coming Persecutions

Matthew 24

9. "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.
10. "And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.
11. "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.
12. "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.
13. "But he who endures to the end shall be saved.
14. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Mark 13

9. "But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. And you will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them.
10. "And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.
11. "But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.
12. "Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.
13. "And you will be hated by all men for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Luke 21

12. "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake.
13. "But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony.
14. "Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer;
15. "for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist.
16. "You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will send some of you to your death.
17. "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake.
18. "But not a hair of your head shall be lost.
19. "In your patience possess your souls.

The Sign of the Imminent Destruction of Jerusalem

15. "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand),
16. "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.
17. "Let him who is on the house-top not come down to take anything out of his house.
18. "And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.
19. "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those with nursing babies in those days!
20. "And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.

14. "But when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.
15. "And let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house.
16. "And let him who is in the field not go back to get his garment.
17. "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those with nursing babies in those days!
18. "And pray that your flight may not be in winter.

20. "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.
21. "Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her.
22. "For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.
23. "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people.
24. "And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Matthew 24

21. "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.
22. "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.
23. "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it.
24. "For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect.
25. "See, I have told you before-hand.
26. "Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it.
27. "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.
28. "For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together. creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be.

29. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.
30. "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.
31. "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Mark 13

19. "For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of
20. "And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.
21. "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it.
22. "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.
23. "But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

After the Tribulation: What Then?

24. "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be dark-ened, and the moon will not give its light;
25. "the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in heaven will be shaken.
26. "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.
27. "And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.

Luke 21

25. "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring;
26. "men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken.
27. "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.
28. "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

The Lesson of the Fig Tree: The Kingdom is Nigh!

Matthew 24

32. "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.
33. "So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near, at the very doors.

34. "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled.
35. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.
32. "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things are fulfilled.
33. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.
36. "But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.
37. "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.
38. "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,
39. "and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.
40. "Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.
41. "Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and the other left.
42. "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.

Mark 13

28. "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.
29. "So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near, at the very doors.

Time Text: "This Generation!"

30. "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.
31. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My word will by no means pass away.
32. "But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.
33. "Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. words will by no means pass away.
34. "It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.
35. "Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming-in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning-
36. "lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.
37. "And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"

[NOTE: Matthew continues to 25:46]

Luke 21

29. And He spoke to them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees.
30. "When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near.
31. "So you, likewise, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.
32. "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things are fulfilled.
33. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.
34. "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.
35. "For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.
36. "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

[Compare Luke 17:20-3]

III. The Time Text - Division of the Discourse

“The Time Text” is a caption borrowed from Kik. This is the verse: “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled” (Matt. 24:34, also Mark 13:30 and Luke 21:32). A natural understanding of the verse would be that everything Jesus had foretold in the preceding verses would have been fulfilled before the contemporaneous generation had passed off the scene. Ylvisaker, however, interprets most of the preceding eschatologically. If that interpretation is correct, a fitting meaning must be found for the Greek word GENEΑ.

At this point the battle of the lexicographers begins. Ylvisaker cites “the well-known lexicographer, Passow,” who lists the following post-Homeric interpretations of the word GENEΑ: (1) race, nation; (2) generation, as the measure of time; (3) birth, genealogy; and (4) birth, as an act or event. Ylvisaker also notes that the Septuagint renders both the Hebrew DOR and AM with the Greek GENEΑ.

Thayer lists the following meanings for GENEΑ: (1) a beginning, birth, nativity; (2) passively, that which has been begotten, men of the same stock, a family; (3) the whole multitude of men living at the same time (Here Thayer notes as examples the three parallel passages that concern us. He also adds, “Used especially of the Jewish race living at one and the same period,” and cites numerous instances from the Gospels); and (4) an age.

Arndt and Gingrich offer the following: (1) literally, those descended from a common ancestor, a clan; (2) basically, the sum total of those born at the same time, expanded to include all those living at a given time-generation, contemporaries (They comment, “Jesus looks upon the whole contemporaneous generation of Jews as a uniform mass confronting Him,” and cite numerous instances from the Gospels); (3) age, the time of generation; and (4) family or origin. The battle of the lexicographers would seem to indicate a two-thirds majority for the meaning “contemporaneous generation” for GENEΑ.

That interpretation, however, does not fit into Ylvisaker’s understanding of the discourse. He outlines the discourse as follows: “I. (vv. 4-14): A warning against the visionary unrest which anticipates Christ’s advent. II. (vv. 15-28): The attitude of the Church during the affliction which ushers in the end. III. (vv. 29-35): How and when the actual end shall come.” With this perspective GENEΑ cannot mean “contemporaneous generation.” Ylvisaker writes:

In Matt. 23:34 GENEΑ can not refer to generation (as the measure of time). It is the unbelieving people upon which punishment is pronounced. . . . Forced constructions are unnecessary if we accept the word in its literal sense, “generation,” here, then, the generation of the Jews, the Jewish nation. Of this people, Riddervold declares justly that it is in its entire history a miracle like a tree, pulled up by the root, exposed to the destructive elements in nature, and still possessing the vital spark . . . This is a sign of the truth of God’s Word. In many ways prophecy may be cloudy and obscure before the light of the fulfillment is shed upon it, but Jesus would seem to indicate in this passage that the Jews shall remain among us, like a living sermon, until the end of time, to prove that the Word of the Lord can not be broken. (616-617)

In a footnote Ylvisaker quotes Prof. Caspari to bolster his contention that “GENEΑ refers frequently to the quality, in the New Testament always in a savory sense.” We certainly concur in this historical perspective and role of the Jews in history, but question whether they rest securely on this interpretation of GENEΑ.

Lenski agrees with Ylvisaker. In his *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* Lenski wrote:

The view that GENEVA and especially HE GENEVA AUTE refers to the contemporary generation, those living at the time when Jesus spoke, is untenable. A look at the use of DOR in the Old Testament and at its regular translation by GENEVA in the LXX reveals that a kind of men is referred to, the evil kind that reproduces and succeeds itself in many physical generations. . . . In the present connection the meaning of 'generation' is plain, for already in v. 14 we were referred to 'the end,' and in vv. 29-31 the end itself is described. . . 'This generation' consists of the type of Jews whom Jesus contended with during this Tuesday, 21:23-23:39. (952-953)

Lenski seems, however, here to be contradicting what he wrote while interpreting 23:36: "Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation." He wrote, "All these deeds of blood will descend like an avalanche on 'this generation'" (920).

For those who interpret the first 33 verses of Matthew's account largely eschatologically, GENEVA in verse 34 becomes an exegetical conundrum. The temptation is to let a definite tendential exegetical course determine the selection of meanings possible for GENEVA. We appeal to the use of GENEVA in the Gospels. Matthew uses GENEVA four times in his genealogical account in chapter one, verse 17: "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations." Obviously GENEVA here has the meaning of the father, son, grandson progression in history, each generation consisting of some forty years.

When Jesus used GENEVA, He frequently restricted the word with the demonstrative pronoun "this." "But to what shall I liken this generation?" (Matt. 11:16). Luke has it: "To what then shall I liken the men of this generation?" (Luke 7:31). Jesus then answered His own question by comparing them to children playing in the marketplace. Jesus was obviously speaking of His contemporaries. When the scribes and Pharisees kept on pressing Jesus for a sign, Jesus called them "An evil and adulterous generation." He continued by declaring that both the men of Nineveh and the queen of the South would rise up in judgment against "this generation." Jesus concluded with the case of an unclean spirit leaving a man but then returning with seven other spirits. What was His point? This: "So shall it also be with this wicked generation" (Matt. 12:38-45). Again, our Lord was not speaking of the nation of Israel as a whole, but of the contemporaneous generation of His people. So also: "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign" (Matt. 16:4). It wasn't preceding or succeeding generations that asked Jesus for a sign, but His contemporaries. When Jesus discussed eschatological matters earlier in His ministry (Luke 17:20-37), Jesus did not want His disciples to become confused and imagine that "His day" would be coming soon, so He inserted a time reference, "But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation" (25). He was rejected by His contemporaries. Earlier in His ministry (Luke 11:37-54) and then again at the conclusion of His ministry Jesus hurled "Woes" upon His contemporaries, concluding with this prophecy:

Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. (Matt. 23:34-36)

They did—through the instrumentality of Titus and his legions, AD 70. It would seem that the Apostle Paul had these words of our Lord in mind when he wrote to the Thessalonians concerning his own countrymen:

. . . who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost. (1 Thess. 2:15-16)

The conclusion of this writer is that the plain and, one must say, obvious meaning of GENE in these passages is “the contemporaneous generation.” Kik comes to the same conclusion:

Thus the understanding common to all the passages in Matthew where the word generation appears is that of a contemporary race, people living at the same time of Christ, the generation then living. It is further emphasized by the demonstrative pronoun “this.” It is this generation, not a generation or generations in the future. [For support Kik quotes Dr. J. A. Alexander:] Common to all these cases is the radical idea of contemporaneous existence, which it would be monstrous to exclude in that before us (Mark 13:30), as we must do, if we understand it of the whole race in its successive generations. (63)

Two themes form the background for “The Olivet Discourse.” One is judgment upon the nation of Israel (Matt. 8:12, Luke 13:6-9, Luke 19:41-44, Matt. 21:43; 22:7, Luke 19:27, Matt. 23:38). That theme was forced into the consciousness of the disciples when, after their enthusiastic tour-guiding of the Lord through the temple, Jesus announced the destruction of the temple (Matt. 24:2). The second theme was that of the coming of the Kingdom and of the Lord’s coming. The coming of the Lord for final judgment was introduced already in the parables (Matt. 13:41-43, 49-50) “the end of the age.” The Lord had also spoken of both His final coming in glory and of His coming during the lifetime of His disciples (Matt. 16:27-28). He had spoken of the coming of His Kingdom despite judgment upon His own people (Matt. 8:10-12; 22:1-10). These two themes, of judgment upon the nation and of a twofold coming, came into focus when the Lord spoke of the desolation of “your house” and the blessedness of anyone coming in the name of the Lord (Matt. 23:38-39).

That the themes of judgment and His coming, both immediate and remote, were confused in the minds of the disciples is obvious from their questions as to when these things would happen and what would be the sign of the Lord’s coming and the end of the age (Matt. 24:3). Jesus sought to unravel these things by speaking first, but not exclusively, of the imminent judgment upon the nation of Israel (Matt. 24:1-35), which would pave the way for His coming and the coming of His Kingdom during their life-span. Thereafter, He spoke of His coming and the coming of His Kingdom at the end of the eon (Matt. 24:36-25:46).

(To be continued)

PAIDEIA

From a Pastor's and Professor's Notebook

Roland A. Gurgel

II

Prophecy number 2: Numbers 23:11-24

The world does not give up in its attempt to thwart the plans of God and to gain its own ends. They have learned from their father, the Devil, to persist in their opposition. Satan has been busy at it from the day of his fall, and he does not like to admit defeat. The examples are too numerous even to list.

Balak was not willing to take the instruction from God so clearly given through the lips of Balaam—not willing to see God's people growing in number rather than being destroyed—not willing to recognize them as a nation set apart, a chosen nation—not willing to join their ranks that "he might die the death of the righteous."

Is there a way around the blessing of God for His people? Balak thought so: get away from the influence of God—find a place from which to view Israel—a place where the entire nation could be seen (v. 23). Could it be that God's power to bless and protect is limited by place or time? Balak's thoughts reflect the thinking of his day. Heaven, like earth, is divided into spheres of influence. Here one god controls; there another; beyond that still another. Think of 1 Kings 20:23ff.

One might find the same thought spooking about in church bodies of our own day. The idea that if a majority opposes a teaching, even if it is found in Scripture, that teaching must be put aside. (Man's thoughts are higher than God's thoughts!) The idea that God's teachings can be overruled by majority vote is quite common. We have had plenty of examples of such thinking in our circles these past decades. Perhaps the idea that place or time can limit the power of God comes far closer to home than we would like to admit. Turn off the lights, and under the cover of darkness God becomes distant. Get out of the house, get away from God's duly constituted earthly authorities—then God's power wanes. We hear such thoughts being expressed and perhaps find them flitting about in our own imaginations. Sinful man does not change whether he be a Balak, a Balaam, or a John Doe.

So Balak and Balaam go to the top of Pisgah from whence they could view the entire people, not just a part of it. Once again the Lord puts words on the lips of Balaam—words to which Balak should give close attention: "Up, Balak, and hear! Harken to me, son of Zippor." The Lord pleads with His enemy to give pause and listen. Opportunities given—opportunities spurned—opportunities given again. Think of Pharaoh and the ten plagues. God speaks to the heathen in various ways in attempts to get their attention. Here He speaks to Balak with His words on the lips of Balaam—one unbeliever to another—and neither listens with the heart. The almighty God cries out, "Don't pursue the course you have chosen. It is hopeless and disastrous." The Lord explains why.

God's blessing stands for Israel, (1) since He has spoken a word of blessing and He remains true to His Word; (2) He has spoken His word of blessing since there was no reason to curse. "He beholds not wickedness in Jacob, and sees not suffering in Israel." "He beholds not wickedness in Jacob . . ." since Jehovah, his God, is with him, and the shout of a king in the midst of him; (3) since Jehovah, his God, Who has the strength like that of a buffalo (wild ox) is with him, Israel has strength (like a lion and lioness) to defeat his foes.

A closer look at this reply of God to Balak in his attempt to destroy Israel, God's people, is in place. First, there is the assurance that God's promises and declarations stand certain. In our dealings with men, we soon learn that words and promises are relative and quite uncertain—at times because man cannot keep his promises, at other times because he does not choose to keep them. How quickly yesterday's assurances and promises can be forgotten or rejected. With the Lord it is quite different, as He himself declares in verse 19. Heaven and earth will pass away, but God's Word never. For Israel that meant they would enter the promised land; there the Messiah would be born and carry out His redemptive work; no one and no nation—be it Moab, Assyria, Persia, Macedonia, or Rome—could stop it. He, God, had promised that and Balaam and Balak cannot change it.

NOTE : Consider the implications of God's being true to His Word and promises.

There is not a moment in life, death and eternity left uncertain for those under God's gracious promises in Christ Jesus. No wonder God could put on the pen of Isaiah the words, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee."

But why this certain, unchangeable word of blessing? From the lips of Balaam comes the answer,

an answer which at first hearing (or reading) sounds totally out of place and almost completely false. There is no reason to curse, for "He beholds not wickedness in Jacob . . ."

No wickedness in Jacob? How often during the previous 40 years had not the Lord rebuked Israel because of wickedness? In fact, God had spoken of "these ten times" regarding their transgressions. "Ten times" may well be a number of completeness—they had brought their iniquity to full measure. Compare Amos' oft repeated phrase for three transgressions and for four—one step beyond full measure. Moses' account in Exodus and Numbers reveals a multitude of reasons to curse, at least from a human point of view. But! The Lord explains what seems to be a paradox. On the lips of Balaam God puts the words, "since" Jehovah, his God, is with him, and the shout of a king is in the midst of him, therefore God sees no wickedness in Jacob. Jehovah, the King, the God of Promise, the King of Righteousness, Jesus—is in their midst. His righteousness covers them; guilt is removed—"blameless, without spot or any such thing." What a demonstration of justification by grace! Here God's view of His people is set forth by a reluctant "priest" into the ears of a hate-filled king and recorded for our benefit. Plow through the sordid history of the wandering Israelites and then stand on Pisgah and see them covered by the blood and righteousness "of the King in their midst." Isaiah's words come to mind: "though your sins be as scarlet—as crimson—white as snow—as wool." "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" There is no reason to curse. The curse has been born by another—the King of Righteousness—the Seed of Abraham—the woman's Seed.

The God of grace, Jehovah, their King, who sees them as "without spot," has the power to keep His promises. He has the strength of a buffalo (wild ox). Neither Balak, Balaam, or any other power could destroy God's people and His plans for and through them. With the almighty God in their midst, they became like the lion and the lioness—victorious over their foes.

These promises are not built on vain imaginations, whimsical dreams, the words of soothsayers or augurers (think of the heathen in their vain attempts to understand the present and foresee the future), but with God's people the promises find certainty by direct and clear words of God (v. 23). Israel, God's people of all times, enjoy a relationship with God that is unique in all its aspects. We need no augurers, soothsayers, etc. The Word of our God is in our hands in Holy Scripture.

What an opportunity this second prophecy provides for a sermon on justification by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, revealed in God's certain and clear Word! (Is there a sermon for Reformation Day in these verses?) Theme: He Beholds Not Wickedness in Jacob. Supporting parts:

1. Can He be seeing the same Israel—Jacob—people we see?
2. Indeed He does, but beholding the King in their midst.
3. This is no idle dream, but a certain revelation.

NOTE: The reference to "the King in their midst" we would like to pick up again at the conclusion of the study of these prophecies. The King is referred to in the second, third, and fourth prophecies directly. There is opportunity here for an excellent Advent series. More of that later.

In addition to things already mentioned, what opportunities are provided for Bible class considerations of God's faithfulness, God's graciousness, God's power, God's way of revealing Himself. Here in the hills of Moab, with His people unaware of what was transpiring, as is so often the case, behold Him in action for His people!

(To be continued)

P A N O R A M A

A STUDY OF THE DOCTRINAL PLATFORM OF THE ELCA*

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- Editor.

On January 1, 1988, a new Lutheran church body will come into being. It will be known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The three presently existing bodies known as The American Lutheran Church, The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, and the Lutheran Church in America, have all agreed to become a part of the new merger. The Constitution and Bylaws of the ELCA have already been approved by the merging bodies. Of particular interest to us is the section dealing with the doctrinal plat form of the new body, which is as follows:

CONFESSION OF FAITH

- 2.01. This church confesses the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- 2.02. This church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.
 - a. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.
 - b. The proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
 - c. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellow ship for service in the world.
- 2.03. This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.
- 2.04. This church accepts the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the faith of this church.
- 2.05. This church accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the Gospel, acknowledging as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.
- 2.06. This church accepts the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord, namely, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise, the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, as further valid interpretations of the faith of the church.
- 2.07. This church confesses the Gospel, recorded in the Holy Scriptures and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional writings, as the power of God to create and sustain the Church for God's mission in the world.

The ELCA will be sub-divided into 65 geographically located synods, with a bishop at the head of each synod. The just-quoted Confession of Faith will become a part of the Constitution also of each individual synod, with only the word "synod" taking the place of "church."

Moreover, a Model Constitution is being recommended for use by all the congregations of the church body. This very same Confession of Faith is being recommended once again, only with the word "congregation" being used in place of the word "church."

Since this Confession of Faith is, therefore, being planned for use at all levels in the ELCA (national, synodical, and congregational), it is evident that it has been composed with great care and that it comes highly recommended. It behooves us, therefore, to scrutinize it carefully, which is the purpose of this paper.

The first thing that strikes us is its brevity . Not that there is anything wrong in itself with being brief. Personally, I am all in favor of brevity! We can't help but think of another doctrinal statement known as A BRIEF Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod , to which we also subscribe. This Brief Statement is some 22 pages long in its pamphlet form. The original committee

which drew it up obviously felt that there are some things which must be said and that brevity is not necessarily a virtue when things are left unsaid which should be said.

Another thing that strikes us is the lack of any quotations or references to Scripture. How much more appropriate a Confession of Faith would be if it would say to one and all: "Thus saith the Lord!"

In order to facilitate the comments which we may have on this Confession of Faith, let us simply follow the paragraph numbers used in the document. My comments are in no way intended to include everything that could be said. You are invited to add your own observations.

2.01. Here is a simple confession of faith in the Triune God. While we are happy to have this Trinitarian confession, nevertheless, from past experience we have misgivings about what the position of the ELCA will be towards those who do not confess the Triune God. The Brief Statement says: "We hold that all teachers and communions that deny the doctrine of the Holy Trinity are outside the pale of the Christian Church. . . . Hence we warn against Unitarianism, which in our country has to a great extent impenetrated the sects and is being spread particularly through the influence of the lodges." Inasmuch as lodge membership will be widespread among the members and clergy of the new ELCA, we are confident that this is a reason why they have not gone into more detail on this matter, not wishing to offend those who deny the Trinity.

2.02. The introductory words of Section 2 say nothing with which we would disagree. Again, what is not said stands out. We miss the clear-cut sentence of the Brief Statement, that "Scripture teaches that God has already declared the whole world to be righteous in Christ. . . . He justifies, that is, accounts as righteous, all those who believe in Christ, that is, believe, accept, and rely on, the fact that for Christ's sake their sins are forgiven." The brief words in the Confession of Faith could easily leave one imagining that to "believe" is something which we ourselves resolve to do ("decision for Christ") rather than being entirely the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

2.02a. Here would be an appropriate place to express faith in the Virgin Birth of Christ.—The brief reference to God fashioning "a new creation" might well leave people wondering just what is meant.

2.02b. This paragraph contains brief reference to different subjects: Law and Gospel, judgment and mercy revealed, creation, etc. Much more could, and should, have been said. E.g., the reference to creation leaves one in doubt whether the Biblical account of creation in six days, as recorded in Genesis 1 and 2, is upheld.

2.02c. Here is their treatment concerning Holy Scripture. The familiar terminology which we have used to make clear the verbal inspiration of the Bible is not here used. One senses that words are used which are acceptable to people holding differing views. Here we need to keep in mind the background of this subject, involving the inerrancy of the Scriptures. It was within the old Iowa Synod, now a part of the ALC, where a dispute arose on this. Dr. M. Reu, a leading theologian of the Iowa Synod, came to regard the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible as an open question, not important enough to refuse church fellowship. When the merger in 1926 of the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo Synods was planned, the Iowa Synod insisted that the inerrancy of the Bible be restricted to matters of Christian faith and life, leaving open the question of its inerrancy in "minor matters." It was an issue whether the absolute inerrancy of the Bible was a Scripture doctrine or a theological deduction. The very first article of the Brief Statement took this up, and in three fine paragraphs deals with the issues that had historically been involved. The "weasel words" that are used in this new Confession of Faith are entirely inadequate in the light of history. Anyone can read his own views into the words that are used.

2.03. Another statement on the Scriptures. "Inspired" is used, but not "verbally inspired." Scripture is referred to as "the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life." Again, we miss any statement that the Bible contains no errors or contradictions. The Brief Statement says that "The Holy Scriptures are the sole source from which all doctrines proclaimed in the Christian Church must be taken and therefore, too, the sole rule and norm by which all teachers and doctrines must be examined and judged."

2.04. The three universal Creeds are accepted as "true declarations of the faith of this church." Since the Creeds set forth in detail the doctrine of the Trinity, we are again left to wonder (as under 2.01) what the relationship will be between this church body and those who do not accept the Trinity (such as

lodges, etc.). Are the Creeds to be regarded as true expressions of what the Bible teaches?

2.05. The Unaltered Augsburg Confession is accepted "as a true witness to the Gospel." We much prefer the wording of the Brief Statement, that "the doctrinal decisions of the symbols are binding upon the conscience not because our Church has made them nor because they are the out come of doctrinal controversies, but only because they are the doctrinal decisions of Holy Scripture itself." We also miss a statement such as this one in the Brief Statement: "Those desiring to be admitted into the public ministry of the Lutheran Church pledge themselves to teach according to the symbols not 'in so far as,' but 'because,' the symbols agree with Scripture. He who is unable to accept as Scriptural the doctrine set forth in the Lutheran symbols and their rejection of the corresponding errors must not be admitted into the ministry of the Lutheran Church." 47 - 74 From the last words of this section, we would gather that the ELCA would acknowledge us in the CLICK as being "one with it in faith and doctrine," since we too accept the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. Obviously, something is lacking! This seems to come out in the next section.

2.06. Here the remaining confessional writings of the Book of Concord are referred to. These are placed into a different category. These writings that are additional to the Augsburg Confession are accepted as "further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church." Are we to think of the Small and Large Catechisms, the Apology (Defense) of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles (written by Luther), and the Formula of Concord, as being merely "valid interpretations" of the church's faith? The Brief Statement says: "All doctrines of the symbols are based on clear statements of Scripture." The expression "valid interpretations" leaves the door wide open for someone to accept other writings as being equally valid.

2.07. This section is a very inadequate confession of faith concerning the Gospel. Nothing is delineated concerning the Means of Grace. Presumably this is to be gleaned from the Augsburg Confession accepted earlier. Much more needs to be said concerning the Gospel than merely this, that it is "the power of God to create and sustain the Church for God's mission in the world." Our mission in the world is to proclaim the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments. Again we turn to the beautiful position of the Brief Statement: "The churches at home should never forget that there is no other way of winning souls for the Church and keeping them with it than the faithful and diligent use of the divinely ordained means of grace. Whatever activities do not either directly apply the Word of God or subserve such application we condemn as 'new methods,' unchurchly activities, which do not build, but harm, the Church."

Let us now follow the order of the *Brief Statement* as we compare its contents with those of the new Confession of Faith:

Of the Holy Scriptures. *Brief Statement*: 3 paragraphs; fine statement. ELCA Confession: Too short; inadequate.

Of God. *Br. St.*: Trinity clearly set forth, with rejections. ELCA: Inadequate; nothing rejected.

Of Creation. *Br. St.*: Fine confession. ELCA: Nothing.

Of Man and Sin. *Br. St.*: Fine paragraph on God's image, man's fall, etc. ELCA: Nothing.

Of Redemption. *Br. St.*: Virgin Birth, Mediator, etc., well treated. ELCA: Few words leave much to be desired.

Of Faith in Christ. *Br. St.*: People are to believe in reconciliation, faith is defined, and the Gospel is explained very beautifully. ELCA: Entirely inadequate presentation.

Of Conversion. *Br. St.*: Seven paragraphs cover all controversies of the past on how man comes to faith in the Gospel. ELCA: This doctrine is ignored.

Of Justification. *Br. St.*: Beautiful summary, with rejections. ELCA: The word "justification" doesn't appear, nor is the doctrine set forth.

Of Good Works. *Br. St.*: Fine definition, application, and rejections. ELCA: Nothing is said.

Of the Means of Grace. *Br. St.*: How the Gospel works beautifully presented. ELCA: Not spoken of.

Of the Church. *Br. St.*: Church beautifully defined; speaks clearly on Church Fellowship. Clearly

settles past controversies. ELCA: Past controversies ignored. Subject is touched on later in Chapter 3 of the Constitution on: The Nature of the Church.

Of the Public Ministry. *Br. St.*: Fine Scriptural presentation. ELCA: Spoken of later under Chapter 10 of Constitution.

Of Church and State. *Br. St.*: Fine presentation. ELCA: Nothing.

Of the Election of Grace. *Br. St.*: In view of past controversies this doctrine is presented in six lengthy paragraphs. ELCA: Nothing.

Of Sunday. *Br. St.*: Settled controversy with ALC as to whether the celebration of 1 day out of 7 is a divine institution. Fine summary of Lutheran position is set forth. ELCA: Nothing.

Of the Millennium. *Br. St.*: Clear statement rejecting ALC position that this is an open question to be tolerated, not a Scripture doctrine. ELCA: Subject ignored.

Of the Antichrist. *Br. St.*: Points to the Pope as the Antichrist. ELCA: Subject ignored.

Of Open Questions. *Br. St.*: Clearly states true Lutheran position on what is and is not to be considered an open question. ELCA: Nothing.

Of the Symbols of the Lutheran Church. *Br. St.*: Fine statement. ELCA: Very inadequate and unsatisfactory statements.

When we compare this Confession of Faith of the new ELCA with the Brief Statement and with our own Statement of Faith and Purpose , we can be thankful to God for His good ness and grace in bringing us where we are in the Church of the Lutheran Confession. May God ever keep us in His truth!
