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HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, NOT MINE

A meditation on Psalm 23*

Victor F. Tiefel

* The following was preached by Rev. Victor Tiefel on June 10, 1967 at St. Luke Lutheran Church in Denver, CO. In memoriam we offer his sermon, along with additional thoughts on Psalm 23 that Pastor Tiefel composed before he died. These can be found after the end of the sermon. Scriptures quoted from the text of Psalm 23 and from other passages are taken from the King James Version.

King David, writer of the 23rd Psalm, was an acclaimed warrior, king, musician, and poet. He was highly favored by God, and after defeating Goliath with a single stone, he eventually became the second king of the United Kingdom of Israel, succeeding King Saul.

David had the entire region at his command. Anything he wanted was his for the taking, including beautiful Bathsheba, wife of Uriah. Obsessed with Bathsheba and her beauty, David commanded her presence and committed adultery with her. Bathsheba conceived a child, and to cover up the sin of adultery, David sent Uriah into battle, hoping to dispose of him. David ordered the commanders to abandon Uriah to the enemy. After Uriah was killed, David married Bathsheba.

God was not pleased. He had exalted David and given him favor, but David had fallen into serious sins with little outward evidence of repentance. Inwardly, as revealed in some of his Psalms, David did struggle with unspoken agonies of guilt and sorrow. "I water my couch with my tears," he wrote in Psalm 6:6.

Eventually the Lord sent Nathan to David, and the king was confronted with the full impact of his guilt. The bitterness of shame weighed heavily on his heart. How could he, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), have fallen so low and disappointed so many, including his Lord?

Realizing that no amount of good intentions and good deeds on his part could undo the evil he had done, let alone earn God's favor and reward, his only hope was in God's mercy. If he was ever to be right with God, it would have to be accomplished by God. The only kind of righteousness that could save him would be the righteousness offered by God's grace.

Psalm 23 teaches us this same important truth.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;

He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul:

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil:

For Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

Thou annointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Of all domesticated animals sheep are well-known for their helplessness in the face of predatory animals and the elements of nature, such as storms and wintry blizzards. They are panicky, prone to wander away and seldom return to the fold without the coaxing and guidance of shepherd and sheepdog.

In our Psalm, which is the devout confession of a believer's abiding faith in the Lord Jesus, King David likens himself to this helpless animal and fervently expresses his faith that **"the Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."**

Yes, the greatest and most powerful king ever to rule Israel was not ashamed to admit that he was unable to take care of himself, that he was indeed a human being quite helpless and panicky, prone to wander from the right paths and much like a sheep in every aspect. He realized that he needed God to shepherd him. We are aware of David's terrible adultery and murder in thought, word, and deed. We recall how he ultimately confessed his sins to Nathan, the prophet whom God had sent to him. David needed humility and repentance; yes, he needed his Lord's mercy.

The haughty unbeliever does not admit to such a need, but prides himself on being rather like a fox, clever and resourceful, well able to take care of himself. He readily excuses his actions, blames others or denies the truth. Taking responsibility for who he is and what he has done rarely crosses his mind.

Children of God, on the other hand, have learned that they need shepherding, that they are utterly dependent on a gracious, providential God. Therefore I invite you to make this confession of a king your very own confession of faith by saying: *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.* You have two wonderful reasons for doing so.

I. Tenderly He feeds me with succulent food in pastures green.

II. Tenderly He leads me ever onward toward the heavenly fold.

I. Consider, first of all, that *tenderly He feeds me with succulent food in pastures green.*

Yes, with God as your shepherd, you cannot be in want, because *green pastures and still waters are yours.* In our own country the areas where sheep are grazing are many and varied. Some areas are parched and dry, alkali and arid. Sheep have a difficult time there, and the shepherd must herd them hither and yon. They roam far and wide to find sustenance. But oases can be found, places where quiet pools of refreshing water await, places where sheep can quench their thirst.

So it is in man's wandering life here upon this earth. People everywhere are wandering about shepherdless, without direction, aimlessly living out their pitiful lives, without the advantages of real food for their souls, real waters to satisfy their spiritual thirst. The solutions which they find prove to be mirages; their philosophies are inadequate and vain; their latest notions and schemes are unworkable. Yes, man's noblest aspirations and attainments never satisfy, and their finest morals are immoral to the eyes and mind of their Creator.

Men and women become weary in their search. Now in the Savior's travels of teaching, preaching, and healing, when He beheld the multitudes, He was "moved with compassion on them because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd" (Matt. 9:36).

How wonderful then for all of you who have heard the voice of the Good Shepherd and learned to follow that voice and only that voice—how wonderful it is, for has He not led you into the green pastures and beside the still waters of His Word and Sacraments? How soul-satisfying are the eternal truths found in His Holy Word, in contrast to the parched, barren, and fruitless thinking and notions of the would-be-wise of this earth! Here you may lie down to rest. Here you can drink to your heart's content from the rivers of salvation.

In His Word the good Shepherd restores your weary soul by leading you in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Just as we must constantly refresh our bodies with food and water, so man's soul needs constant restoration with the good food and drink contained in the green pastures and water of God's Word. We actually become downright weary with our constant sinning and failure to meet the demands of God's holy laws. We become weary and tired in our thirsting for a righteousness which will avail before God. Our best efforts fail miserably to give us that feeling of satisfying our God. Here comes our tender Shepherd who knows and understands His erring sheep and leads us into a path of righteousness for His name's sake. Knowing that there is "none that doeth good, no not one" (Ps. 14:3), that we all like sheep have gone astray (Isa. 53:6), He proffers unto us His own fulfillment of all God's holy laws, and we find green pastures indeed!

Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: . . . being justified freely by His grace (Rom. 3:21-22, 24a).

How soul-satisfying is this information to every human thirsting for and hungering after righteousness which truly avails before God! As sheep of His pasture we do not earn this righteousness. We merely follow the voice of our Good Shepherd when He leads us into such green pastures and still waters, where we find true peace and joy. This is the path of repentance and faith. He shows us the way that leads to His righteousness—not ours or of our doing—but His own, for His name's sake, as Jeremiah proclaimed: "This is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:6).

II. Like the picture presented in this beautiful Psalm, as the sheep of His pasture we do not lie down in one green vale, but are ever on the move to higher plateaus, past many dangers here in this our life,

toward the very ramparts of heaven itself. *Tenderly the Savior-Shepherd, your Lord Jesus, leads you ever heavenward*, where there will be joys forevermore.

In this Psalm you confess that you do not even fear the dark valley of the shadow of death. In the course of our earthly wanderings dangers loom on every hand, veritable gorges and deep crevasses, pitfalls where faith falters and panic sets in. There are predators who would rob you of your simple trust in the inspired voice of the Shepherd. There is the bad water of human reasoning, which would destroy your faith in the Holy Scriptures. But you know that your Shepherd is there by your side. With David you say, “*Thou art with me*. With the rod and staff of the Word, Lord, You strengthen my faith and use these to comfort me.” You recognize no other voice, only His. And so you confess, “I fear NO evil, not even the dark valley of death itself, for it finally proves to be a mere shadow when *Thou art with me*.”

“*Thou preparest a table . . .*” In the very presence of my bitterest enemies, my very personal enemies—my own sinful flesh which is still a part of me; my pride which rebels against accepting His substitute righteousness and always wants to boast in its own; those sins which do so easily beset me, so that I am assailed with doubts whether I really am God’s child and redeemed and holy; my own conscience which accuses me so and tells me I am unacceptable in the presence of God—in the very presence of all these bitter foes, You, my Good Shepherd, prepare a table laden with daily, even hourly forgiveness of all my sins. I receive reassurance again and again through Baptism and the Lord’s Supper that I am Your holy child, righteous with an imputed righteousness that has become my precious possession through Your blessing.

I must indeed be *anointed with oil*, the oil of Your eternal love, and so I am elected, chosen, called, baptized, and set apart by this Good Shepherd.

My cup truly runs over; so plenteous is Your redemption. My Savior-Shepherd, who taught me, a sinful being, to forgive “not seven times but seventy times seven,” will daily absolve me from all sin.

Since all these things are true, then *goodness and mercy must follow me all the days of my life* and no enemy, no satanic accuser, no conscience, no law, no moralist will ever be able to snatch me from the tender care of this Savior-Shepherd.

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. He is even now leading me to the heavenly house. He has told me: “In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know” (John 14:2-4). Yes, I will dwell with my Shepherd in the eternal fold. That is my faith.

May the Good Shepherd strengthen and keep you in that faith, and when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall “receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Pet. 5:4). Amen.

Additional thoughts on this Psalm:

We look to 2 Samuel 11:1-15 and Psalm 51 to see the extent of David’s repentance. Repentance and faith are always essential to walking in the paths of righteousness. It is not about performance, and it is not about works, but always and only is it about repentance and faith.

It appears that King David knew the Scriptures and was aware that the Lord, his Savior, would be one of his descendents.

David’s gospel of “how to become righteous in God’s sight” was clearly explained in the scriptural scrolls of that period. The Good Shepherd led King David on paths which led to Jesus’ righteousness and not David’s. Such paths included the prescribed ceremonial rituals of that time.

1. For example, the high priest sprinkled sacrificial blood on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. That blood obliterated the condemning and accusing demands of the Law, leaving King David righteous in God’s sight. It was a path to an imputed righteousness for King David (“for His name’s sake,” i.e., the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sake of His flock).

2. Another example was the priest laying his hands on a scapegoat and bestowing the sins of the Israelites onto the now sin-laden animal. The animal was led out into the wilderness, only to perish, thereby leaving King David and other believers without sin and righteous in God’s sight.

3. A third ritual was the annual Passover festival. This was a reminder that the blood which was shed and then brushed on the doors of one’s home would keep out the angel of death. In the future the blood of the Lamb of God would be shed and thereby preserve believers of all time from eternal death.

In addition to David's encounter with these gospel-laden rituals of his worship, he had the benefit of confession and absolution. Nathan the prophet uttered to him the beautiful gospel of 2 Samuel 12:13: "The LORD hath put away thy sin." It was God's own declaration, which left King David righteous.

These were the paths of righteousness which caused David to say, "I shall not want." Want what? King David longed for the righteousness which only his God could grant him; yes, it was Jesus' righteousness that he sought and received.

This "being right with God" is, finally, what all human beings desperately need!

SERMONS TO SEMINARIANS

David Lau

Homiletics Sermon #5 (Fall 2000): 1 John 4:7-12

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

Dear friends in Christ:

It is because of texts like this that the Apostle John has been called the apostle of love. In fact, the story is told that when the Apostle John was a very old man, he kept on repeating to his Christian friends that they should love one another. In this exhortation, of course, he was imitating his Lord Jesus, who likewise told His disciples on the night before His death that they should love one another. "**This is My commandment,**" He said, "**that you love one another as I have loved you**" (John 15:12).

The early Christians listened to the Apostle John and to their Savior Jesus. They *did* love one another, and they showed their love for one another to such an extent that the pagans living near them were amazed at such self-sacrificing love and were compelled to say, "Behold how they love one another!" (cf. John 13:35). The brotherly love of Christians was something quite different in a world and society where the heathen thought only of their own selfish interests.

The question I want you to consider with me today on the basis of our text is whether the kind of love described by the apostle in 1 John 4 is present among us, who are living here at this time and in this place. So we ask ourselves: **AGAPE LOVE—IS IT PRESENT AMONG US?** May the Holy Spirit through our text direct us to an edifying examination of this question, with the result that He strengthens our faith in our God who loves us and that He also strengthens our love for Him and for one another.

Agape love gets its name from the Greek word that is used most often in the New Testament in reference to God's love for us, our love for God and our love for one another. This kind of love is not physical love. It is not mere friendship or emotional love. It is love that is concerned with the interests of the other person and takes action in behalf of that person. The noun forms of ἀγάπη and the verb forms of ἀγαπάω are used numerous times in our text and are translated "love" consistently throughout.

Is this kind of love present among us? I say: **Yes, it is**, for we learn in this text that **God's love for us is present in Christ**. Yes, God's love is **present in the Word about Christ that we are using**. That Word about Christ tells us: "**In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**"

God has loved us and has shown His love for us by sending His Son into the world. As we hear the gospel declare this truth to us, whenever such a Word from God is read or spoken here on earth, God's love is truly present. And His power is also at work through that same Word. God's love is at work to such a degree that

through the Word we hear, He creates within our hearts a realization and appreciation of that great love which He displayed for us on the cross of His Son.

In order to appreciate the extent of God's love for us, we need to consider some of the phrases this text has used to describe us. God sent His Son into the world that we might "live through Him." This implies that if He had not sent His Son into the world, we would die rather than live. We would die that terrible death described in the book of Revelation as the "second death," being thrown into the lake of fire forever and ever (Rev. 20:14). Now consider why it is that we would die if God had not sent His Son into the world. Our text says that God sent His Son to be "the propitiation for our sins." Our sins deserve the penalty of death, which includes the second death, the perpetual separation of us from God in hell.

Just think then of what God saw when He looked down into this world of ours. He saw our sins, those sins that we commit in thought, word and deed every day of our lives. Do we need some specifics? Our text mentions one specific sin that everyone in this world commits day after day without fail. It is the sin of lovelessness. The world is full of such lovelessness. John says: "**He who does not love does not know God.**" Likewise, he who does not know God does not love. When God looks down at our world, He sees all these creatures of His, whom He originally made in His own image, lacking love. "**God is love,**" and yet those once made in His image do not love. That is our sin. We ought to love God and one another, but we don't. In fact, we can't love God or one another, as long as we do not know God. This is our sin and the sin of our world. The Apostle Paul has foretold how it will be in the last days, and as we examine his description, we conclude that it surely fits our own time. In 2 Timothy 3 he says: "**In the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud,**" and then a few adjectives later, he identifies the prominent trait of people to be "**unloving**" and "**lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God**" (2 Tim. 3: 1-4). This is the way our world is, and we are this way too. That is, we came into the world as such sinners, and even now as Christians we still continue to be unloving instead of loving, because of our sinful flesh.

Now while our text talks about our sin and especially our lack of love, for which we deserve eternal punishment, it also speaks of God's love for us sinners, God's love for us unloving ones. "**God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**"

Is God's love present among us? It certainly is, as long as we can hear such words from God. Just think of what this means for us. We were headed for certain death and hell, found to be unloving and condemned for that, unworthy of anyone's love and surely unworthy of God's love, and yet here we are, listening to the grandest good news there could ever be. Rejoice, you sinners! God loves you, and so He does not want you to die but live. He does not just say He loves us. He does not just have a feeling of love toward us. He proves His love for us by sending His Son into the world— into the wicked world—to be persecuted, slandered, rejected, and crucified. God sent His Son into the world for one main purpose, as our text states, "**to be the propitiation for our sins.**"

This word *propitiation* identifies for us what happened when Jesus, God's Son, was nailed to a cross and left to hang on that hill outside of Jerusalem. The word propitiation means that God was angry because of our sin and in His holiness had to punish this sin. But Jesus, the holy Son of God, carried out the plan of His Father to rescue man from the consequences of his sin by becoming sin Himself, that is, by taking on Himself the sin of the entire world and allowing Himself to be punished as the guilty party in place of the entire sinful world. This is how Jesus became the propitiation for our sins. As it is written in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, "**Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma**" (Eph. 5:2). It was love that moved Jesus to be a sacrifice to God to atone or pay for the sins of the whole human race, including also our sins that threatened to send us to eternal hellfire.

God accepted Jesus' sacrifice as the satisfactory payment. We know this, because God raised Him from the dead on the third day. And so what John wrote earlier in this same letter is true: "**He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world**" (1 John 2:2). As long as this message is heard in this room and in our churches and anywhere else the gospel is used by us, *agape* love is truly present among us. It is God's own *agape* love, proved in what Christ did and now also demonstrated in the fact that we are still hearing about it today through the testimony of the Holy Spirit working through the Word.

Of course, our consideration of how God's *agape* love is present will have an internal aspect, and so we ask whether this love is not only among us, but also in us. Is God's *agape* love just surrounding us on the

outside, striving to make its entrance and being rebuffed? Or is it actually entering into us and filling our own hearts, so that we are overflowing with love for God and for one another?

Each one must answer for himself, we realize, because there can be such a thing as a fake love. That is, persons can pretend that they appreciate God's love and then pretend that they love one another, or at least say that they do.

Our text says: **“Love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God.”** It is clear from this biblical truth that there are two kinds of people in the world: people who know God and people who do not know God. Or to put it another way, people who have been born of God and people who have not been born of God. If we are talking about those people who do not know God and who have not been born of God, then we are also talking about people who do not have *agape* love in their hearts. Only persons who have been born of God and thus know God by faith have such love.

Now there is a kind of love found among unbelievers. Jesus Himself spoke about thieves loving each other and being kind to one another. But as long as such persons have not been born of God and so remain in unbelief, the only kind of love they can have is a self-centered, self-seeking love, a love that is more interested in receiving than in giving.

Dear friends, I believe something better concerning you. I believe the message of God's love in Christ Jesus has been working on you for many years and has been used by God to give you a new birth, so that you know God through Christ and you know His love for you in Christ. His love for you has created within you a love for Him and for one another, so that you are intent on helping each other and being of good service to one another, yes, that you are beginning to love one another, as Christ has loved you. If it is true that we are Christians, true Christians trusting in Jesus as our Savior from sin, then it is also true that *agape* love is present not only among us in the Word, but within us, as a burning flame in our hearts, moving us to serve one another in true Christian love.

However, we do not want to say too much here about our love for God or our love for one another, as though we had reached a plateau in this *agape* love. The Apostle Peter once thought he really loved the Lord; he loved Him so much that he was willing to lay down his life for Him, or so he thought. But in reality his love for Jesus was very weak, so weak that he denied his Lord three times only a few hours after brashly claiming how great his love for Jesus was. We do not want to make the same mistake of overestimating the strength of our love for Him or for anyone else.

Our text shows us that the Apostle John and his readers realized that their love for God and for each other was not what it should have been. It was still far from being close to the kind of love Jesus showed to us sinners. John recognized that growth in love was necessary. If their love had been such that it could not be improved, why would John encourage them with words like these: **“Beloved, let us love one another?”** If their love had reached the goal of perfection, John would not need to repeat his exhortation: **“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”**

Now if John and his readers needed such encouragement, what shall we conclude about ourselves? Do we not need this same encouragement? Isn't true that we have not reached the level of unselfish love which God directs us to have? I know I need to be reminded to show such love, even though I have been a Christian for many years. But notice how the Apostle John goes about encouraging such love. He does not simply lay down the law that they should all love one another. He also supplies the enabling motive. **“If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”** The only thing that can bring about an increase in love within us is an increased recognition and appreciation of God's love for us in Jesus. In other words, the gospel of Christ is the only thing that the Holy Spirit uses to bring about love and more love in our lives.

So let me come back to our original question. **AGAPE LOVE—IS IT PRESENT AMONG US?** We know the answer: *Yes, for the gospel is being preached in our midst, and there will be fruit produced by that Word.* We know the answer: *Yes, for God's love has moved us to love Him and one another and to show that love by serving one another.* Finally, the answer is: *Yes, even though our love is still small and needs to grow.* Be determined to use the gospel in your lives, in your families, in your ministries, so that your own love may grow, as well as the love of those whom you are serving in love. It is with us as it was with the Thessalonians to whom the Apostle Paul said: **“You yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more”** (1 Thess. 4:9-10). May the Lord work such an increase of love among us through His Word. Amen!

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear. Like the cold of snow in time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him, for he refreshes the soul of his masters.

Dear friends in Christ, who are training to become wordsmiths in the kingdom of our Lord:

The work of a pastor requires the use of words: words to speak to his congregation on Sunday morning, words to teach his confirmation class during the week, words to instruct the new couple across the street, words to speak at the bedside of a dying member, words to help that delinquent member recognize his sin, words to comfort the family after a loved one dies. Words, words, words! Who can even begin to count the number of words the pastor uses in one ordinary week of work as a minister of the gospel?

There was a time in my ministry when I could not speak because of a polyp, and I began to wonder what line of work I could get into if I was not able to speak anymore. Certainly a pastor cannot do his work without being able to talk. A relatively simple surgical operation took care of my problem, and my voice returned. I was able to speak once again and also able to appreciate all the more the ability to convey thoughts and truths through the spoken word.

Now as we think of the multitude of words that come from a pastor's mouth, we must remember the words of James, who says: **"We all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body"** (Jas. 3:2). In other words, there is no pastor anywhere who is able to control his words to such an extent that everything he says is just right. Sometimes the words we say with good intentions are inappropriate at the time they are spoken and cause serious trouble. And sometimes we lose control of our emotions, and our words may even become hateful and injurious.

For this very reason it is important that we consider our text from the book of Proverbs and learn **THE WORTH OF WORDS FITLY SPOKEN**. Certainly, the careful consideration of this text should help us realize the importance of saying the right thing at the right time. In fact, a careful consideration of this text should lead us to pray that our God would give us the right words to say in every circumstance, so that those persons who hear our words may be brought to repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and kept in that faith to the end of their days.

Our text refers to two kinds of worthwhile words; there are *words of rebuke* and *words of refreshment*. In each case it is important that the words we speak may be **fitly spoken**.

The wise King Solomon says in our text: **"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver."** We have here mentioned first the content of the words. That is like the gold. Then there is the package or setting in which the words are spoken. That is like the silver. "Apples of gold in settings of silver." Truly, as Solomon vividly describes, the pure word of God spoken at the right time in the right way has great worth.

During your time in seminary you are in training to become better acquainted with all the gold in God's Word. What a gold mine we have in all 66 books of Holy Scripture! You are learning the arrangement of all this gold in the Old Testament and the New Testament. You are gradually getting the road map, so to speak, of where all this gold is to be found, from the pages of Genesis through the Psalms and the Old Testament prophets, to the Gospels and Acts and the letters of Paul and those other letters of Peter, James, John and Jude, as well as the book of Revelation. You know that all Scripture has been breathed out by God and that therefore it is all gold; it is all the Word of God without any errors or contradictions. In fact, the sacred writers speak of God's Word as worth much more than pure gold. For example, we hear the word of the psalmist to his God and ours: **"The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver"** (Ps. 119:72).

Now as you are learning how to mine this gold, you are also learning how to convey this gold to your listeners, to people young and old in every condition of life, members and non-members, strong and weak, rich and poor, male and female. This is where the setting is so important. If the "apples of gold" are presented in "settings of silver," then your communication of the Word to them is appropriate and fitting. If the wonderful words of God are presented to poor sinners like us at just the right time and in the right way to do the hearer good, what a great and wonderful thing that is!

Our text says: **"Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear."** Here we are dealing with *the word of rebuke*. Sometimes the right word to say, the word fitly spoken, is a word of rebuke. In other words, it is a word of law. It is a word intended to make the hearer realize

that he has broken the commandments of the almighty and perfectly righteous God, and that he deserves punishment from that God.

Take, for example, the account in Scripture of that sweet psalmist of Israel, that faithful king in Jerusalem, King David. You know the account of his great wickedness reported in 2 Samuel 11: how he stayed at home in Jerusalem while his troops were at war; how his eyes spotted the neighbor's wife bathing and how he lusted for that woman, even after he knew she was the wife of one of his trusted soldiers, Uriah the Hittite; how he then invited her to his home, committed adultery with her and then tried to cover up his sin; how he then gave the command which led to the death of this faithful soldier, so that he could add the widow Bathsheba as one of his wives. The sordid account makes it obvious that David needed a word of rebuke.

The Lord sent the prophet Nathan to deliver that rebuke to David. Nathan had to bring the pure Word of divine law to the disobedient and impenitent king. He had to deliver the gold to one of the most powerful men on earth. What setting should he use? What would be a word fitly spoken to this man who was stuck in his sins of adultery, murder, and rebellion against his God?

As we know from Scripture, the prophet Nathan came up with the setting of silver that would match the gold of God's Word which he was called on to deliver. The silver setting was the story of the rich man and the poor man and, in particular, how the rich man stole from the poor man to feed his guest. This story was effective in arousing David's wrath; he immediately called for the death of this selfish, loveless rich man. Then Nathan applied the gold in the appropriate silver setting by saying to David: **"You are the man! Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife."** With fitting words such as these Nathan drove the point home. He proved to be a wise rebuker, and David was driven to say in all sincerity: **"I have sinned against the LORD."** The word fitly spoken did what it was intended to do; David repented, and his sin was forgiven.

It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will so work in our hearts through His Word and will so guide us in our dealings with sinners to the end that we also will be wise rebukers, who not only use the gold of God's Word as the basis for our rebuke, but also in love for the sinner put that gold into a silver setting. May the Holy Spirit accomplish such communication from us, so that with God's blessing it will accomplish God's purpose. Our text speaks of "an obedient ear." Of course, that is what we are aiming for with all of our words: an obedient ear, like the ear of David who was moved by Nathan's golden words in a silver setting to recognize his grievous sins and plead for mercy, as he did in Psalm 32: **"I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin."**

This leads us to consider *the word of refreshment*. This golden word should also be conveyed in a silver setting. What this means in practice is that as soon as the sin is confessed, then the word of forgiveness is spoken. The prophet Nathan did not make David wait for days or hours for the declaration of God's forgiveness. On the contrary, that word came from Nathan's mouth as soon as David confessed his sin. Yes, the Lord's prophet was quick to say to the Lord's penitent king, **"The LORD has also put away your sin; you shall not die."** Surely it was a word fitly spoken, as fitly spoken as when our Lord Jesus Himself said to the man lowered from the roof, **"Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven."** Or when the Apostle Paul said to the trembling jailer at Philippi, **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."**

In our text Solomon uses another picture to describe this gospel proclamation and how it is fitly spoken at certain times. He says, **"Like the cold of snow in time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him, for he refreshes the soul of his masters."** Imagine an extremely hot day under the scorching sun. It is harvest time, and there is backbreaking work to be done. In those days, of course, there was no machinery and no one riding that machinery in an air-conditioned cab. Imagine instead the ancient farmer and his workers, standing out there under the hot sun, laboring hour after hour, cutting down the harvest and gathering it together, all by hand. And then suddenly the cold drinks arrive. Jugs of water kept cold by being placed in snow, which was brought down from the high mountains. The pause that refreshes! "The cold of snow in time of harvest!" What a relief for the laborers sweating out there under the hot sun.

The faithful messenger of God's Word is like that cold of snow in harvest. He brings a welcome message, and he brings it at the right time, just when it is needed the most, as when the penitent David needed to hear the word of forgiveness from the prophet Nathan. How refreshing such a word was to him, so that David rejoiced in the 32nd Psalm: **"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."** Those who are sick and know they are sick are those who appreciate most the word from the doctor that they are permanently cured. Surely the man excommunicated by the congregation at Corinth needed to hear the word of

refreshment. That is why Paul urged the congregation after the man was sorry for what he had done: **“You ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him”** (2 Cor. 2:7-8). Surely to that man the word of forgiveness was a word of refreshment, like snow in the time of harvest. It was a word fitly spoken.

So how about you who are preparing yourselves to be faithful messengers of the Lord, conveying the good news of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ? Your words of comfort will be “like snow in time of harvest” to your listeners. But notice that Solomon says, **“Like the cold of snow in time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him, for he refreshes the soul of his masters.”** Those who send the messenger are likewise refreshed when the messenger faithfully delivers his message. We can think of Jesus’ words to His disciples that all of heaven rejoices when a sinner repents. The angels in heaven celebrate when the faithful Word faithfully delivered does what it is sent to do, and the sinner is converted and trusts in Jesus as his Savior. Surely there is refreshment or joy all around. The faithful messenger is happy. The repentant sinner is happy. The congregation of Christians is happy, or at least ought to be happy. And God Himself is happy, together with all of His holy angels.

You are in training to become such faithful messengers, delivering the gold of God’s Word in silver settings, speaking what you know to be true and pure at just the right time to persons who need to hear what you have to say. **“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes”** (Luke 12:42-43). What a great and noble calling it is, giving sinners their food in due season, that is, law when they need law and gospel when they need gospel. How faithfully we should work at our studies, so that we learn not only how to mine the gold of God’s Word, but also learn how to put it in the right setting, so that it accomplishes what God wants it to accomplish.

Let us realize, right from the start, that we will not always get it right, and even if we do say the right thing at the right time, the results will sometimes be disappointing. Think of our Lord Jesus in His ministry on earth. Did He know how to mine the gold of God’s Word? Was He well versed in Holy Scripture? Of course, He was. Did He always say the right thing at the right time? Did He speak law when that was in place and gospel when that was in place? Did He always speak with love for His listeners as well as with faithfulness to the will of God? Of course, He did. No one has ever spoken words more fitly spoken than He did. And yet even in His case we do not see a 100% success rate. Not all those who heard Jesus’ words fitly spoken responded as God wanted them to respond. In fact, many reacted in hatred and anger, even though there was nothing at all wrong in anything that the Lord said to them. What Jesus said was always right and always said in the right way. From our viewpoint we are left with questions unanswered, because we cannot fully understand why some respond as they should and others do not.

Nevertheless, we make it our aim to use God’s Word wisely and well and to trust God to bless what we say in keeping with His own purpose. We are not going to do a perfect job of it. Our flesh will get in the way time and again. Those are the very moments we need to draw comfort from the very message we are bringing to comfort others. We need to be on the receiving end as well as on the delivering end. We need to see ourselves as sinners condemned by God’s holy law, and we need to see ourselves as sinners rescued from sin and its consequences by our Lord Jesus. We need to take in the refreshing word of forgiveness won by our Savior and delivered by His apostles and rejoice in our own salvation. The word fitly spoken *to* us will then become the word fitly spoken *by* us, as we speak to other sinners like us. To that end may our Lord teach us evermore to see **THE WORTH OF WORDS FITLY SPOKEN** by our God. Amen.

(To be continued)

HEBREW: THE PERFECT LANGUAGE FOR DIVINE REVELATION UNDER THE OLD COVENANT?

John K. Pfeiffer

Among German Lutherans in America the story is told of the man who grew up learning the Bible in his native tongue. When he came to America, he joined a church that conducted its services in German. It wasn't long before the congregation began the process of shifting from German to English. However, this man had an objection: "If German is good enough for God, then it should be good enough for us." To this assumption someone replied, "How do you know that God speaks German?" The man answered, "The Bible states that God said to Adam, 'Wo bist du?'"

So the story echoes through other nationalities and tongues. *Hvor er du? ¿Dónde estás? Où es-tu? Dove sei?* People become so accustomed to hearing the words of God in their native tongue that they imagine that this is how God speaks. To be sure, it is how God speaks to them. We give thanks to God that we do not have to learn Hebrew or Greek in order to receive the gospel of Christ.

This fact is demonstrated by the words of Paul: "Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: 'Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved'" (Rom. 9:27). Isaiah wrote in Hebrew; Paul quoted him in Greek; as for us, we read the words of Isaiah and Paul in English. Compare the three languages of this verse below:

Isaiah: אִם־יְהִי־עַמּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּחֹל הַיָּם שָׂאֵר יָשׁוּב בּוֹ

Paul: ἐὰν ᾖ ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ ὡς ἡ ἄμμος τῆς θαλάσσης, τὸ ὑπόλειμμα σωθήσεται

NKJ: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved."

Paul identifies the Greek words as being the words of Isaiah, even though Isaiah wrote them in Hebrew. So whether the words are in Hebrew or Greek or English or German, they remain the words of Isaiah, and by inspiration they remain the words of the Lord.

The fact that the message of the gospel is valid and effective in every language of man is demonstrated also on the day of Pentecost, as we learn from the account in Acts 2. "And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:8-11).

Was Hebrew the Proto-Language?

That having been said, we are still left with a question. When God said to Adam, אִיכָּה, was He speaking in Hebrew? Or was it in some other known language or even in an unknown, extinct tongue (e.g. Edenic, Noahitic, Proto-World)? There is no conclusive proof for any of these positions. However, it is interesting to note that the names of prediluvian individuals mentioned in Genesis were fashioned from Hebrew roots, as we see in the following:

Seth	(שֵׁת)	= set, put, appoint (from שֵׁת)
Enosh	(אֵנוֹשׁ)	= man (emphasis on weakness)
Cainan	(קַיִן)	= acquisition (קָנָה)
Mahalalel	(מַהֲלָלֵל)	= praise of God (אֵל + הָלַל)
Jared	(יָרֵד)	= descent (יָרַד - descend)
Enoch	(חֵנוֹךְ)	= dedicated (חָנַךְ - to train, dedicate)
Methuselah	(מֵתוֹשֶׁלַח)	= man sent (שָׁלַח + מָת)

If the prediluvian language was not Hebrew, it would be difficult to explain the names.

Consider the name *Seth*. "And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, (שֵׁת), 'For God has appointed (שָׂת) another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed'" (Gen. 4:25). Eve took the

word meaning “appoint” and gave it to her child as a name. If Hebrew was not the language of Eden, then the Bible must be offering the Hebrew translation of the actual name, as well as an alternative explanation for the source of that name. After all, the Hebrew name must match the Hebrew word which means “appoint.” If German was the proto-language, then according to Luther’s translation Eve would have said, “*Denn Gott hat mir einen andern Sohn gegeben für Abel.*” Thus the name of the third-born son would have been something like *Geben* (or perhaps *Gabe*). If this were the case, then the Hebrew version of the naming process would not have properly expressed the reality of the situation.

Moreover, if the name שֵׁט was a Hebrew translation of the actual name, then why does the New Testament maintain that his name was “Seth” (Luke 3:38: $\Sigma\eta\theta\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \text{'}\text{A}\delta\acute{\alpha}\mu$)? If שֵׁט is only a translation inspired by the Holy Spirit, wouldn’t the Greek New Testament, inspired by the same Holy Spirit, have to translate his name with some form of ἵσσημι (Gen. 4:25 LXX: $\acute{\epsilon}\xi\alpha\nu\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\eta\mu\iota$)? The fact that the name is transliterated with Greek letters ($\Sigma\eta\theta$) demonstrates that שֵׁט was his actual name. Since the practice of the Spirit is to maintain the original sound of the names, it would at the very least imply that the prediluvian language was an ancient form of Hebrew.

If Hebrew was the proto-language, if it was the language developed by God Himself for communication with His perfect creatures, then what is there about the language that makes it so well designed for communication? The very possibility that this was the divinely chosen language prompts a desire to discover the answer.

HEBREW: THE DIVINELY CHOSEN TONGUE OF THE SHEMITES¹

Even if Hebrew was not the proto-language, it is, nevertheless, the language which God chose for His Old Testament people and His Old Testament revelation. Or shall we assume that God merely accommodated Himself to the language that Abraham and his descendants just so happened to speak? Did they come to speak this language because they were the mere products of their linguistic environments (Mesopotamia, Aram, Canaan, Egypt)? This is what some linguists maintain.

For the truth of the matter we go to Babel at a time 300 years before the birth of Abraham. The people of the world were all living in one place and speaking one language. “Now the whole earth had one language and one speech” (Gen. 11:1). However, they refused to submit to the will of God (i.e., to “fill the earth” Gen. 1:28; 9:1), instead desiring to exalt themselves by remaining united in one location. Therefore God forced His will on them by “confusing their language,” with the result that they could no longer live together.

In the days of Peleg, the great-great-great-grandfather of Abraham, “the earth was divided” (Gen. 10:25). At Babel “the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth” (11:9). “The coastland peoples of the Gentiles were separated into their lands, everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their nations” (10:5).

The confusion of languages was not carried out in a confused fashion, however. It was very well organized. When the people journeyed away from Babel, they went in groups. Each group had in common a God-given language in accordance with their familial relationships. According to His wisdom, omniscience, and omnipotence, God arranged things so that all within a given family spoke the same language. Apparently, the family groupings were broad enough to constitute nations: “everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their nations.”

God’s great mission for mankind was not completed at this point. Man had not yet produced the promised Seed, who would crush the head of the serpent, undoing the murderous work of Satan. Therefore the progression of time and events was not left to chance (if there be such a thing). The line of the Savior was predetermined and preserved by divine providence. This included maintaining the integrity of familial and national ties. God would not leave to chance the unity of the line of Shem, from whom would come Abraham, from whom would come Jesus. Thus at Babel God gave the family line of the Savior the Hebrew language. Knowing our God to be what He has revealed of Himself, we would not conclude that this happened as the result of a “flip of the coin,” but rather by divine determination. Hebrew was the divinely chosen language for the people of God and on that basis also His chosen means for the divine revelation which we call the Old Testament.

However, Hebrew was not the choice for the New Testament. For this revelation God chose Koine Greek. Our question, therefore, remains limited to the Old Testament. What made Hebrew the right choice for God's revelation to the people of Old Testament times? Here is the contention:

- Greek is a language suited to the mind and thus “perfectly” fit for the revelation of Christian doctrine.
- Hebrew is a language of the viscera and therefore “perfectly” fit for the revelation of the historical activity of God in connection with the people of His covenant.

HEBREW: A LANGUAGE OF ACTION

The history of the Old Testament era is the story of the relationship between God and His chosen people. It is the story of the ongoing activity of God as He directed Israel toward its ultimate destiny: bringing the Savior into the world. Action is an essential element to this story and how it is told.

The Hebrew language is a language well suited to the description of activity. Consider the sentence structure. The normal word order for the Hebrew language is *verb-subject-object*, with prepositional phrases and other adjuncts generally following the word(s) which they serve as modifiers. On occasion the Holy Spirit wants to emphasize the subject or the object, in which instance the noun will precede the verb.

In the following example of Genesis 2:6 אֶרֶץ (“mist”) precedes the verb יַעֲלֶה. Thereby the Spirit draws attention to the subject of the action rather than the action itself.

וַאֲדָר יַעֲלֶה מִן־הָאָרֶץ וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת־כָּל־פְּנֵי־הָאָרֶץ׃
*And a mist> proceeded to go up> from-the land>
 and it proceeded to cover> the whole-face-of-the earth.²*

Normally, however, the verb comes first, placing emphasis on the activity. It is difficult to convey this emphasis in the form of a fluent English translation. As an example consider Genesis 1:3. The thought process of the English language leads us to say, “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” However, the Hebrew thought process led Moses to write:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי־אוֹר
(And says >God>let be>light>and is-light).

The verb comes first in each of the three clauses within this verse. With this convention the Spirit emphasizes the action of “saying” and that of “being.”³

At times the emphasis placed on the verbal action may not seem significant. The positioning of the verb at the beginning of the sentence or clause may appear to be a simple, customary usage.⁴ Even so, the action expressed can still occupy a prominent place in the mind of the hearer or reader. At the very least it is the first element of thought or information that his mind considers in processing the meaning. This customary usage of verb-first word order was a good fit for the Lord's description of His activity in the historical development of His people and their divinely ordained destiny as the Messianic nation.

One need not look to the verbs alone to see that this language is truly action-based. Most of the nouns and adjectives in the Hebrew language are based on trilateral verbal roots. Verbal roots consist of three consonants (some say two). These three consonants represent a verbal action and serve as the base root from which cognate nouns and adjectives are derived. Such cognate nouns and adjectives, consequently, can be viewed as rooted in action.

We might compare this linguistic trait of Hebrew to a movie video, in which an action is viewed as taking place. If we push the “pause” button, the portrayal of that action is put on hold. The image in view is no longer showing action underway, but rather a person, place or thing frozen in the frame. Going from “play” to “pause,” we potentially move from a primary focus on activity to a primary focus on the subject or object of the activity. In a similar way, when tracing the cognate relationships of Hebrew words, we can see the progression from a verb to a noun or adjective.

Consider as an illustration the listing below of cognate words based from the root רָאָה. רָאָה is the trilateral root that expresses the concept found in the English verb “to see.” From this root are derived the following words, given with their grammatical label and lexicographic meanings:

- רָאָה – verb in 3 sg. form - *he sees*
- רָאָה – adjective - *seeing*

רָאָה – noun - *seer*; the same form can also mean *vision*

מַרְאֵה – noun - *sight, appearance*

One goes from the activity of seeing (verb) to the attribute of seeing (adjective) to the subject who is seeing (noun) to the object of what is being seen (noun). Whether verb, adjective or noun, each derived form is based on the conceptual activity expressed in the English word “seeing.” The activity is always at the root of the words. In this instance, as it turns out, the English terms also have a verbal origin and a derived relationship to the verb “see.”

One might argue that a noun like מַרְאֵה is in reality a participle. This does not negate what is said above, but rather verifies it. Nouns and adjectives were formed from the verbal root. Many nouns were actually derived from participles. Some even had the form of the participle, but in time were no longer treated as such.

Consider also the Hebrew noun בְּרֶךְ, which is translated “knee.” It is derived from the verb בָּרַךְ, whose root conveys the sense of the action found in the English verb “to kneel” or “to bend the knee.” Thus the Hebrew noun is a thing described in terms of an associated action; it is “the bending or kneeling member” of the body.⁵

HEBREW: A LANGUAGE OF THE CONCRETE

What is the significance of the fact that Hebrew is an action-based language? An action-based language focuses on what can be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and felt. The Hebrew way of thinking and expressing thought deals with the concrete rather than the abstract.

As we journey through time with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, the judges, Samuel, David, Solomon, the kings and prophets, and on into the fullness of time, we are confronted not by doctrinal treatises, but by living people, momentous events and material things. We encounter the concrete. We watch more than listen, as the people led by God act, interact, react, enact, mis-act and overact.

As we see this ongoing activity, we learn the ways of the Lord as well as the ways of man. Repeatedly, we see the sinfulness of man; and repeatedly, we see the grace of God. It is from the concrete that we learn about the abstract. Whereas a statement of words can tell us that God is gracious, the portrayal of God’s activity in the lives of His people will show with effective impact how gracious He is.

Such was the plan of God during the 2000 years from Abraham to Jesus. It was His plan to forge the family of Abraham into a nation and to march that nation through the centuries until it reached its destiny: ushering in the birth of the Savior. Along that march God conveyed the concept of His glory through His actions.

Even divine glory itself, what we have theologically defined as the sum total of God’s attributes, was envisioned in terms of the concrete rather than the abstract. Throughout much of their history a cloud and fire represented כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה to the children of Israel (Exod. 16:10; 24:16-17; Num. 16:42; Deut. 5:24; 1 Kings 8:11; Isa. 4:5; etc.). As for the individual aspects of God's glory, these too were expressed and understood in terms of activity. Indeed, all of the characteristics of God were portrayed to the eye of the Old Testament believer as Jehovah in action according to His love and mercy, or according to His wrath and justice, or according to His power, or His wisdom, and so forth.

A thorough study of the Old Testament Scriptures will reveal that its doctrine is presented mainly in terms of actions and events rather than abstractions and definitions.

Divine Revelation and the Concrete

Divine revelation frequently came directly to men in a concrete fashion: *visions* they saw, *dreams* they had and *audible statements* straight from the mouth of God to their own ears. One can find numerous examples of each kind in the Old Testament.

Visions: Genesis 15:1; 46:2; Numbers 12:6; 24:4,16; 1 Samuel 3:15; 2 Samuel 7:17; 1 Chronicles 17:15; 2 Chronicles 9:29; 26:5; 32:32; Psalm 89:19; Isaiah 1:1; Lamentations 2:9; Ezekiel 1:1; 7:13,26; 8:3-4; 11:24; 12:22-28; Daniel 2:19; 7:1-7, 15; 8; 9:21-27; 10; Hosea 12:10; Obadiah 1:1; Nahum 1:1; Habakkuk 2:2-3.

Dreams: Genesis 20:3,6; 31:10-11,24; 37:5-11; 40:5-19; 41:1-36; Numbers 12:6; Deuteronomy 13:1-3; 1 Kings 3:5-15; Jeremiah 23:28; Daniel 2:1-45.

Audible statements: Genesis 12:1-4; 16:7-13; 17:1-22; Exodus 3; 4; *et multi*; Judges 2:1-4; 6:11-18; 13; 1 Kings 19:9-18; 2 Kings 1:3-15; 1 Chronicles 21:9-10.

Covenants and the Concrete

By virtue of the greatness of His love, God established covenant-relationships with man. In the days of the Old Testament these covenants focused on that which can be perceived with the senses. They were established, conveyed, and experienced in terms of the concrete. In the Old Testament era we recognize two such covenants.

- The Abrahamic Covenant: God's covenant with Abraham included details about the following: his name, his descendants, his relationship with others, the future land of settlement, the one specific Descendant through whom the whole world would be blessed.
- The Old (Mosaic or Sinaitic) Covenant: God's covenant with the children of Israel included details about the following: *civil laws* governing the nation of Israel as a political entity, *ceremonial laws* governing their worship life as people separated and dedicated to the one true God, *moral laws* governing their interpersonal relationships with their God and with each other.

The Abrahamic Covenant was the primary covenant, establishing the basis for the existence of Israel as a separate nation and prescribing their destiny as the people God would use to bring forth the Savior. The Mosaic Covenant was secondary, governing the lives of the children of Israel from the time of its giving at Mt. Sinai to the resurrection of the promised Messiah from the dead.⁶

Throughout Israel's existence as a holy people claimed by Jehovah, God's activity centered on concrete actions and events. Many of these actions and events had implications beyond the immediate circumstances. They were pictures of things to come.

~ The nomadic life of the patriarchs is a picture of the Christian's existence as a stranger and pilgrim in this world.

~ Certain events in the lives of the patriarchs seem to prefigure spiritual realities found in Christ. For example, the offering of Isaac seems to prefigure the offering of Christ: the father offering his only son; the son carrying the "wood" for his sacrifice; the sacrifice taking place near Jerusalem; the father receiving his son back to life again on the third day.

~ The physical nation of Israel is a picture of the spiritual Israel, the Holy Christian Church.

~ Certain events from the time of the exodus from Egypt to the time of the entrance into Canaan were meant to foreshadow Christ: the Passover, the manna, the water-giving rock, the bronze serpent, etc.

~ The physical separation of the nation from surrounding nations was a picture of the spiritual separation of the Church from the unbelieving world.

~ Certain ceremonial laws were pictures of Christ's work of atonement: the tabernacle and temple are a picture of heaven and the presence of God; the priesthood pictures Christ's priesthood; the required sacrifices prefigure His atoning sacrifice; uncleanness prohibiting entrance into the temple pictures the spiritual uncleanness of sin which prevents man's entrance into God's presence; the ceremonies for cleansing and making one fit to enter the temple picture the cleansing that is ours through Christ, especially the cleansing that comes through baptism; etc.

~ The establishment of the kingdom in Israel prefigured the kingdom of Christ.

~ The building of the temple prefigured Christ's building of the New Testament church.

These and many more events, laws, and symbols made the daily lives of the children of Israel a living, physical picture of the spiritual existence of the true children of God. Doctrines were set forth with actions and experiences in the lives of the Old Testament people. In this way scriptural principles revolved around concrete events and activities.

One example of this would be the confrontation between the returned exiles and the Samaritans. The Samaritans wanted to participate in the building of the new temple. So they said, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here" (Ezra 4:2). The response of Zerubbabel reflects an application of the doctrine of fellowship: "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel" (4:3). Building the temple was an act of worship for the Jews. In recognition of and obedience to God's will, they would not allow the heathen to participate in this activity. Without the principle explicitly stated in so many words or taught as a formal axiom, this event was, nevertheless, a dramatic display and effective illustration of the fellowship principle in action.

Doctrinal principles were revealed through activities and events. Even one's relationship with God at that time was tied to activities, events, and experiences related to the concrete. We note this reality in our

understanding of Jeremiah's comments about the Old Covenant changing to the New Covenant. "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:34). Under the Old Covenant the people came to "know Jehovah" through the regulated experience of an activity-driven, event-repeating, concrete-based system of worship. As decreed under the Old Covenant, their worship involved them in the observance of detailed ceremonial laws. In light of what God told them as Messianic prophecy, they were to examine the meaning of the external rituals, so that they might better understand the nature of their God, their relation to Him and His will for their lives.⁷

The people came to know Jehovah also by observing Him in action. The manner in which God dealt with His people revealed the kind of God that He is: "the LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation" (Exod. 34:6-7).

In fulfillment of what Jeremiah foretold concerning the change from the Old Covenant to the New, the New Covenant provides the essential means, the blood-bought forgiveness of sins, through which a man knows God the very moment he comes to faith in Christ. When one comes to faith in Christ, he has "seen" Christ. And when he has thus "seen" Christ, he has "seen the Father" too (John 14:9).

In the New Testament Scriptures, especially the discourses of Jesus and the didactic material of the epistles, we study statements of divine truth and carefully examine Greek forms and syntax in order to trace the progression and interrelation of thoughts that express Christian doctrine. In the Old Testament Scriptures, on the other hand, we study the activities of God and the prescribed activities of God's people in order to see His doctrine at work, that is, His nature and His will engaged in accomplishing His saving purposes and leading His people back into His presence.

THE FORCES⁸ OF ACTION

Because divine principles were being conveyed by means of divine activity and divinely prescribed human activity, the language used to convey the events needed to be a language based on activity. Hebrew is such a language, as has been noted.

To this writer's knowledge every language conveys the thought of action through verbs. Verbal forms are characterized by tenses. In many languages, such as English, tenses convey action mainly in terms of time: past, present, and future.

In the Hebrew language there are two primary tenses: perfect and imperfect.⁹ The perfect and imperfect tenses are not true tenses by definition, since they do not express a concept of time in their forms.¹⁰

Perfect Tense

The novice often regards the Hebrew perfect tense as the equivalent of the English past tense. As a result he may translate it accordingly. Likewise, he tends to translate the imperfect tense with an English future. The fact of the matter is that in portraying action, the Hebrew speaker or writer did not try to convey the timing of the action by means of the verb form. With the perfect tense he was only indicating that the action was perfected.

The *perfect tense* in Hebrew presents action that is *single* and *finished* and *certain*. From the viewpoint of the writer or speaker, the action is perfected or completed action which either took place in the past or is taking place in the present or will take place in the future. Consider the following as an example of the perfect used in reference to present time (present time in reference to the speaker):

Ruth 1:12a: "Turn back, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have a husband."

Literally the words underlined would read: "I am old from being to a man" (אֲנִי מְהֵיֹת לְאִישׁ). The perfect tense is not translated with a past tense ("I was old"). Naomi is simply expressing the fact that at that point in time she is old; the activity which brought her to this point is completed and certain and viewed as a single whole.

From a different temporal viewpoint the completed action of the Hebrew perfect can also be seen and expressed as taking place in the future.

Isaiah 9:2 (v. 1 in Heb.): "The people walking in the darkness see a great light; the ones sitting in the

land of death's shadow, light shines upon them.”

The perfect tense indicates that the action of “seeing” (רָאָה) and that of “shining” (נָגַד) are viewed as completed actions, as well as single and certain. However, the context indicates that this is something that will take place in future time relative to moment that the statement was made. I chose to translate the perfect forms with the English present tense, for of all the English tenses this seems to be the most temporally noncommittal. Note how in narrating an event of history, a storyteller may lapse into the present tense when trying to convey the drama of the moment: “Then General Washington climbs into the boat and begins to cross the Delaware.” Based on the context, however, the reader or listener is fully aware that the action took place in the past.

The prophet Isaiah was seeing and foretelling a future event as completed. This was due to the fact that God had given the prophecy and “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8). When God has declared a future event, it is “as good as done” the moment that God declares it. The future event of the Light of the world shining in Galilee is “a done deal.” Therefore the English present indicative (“see” and “shines”) is meant to convey the fact of the future action. The translators of the King James Version chose the English perfect: “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.” This is better than the future tense, since it conveys the thought of completion.

The reality of Christ's coming was as certain in the days of Isaiah as it was in the days of the Apostle John, who wrote, “All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8).

Imperfect Tense

Similar statements regarding time can be said of the imperfect tense, which presents an action (or state) that is *incomplete* or *unfinished*. Such action may occur in the past, the present or the future.

The default force for this action is *progressive*: activity having begun, but not concluded. In the mind's eye the beginning of the action can be seen, but not the end. It is like the start of a pathway that disappears into the fog. The pathway may end quickly, or it may continue indefinitely. The end is of no concern to the speaker. The only thing that concerns him is that the activity has begun.

On occasion the activity is viewed as *frequentative*: activity repeated over an unspecified range of time. Again, the beginning can be seen, but not the end. The choice of the frequentative force as the intended meaning of the imperfect is one that should be determined from the context. If there is nothing in the context that indicates repetitive activity, then the progressive should be the force of choice. An example of each is found below, with the translation of the imperfect form underlined.

Progressive Imperfect

Exodus 15:1

אָז וְשִׁיר־מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה

Then Moses, along with the sons of Israel, began to sing this song to Jehovah.

Frequentative Imperfect

1 Samuel 1:7

וְכֵן יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה מְדֵי עֲלֹתָהּ בְּבֵית יְהוָה
כִּן תִּכְעֲסֶנָּה וְתִבְכֶּה וְלֹא תֹאכַל:

And so often as it happened year-by-year, whenever she (Hannah) went up to the house of Jehovah, so often she (Peninnah) provoked her and she (Hannah) wept and did not eat.

In both of the above examples the imperfect tense is understood as being in past time. However, it is not the imperfect form itself that reveals this, but the context. As far as the tenses are concerned, the second passage could read, “And year-by-year, as often as she goes up to the house of Jehovah, just so often does she provoke her and she weeps and does not eat.” The Hebrew tense does not concern itself with time, but with the consummation of the activity, that is, whether it is consummated or not consummated. For an example of the imperfect used in the context of present time, see Genesis 37:15. An example of the imperfect used in future time is Genesis 12:12.

The imperfect tense should not be construed as being the same as the **participle**. Using the previous

analogy of the road seen in the fog, the participle can be viewed as one observing the road coming out of the fog, passing by in front of him and then disappearing into the fog again. In this instance he can see neither the beginning nor the end. As far as he can tell, the road continues on indefinitely in either direction. Of course, this is of no concern to the speaker in using the Hebrew participle. What concerns him is that the action is going on right now (at the time of speaking). Because of the nature of the participle, it is often used like a noun (a gerund). Thus the word for “shepherd” is רֹעֵה, a participle of רָעָה (“to tend sheep”); he is “a tending one.” His *ongoing activity* is that of tending sheep.

Timelessness of action

As this writer sees it, the entirety of the Old Testament revelation is encased in covenants. Like the Russian *matrioshka* one covenant nests within another. The chief covenant is the Abrahamic Covenant. Nested within that is the Mosaic Covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant dictates the activities of God; the Mosaic Covenant dictates the activities of Israel.

With both covenants there is a need for consummation, for fulfillment, for completion. The Abrahamic Covenant would be fulfilled by the actions of God. The Old (Mosaic) Covenant should have been fulfilled by the actions of Israel. The consummation of both is found in the God-man, Jesus Christ, who “was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:3-4 KJV).

As the God-man Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant through His perfect keeping of the Law. The Old Covenant found its perfect consummation in Him and His obedience. He was everything that the covenant was looking for. And so He made possible the blissful union between God and Israel, that is, not those who are Israel after the flesh (Rom. 9:6-8), but those who are of the faith of Abraham.

As the God-man Jesus also fulfilled the Abrahamic Covenant through His suffering, death and resurrection. The Abrahamic Covenant’s promised blessing for all the nations of the earth is found only in Christ’s completed work of atonement.

Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. . . .

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:7-9, 13-14).

So it is that the ultimate consummation of the Abrahamic Covenant came almost 2000 years after it was made. Throughout this time the faithful had no idea when the Messiah would be born. Day after day and year after year, they waited in hope.

The Hebrew language, meanwhile, served to maintain this anxious anticipation of the consummation. “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (1 Pet. 1:10-11). For the most part, they did not know the timing, but they knew the certainty of the consummation. In prophecy after prophecy the Spirit used the perfect tense, not revealing time, but declaring that the fulfillment was as good as done. Each generation of believers lived and “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off . . .” (Heb. 11:13). Thus as the faithful looked forward to the consummation, they did so with a heart filled with certainty.

We note some examples of the perfect tense used to convey the certainty of the promise by showing that in the mind of God the promise was already fulfilled.

Isaiah 11:2

וְנָחָה עָלָיו רוּחַ יְהוָה רוּחַ חֵכְמָה וּבִינָה
רוּחַ עֲזָה וְנִבְוִיָּה רוּחַ דַּעַת וַיִּרְאַת יְהוָה:

*And the Spirit of Jehovah rests upon Him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,*

the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of Jehovah.

Isaiah 53:4

אֶכֶן חָלִינוּ הוּא נָשָׂא וּמַכָּאֲבֵינוּ סְבָלָם
וְאִנְחָנוּ חֲשַׁבְנָהוּ נִגּוּעַ מִזֵּדָה אֱלֹהִים וּמַעֲנָה:

*But surely He Himself takes up our diseases,
and as for our sorrows, He bears them.
But as for us, we consider Him stricken,
smitten of God and afflicted.*

Isaiah 60:1

קוֹמֵי אֹרֵי כִּי בָּא אֹרֶךְ וּכְבוֹד יְהוָה עָלֶיךָ זָרַח:

*Arise! Shine! For your light is come,
and the glory of Jehovah breaks forth upon you.*

As the faithful looked into the future, they were led to see with eyes of certainty. As they looked back on their past, there was a liveliness in the way that the Lord presented their history to them. He did not do it with past tenses, as if to convey the thought of times and events dead and gone. Rather He did it with a “tense” that makes the times and events come alive. It is the imperfect tense that adds a note of vividness to the written history of the people of Israel. It portrays actions as if they are beginning just as the reader lays eyes on the text. By way of example this writer offers his own translation of Genesis 22:1-3.

And it happens after these things that God tests Abraham and He says to him, “Abraham,” and he says, “Behold me.” And He says, “Take now your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac, and get going to the land of Moriah and offer him there for a burnt offering upon the same mountains which I say to you.” Then Abraham rises up early in the morning, and he saddles his donkey, and he takes two of his servants with him and Isaac his son, and he splits the wood of the burnt offering, and he arises and walks to the place which God said to him.

The use of the perfect tense for the future and the imperfect tense for the past opens up before our eyes a view of God that knows no time. The New Testament Scriptures *tell* us that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). The Old Testament Scriptures *show* us that He is the same. They portray past events as though they were going on at the time of reading. They show future events as though they are already completed in the present. The vast stretch from past through present and into the future collapses into the present, and all of it is in the hands of the faithful, loving, active God, the timeless One who is “I AM.”

JEHOVAH

יְהוָה (“He is”) or, as He Himself said from the burning bush, אֲנִי־הוּא (“I am”). God shows Himself as the ever-present, eternal, unchangeable God. The language that He uses to communicate with His people shows the same truth. Although we human beings are subject to the passage of time with its beginnings and endings, God is not. The people of Israel needed to know that no matter what happened, no matter what changes took place, no matter what endings occurred in their lives, God and His covenant remained the same.

For the New Covenant people of God the divine name *Jehovah* has been incorporated into our Savior’s name *Jesus*: *Je* = Jehovah; *sus* = saves.¹¹ He is both the timeless “I AM” and the Savior of the world. No matter what happens, no matter what changes take place, no matter what endings occur in our lives, Jesus and His covenant of forgiveness remain the same. The actions of God in the Old Testament era vividly reveal this truth; the actions and teachings of Jesus Christ in the New Testament era also reveal this truth.

Is the Hebrew language the “perfect” language for the revelation of God to His people before the time of Christ? Is it the language specifically chosen by God? Perhaps we cannot answer these questions definitively. However, certain characteristics of the Hebrew language answered the needs of the people who lived under the Abrahamic and the Old Covenants. These characteristics also fit the nature of the God who revealed Himself as “I AM,” the timeless, eternal, unchangeable God. If it is not the “perfect” language for this purpose, it is certainly the best of those available and the right one for God’s purposes.

All pastors and theological teachers are encouraged to renew and strengthen their understanding of the Hebrew language, so that they may better understand God’s revelation of His gracious will during the 2000 years that preceded the birth of His Son. By gaining such an understanding of the language used, they will have a better

understanding of the activity of the ever-present, eternal, unchangeable God in the lives of the New Covenant Israel, the Holy Christian Church.

Endnotes

¹ I contend that the language chosen at Babel for the descendants of Shem (Shemites) was a form of Hebrew. I do not believe the Jews to be the only heirs of this tongue, although they appear to be the most direct heirs. Other cognate languages, however, would have spun off of this language.

² In the literal translations given for the Hebrew, the angle brackets (>...>...>) set off the English rendering of each Hebrew word or word grouping. Hyphens are used to represent each occurrence of the Hebrew makkeph in the Masoretic text.

³ In this instance I am treating אָבָה as a fientive verb: “to come into being.”

⁴ This is likewise the usual word order of the Koine Greek used in the New Testament.

⁵ Conversely, the English verb “kneel” is derived from the noun “knee”; i.e., the action expressed by the verb is associated with the thing (noun) used to carry out the action.

⁶ For more on the primary and secondary natures of these two covenants, see Galatians 3:10-25, in which Paul identifies the Abrahamic Covenant as the primary “promise” and the Mosaic Covenant as the secondary “law.”

⁷ As an example using the life of King David, consider Victor Tiefel’s “additional thoughts” at the end of his sermon on pages 7-8 of this issue.

⁸ The use of the word *force* in this section is to be understood as a term of grammar and also as synonymous with grammatical *aspect*. In many languages the force or grammatical aspect of a verb form generally presents the action or state expressed as *perfective* (action as a single event) or *imperfective* (action in progress or repeated or habitual).

⁹ One might include the imperative. However, this appears to be an offshoot from the imperfect both in form and aspect.

¹⁰ From a grammatical viewpoint “tense” is generally understood as a “category of verb inflection specifying time and duration” (*The Random House College Dictionary Revised Edition*).

¹¹ *Jesus* is the English transliteration of Ἰησοῦς, which is the Greek transliteration of Yeshua, the Aramaic form of Joshua or Jehoshua, which means “Jehovah saves.” Cf. also what the angel said to Joseph, “You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). For more on the identification of Jesus as Jehovah, see C. M. Kuehne’s article “Jesus / Jehovah,” *Journal of Theology*, 37:3 (Sept. 1997), pp. 4-34.

The Son of Man as Preacher Interacting with His Congregation*

William Henkel

* In his series on the Son of Man and His interaction with men, Prof. Henkel’s next article—a continuation that bears the previously used title “Der Menschensohn als Prediger im Umgang mit seiner Gemeinde (Forstetzung)”—was published in *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 22:4, October 1925, pages 255-273. The first six pages have been translated for this issue, with the remainder to come in the next issue. Endnotes, headings, other conventions of formatting and words contained in brackets have been inserted by the translator or the editor.

No characterization of Christ’s preaching would do justice to its subject, which did not also say something about the outward form, the means of presentation which He used. The material offered in the four Gospels is just not extensive enough for characterization of that sort. Indeed, none of Jesus’ sermons has reached us in its original form; only a few are before us in detailed summary.¹ Nonetheless, the material at hand is abundant enough that one can form a rather clear picture of the **homiletical method of the Master**, even insofar as it deals with external form.

We assume as self-evident that the outward form of His speech and of His teaching is one peculiar to Him and is not borrowed from anyone else. To be sure, no dogmatic consideration would oppose an assumption to the contrary. Christ was true man, born of the Virgin Mary, and in the state of humiliation He gained His human knowledge and skill in the same way that we do. There are also, in fact, New Testament scholars who

find in His discourses, at least here and there, things borrowed from others. Especially in the Sermon on the Mount and most particularly in the Lord's Prayer, echoes of passages from the rabbinic literature are found both in content and expression. Compare Zahn's interpretation of the Lord's Prayer in his commentary on Matthew.² But it is inconceivable that the powerful thoughts which Jesus expressed should not have produced their own form. Although He had made Himself acquainted with the rabbinic literature as well as with Scripture—and it was unavoidable that His thoughts and turns of speech should now and then approach that of the rabbis—yet surely His teaching was without doubt unique also in its outward form, so that one can also apply the words of the synoptic Gospels here, namely that He did not teach as the scribes.

Chiefly two things are characteristic of Christ's form of preaching. On the one hand, it is *fitted to the content*. One could examine, for example, the Sermon on the Mount and the farewell addresses.³ What powerful language, what razor-sharp expressions are in the former! The short sentences, especially in Matthew 5 where Jesus confronted the scribe's shallow explanation of the Law, accentuated the harsh contrast between Him and them. The individual expressions, in which the contrast between Him and them was honed to the sharpest point, act as cudgel blows. The climaxes give the impression of a duel in which the foe receives blow upon blow—the second more powerful than the first, the third more forceful than the second—so that resistance is no longer possible. How different are the valedictory addresses! There is no clashing of swords here, no din of battle. The entire way of presentation is soothing, peaceful. The language is not like a razor-sharp, polished sword, but is soft and mild. The somewhat longer sentences and more elaborated truths presuppose inner peace in the Speaker and in those listening. The brief concluding statements sum up what was said and remind us with their rhythm and cadence of the manner of a mother who is soothing and comforting her child:

ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν ἵνα ἐν ἐμοὶ εἰρήνην ἔχητε. ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ θλίψιν ἔχετε· ἀλλὰ θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ νενίκηκα τὸν κόσμον.⁴

He adapted His preaching to His audience

So then, the preaching of Christ was adapted to His audience. He did not preach just to preach, or even to preach beautifully and correctly. He preached so that He might give witness to the truth and magnify this for His hearers and win them for it. For this reason He spoke differently to the common people than to the scribes. He spoke differently to the disciples when they were newly assembled than after they had been instructed for three years.

Because His primary concern was not to correctly present the truths of the kingdom of heaven as such, but to impress them deeply and indelibly on the souls of His hearers, therefore *He did not preach dogmatically*. Here the term [dogmatically] does not refer to the source, but to the manner of His teaching. Christ did not set down a dogmatic proposition at the beginning of His sermon, break it down into its constituent parts and explain it. Abstract tenets and by-the-book definitions played no part in His preaching. His teaching took place after the manner of life. He did not feed His hearers on abstractions; he spoke of concrete matters.

Think of the Sermon of the Mount. A long section of it is devoted to explaining the Law. How many opportunities there were for giving definitions and abstract summaries, but Jesus gives none. Instead of these He reaches into the fullness of human life and brings the significance of the individual demands of the Law so clearly to the awareness of His hearers that they are nearly blinded by the fullness of the light which radiates from the Law, and they cannot cease being astonished. Instead of offering a definition of fine adultery,⁵ He says, "Whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). A dozen most painstakingly constructed definitions would not have given as clear a knowledge of the purity demanded in the Sixth Commandment as do these words.

When the great Preacher wants to bring His hearers to an awareness of the horror of sin and the fearsome earnestness of the Law, He does not use abstract propositions. Rather He says, "If your right eye offends you, then tear it out and cast it from you; it is better that one destroy one of his members and not that your whole body be cast into hell" (Matt. 5:29). When He wishes to make clear that our love for our neighbor must be so great that it makes us willing to sacrifice everything and suffer anything as often as his welfare requires it, then again He does not reach for some abstraction. Rather He illustrates this truth with three examples drawn from life: "If anyone strikes you on one cheek, offer him also the other. If anyone wants to argue with you and takes your jacket, give him also your coat. And if anyone compels you to go one mile, go

with him two” (Matt. 5:39-41). When He wants to impress on us how dearly we must hold Him, if we want to be his disciples, He does not say, “My disciples must love Me above all things.” Rather He expresses Himself in this way: “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26).

What dogmatic treatise, however long and ever so correct it may be, could make these truths so alive for His hearers or press them so deeply into their conscience as do these examples from life? This is the manner of teaching of almost the entire Sermon on the Mount. One example from life follows the other. But for all that, the Sermon on the Mount is anything but casuistry. Each example from daily life is the concrete clothing of a principle, a truth. In doing so, it is not aiming for a logical, that is, a dogmatically precise formulation.

The truth to which Jesus gives this clothing, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father . . . , he cannot be my disciple,” would have allowed a more logically correct expression. But Jesus does not want to teach His audience to speak logically or in a correct dogmatic fashion about the truths of the kingdom of heaven. Rather He wishes to bring these truths to their awareness in their full meaning and in their full import. He cannot do that through definitions which contain all the elements of the truth in compressed brevity. He needs to display the truth to His hearers piece by piece. And when He wishes to make one aspect of it stand out, praise it, make it important, He cannot limit His assertion with stipulations as dogmaticians do, when they desire correct definitions. The stipulations would divert His hearers from the great main point and weaken the impression which it should be making.

For example, what if Jesus had thus hedged in the statement, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father . . . ,” so that no Philistine⁶ would find anything to criticize? What if to the admonition, “If anyone wants to take your coat, also let him have your jacket,” He had added an explanation to the effect that this applies in those cases where love demands it, but in truth it does not always demand this and often demands the opposite? Then He would have so weakened what He wished to make great and important to His hearers, that it probably would have made neither a deep nor a lasting impression.

Nevertheless, He has not spoken unclearly. Whoever paid attention to His words, whoever sought the truth could not misunderstand Him; the context in which His words were spoken has made it all clear. Nor have His hearers misunderstood Him; the impression which His words have made on them was powerful.

Thus it is also not due to Jesus’ manner of presentation that so many statements from the Sermon on the Mount are misunderstood today. So what if on the basis of the words, “But I say to you that you should not resist the evil . . . ” (Matt. 5:39-41), an anarchist should deny the authority to punish and even the right of government to exist, without observing that Jesus in the cited passage does not mean to establish the rights of government, but wishes to make clear through concrete examples the individual Christian’s debt of love to his fellow man? So what if many people of the world entertain the hope of heaven in spite of their despising the means of grace, because Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount indeed blesses the merciful—among whom they, who would not be able to see anyone suffer without sympathy, clearly belong—and yet they pay no attention to the fact that in the Beatitudes Christ is setting no stock on the virtues of natural man, but rather is describing His adherents according to the virtues worked in them by grace, which, though despised by the world, are precious in God’s eyes? So what if sanctimonious lodge members and self-righteous nominal Christians construe the religion of Jesus as mere moral teaching and appeal to His word, “Whatever you want people to do for you, do that to them; that is the Law and the Prophets,” without ever considering the fact that in the pertinent section of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ is not speaking of the way of salvation, but is expounding the Law, and thus in context He means to say that this is the sum of the Law (not of Christianity), as it has been taught in the Law (the Torah) and the Prophets, i.e., in the Scriptures? In all such cases no one should dare to trace these errors back to Jesus’ dogmatically inexact manner of speaking. Much rather, it is clear that all who misunderstand Him in such a way are biased and have not taken proper care to penetrate the sense of His words.

He preached in pictures, not abstractions

Instead of saying that *Jesus does not preach dogmatically, but in the form of life,*⁷ I could have said: *He preaches vividly.* The two expressions, however, do not completely correspond. That Jesus preaches in “the form of life” means that He preaches in such a way that the kingdom of God passes before the eyes of His audience in living forms. He does not describe the children of the kingdom according to their qualities, principles, and convictions, but shows how they believe and live under the influence of the divine power of the Gospel. He

gives no abstract description of Christianity, but shows it in action by setting before our eyes how it molds the life of the person inwardly and outwardly. That is a vivid sermon, for it does not appeal primarily to the rational mind, but to the life of the imagination [*das Vorstellungslieben*]. But the vividness of Jesus' preaching is not limited to showing us Christianity in the spiritual life of believers in action. It lies much more also in this: the natural life of mankind, indeed, the whole life in nature is brought in to illustrate the truths of the kingdom of heaven and to display them in striking form to the hearer.

That happens most especially in the parables of Jesus. Jesus preferred to teach in parables. In more than thirty parables He depicted the kingdom of God in all its facets. He, who knew man thoroughly and had obtained a deeper look into his inner life than any psychologist who has ever lived, knew long ago what modern educational theory resting on psychological foundations stresses: that imagination and ideas are not only the basic requirement for all knowledge, but they also rouse the emotions more powerfully and set the will more powerfully into motion than abstract, rational reason. Who could ever forget parables such as the Sower, the Tares among the Wheat, the Mustard Seed, or the Laborers in the Vineyard? Who could ever read the parables of the Wicked Husbandmen, the Unjust Servant, the Rich Man and Poor Lazarus, the Pharisee and the Publican, the Good Samaritan, the Lost Sheep, the Ten Virgins, or the Lost Son without being deeply moved?

But even when Jesus is not speaking in parables, His presentation is vivid and full of imagery. How many metaphors does He not use in His preaching?

"I am the light of the world."

"I am the bread of life."

"I am the vine, you are the branches."

"I am the good shepherd.... I am the door of the sheep."

"You are the light of the world.... You are the salt of the earth."

"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me."

"Whoever wants to follow Me, let him take up his cross."

"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood...."

"Tear down this temple...."

"You must be born again."

"Whoever will drink the water which I give to him will not thirst eternally."

"The harvest is great, but the laborers are few."

"My sheep hear My voice."

"On this rock I will build My church."

"The light is still with you a little while."

"Inwardly they are ravening wolves."

"Can you drink the cup which I will drink?"

"I have other sheep which are not of this fold."

Indeed, where would a man stop, if he wished merely to seek out all of the substantival, adjectival, and verbal metaphors in Jesus' words, to say nothing at all of other images? Everything in His preaching lives and breathes, so that one merely looks at it and is able to hold it in his hands. None of His disciples, none of His apostles can match Him in this. No one else's preaching is as well adapted to the mental capacity of the hearer as is His.

Before we conclude our characterization, which makes no claim to completeness, one more thing must be mentioned. It belongs neither to the form exclusively nor to the content of Jesus' preaching, but is more or less combined with both, and that is the tone of His preaching. In one respect, an earnest tone predominates in Jesus' preaching. One does not hear jesting and witty remarks from Him, calculated to coax a smile from the hearer. These are serious, deadly serious matters which are addressed to His people, and no joke of any sort should obscure this fact from them. Moreover, He sounds a manly [*männlicher*] tone; nowhere does a feminine softness or shallow sentimentality adhere to His speech. A sweet-and-sour tone is likewise foreign to it. On the contrary, a manly anger sounds through many of His sermons, while mildness and tenderness are not lacking in others. And when His feelings were once stirred to their deepest depths, as when He reviewed His three year activity in Israel—which was an uninterrupted, but by-and-large futile wooing of the love of His people and an exertion for the rescue of Israel, straining His whole body and soul, but without result—then the tone of His speech was soul-stirring and deeply moving. Who can listen to His lament without being gripped and deeply stirred: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often have I desired to

gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Matt 23:37)?

(To be continued)

Endnotes

¹ We encountered a similar statement made by the author in our translation of part II. Cf. page 29 of issue 46:2 (June 2006) of the *Journal*. In reference to the sentence, “Can we be certain that even a single one of His sermons has been preserved as an exact transcript [*in ihrem Wortlaut*]?” the following endnote was given: “Henkel’s conclusion here seems to be that in the New Testament texts we are not given a transcript of the Lord’s discourses. What we have is a truncated, yet completely accurate version of what Jesus said—more of a verbally inspired summary or extract than a verbatim transcription.”

² Perhaps Henkel makes reference here to Theodor Zahn’s expressed opinion that the Lord’s Prayer is not a distinctively Christian prayer—an opinion he defends by saying, “it could and even today can be prayed by any Jew who knows nothing and does not care to know anything of Christ.” He also asserts that “fitting parallels” have been cited “for each essential portion of the Lord’s Prayer.” For proof he cites Latin works by Lightfoot, Vitranga, and Wettstein (*Kommentar zum Neuen Testament: Das Evangelium des Matthäus*, 1903, p. 268; trans. N. Greve).

While commenting on the Lord’s Prayer, Zahn refers four times to prayers in use in the synagogue, “the oldest and most important” of which are, first, the “so-called *Schemone esre*,” which consists of 18 stanzas and was already in use at the time of Jesus and, second, the Aramaic *Kaddisch* des Gottesdienst, “perhaps also extant in the first century BC” (p. 269n167).

Among the parallels to the Lord’s Prayer which he quotes in a footnote is this one from the *Kaddisch*: “Let His great name be glorified and hallowed in the world, which He has created according to His will, and let His rule (*Königsherrschaft*) prevail in your lifetimes and in your days and in the lifetimes of the entire house of Israel soon and in the near future” (p. 273n173).

³ The “farewell addresses” (*Abschiedsreden*) are also known as the “valedictory addresses.” Henkel undoubtedly has John 14-16 in mind.

⁴ As done with previous articles in this series, we have retained the author’s inclusion of the Greek text, here taken from John 16:33: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (NASB).

⁵ We understand the expression “fine [*feinen*] adultery” in distinction to gross adultery: addressing matters of the heart and attitude rather than coarse, outward acts, and thus being analogous to the distinction between fine and gross idolatry.

⁶ The German word *Philister* could be rendered more freely as “quibbler.” As we understand the use of the term in context, “Philistine” seemingly refers to one who doesn’t recognize nuances of expression and hence contradicts or argues in a rather literalistic fashion.

⁷ The German here is *der Form des Lebens*.

ELIJAH'S MANTLE

Paul Tiefel, Jr.

In 2 Kings 2 the account can be read of how the LORD replaced the prophet Elijah with the prophet Elisha. On the one hand, the change in called workers happened so suddenly; it is hard to picture anything faster than a whirlwind and a fiery chariot. On the other hand, there was time for the older prophet to tutor the future prophet. Elisha's receiving of the mantle (cloak) of Elijah was more than the acquisition of a piece of clothing. With the old guy close to "retiring" and leaving this world, the new guy desired to receive valuable lessons in serving the Lord.

It is with a similar thought of sharing in mind that a series will appear in the *Journal* under the title above. Please understand that the writer makes no pretense to be another Elijah or to be some kind of prime example or role model to the next generation of pastors. There is the sobering realization, however, that he has gone past the age of being one of the young ones to now being one of the older, and with that realization comes the thought that time and experience, including also errors along with trials, have taught some lessons that may benefit others. Such is the hope and prayer of the writer of this series, what was expressed by the hymn-writer:

God of the prophets, bless the prophets' sons;
Elijah's mantle o'er Elisha cast.
Each age its solemn task may claim but once;
Make each one nobler, stronger, than the last. Amen (TLH 483:1).

Selection of Hymns for the Worship Service

Care and effort need to be taken in selecting hymns for the worship service, just as in all the areas of putting the worship service together. How unfortunate it is to see all the hymns of the service clustered from one section of the hymnal, as though the preacher had opened to that section and simply looked around a bit. This is not to deny that there will be times when the hymns for worship do, in fact, come mainly or entirely from one section of the hymnal; this may happen, for example, on certain festival days or for the sake of emphasis. But such a selection in that case has been done for a specific reason and a deliberate purpose, as should be the case all the time.

Let's make clear what we are trying to accomplish in selecting hymns for worship. First of all, we certainly want to preach the Word of God in an edifying way to the congregants.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Col. 3:16).

Secondly, we want to inspire and to lift up our people, reflecting the spirit found in Revelation 5:

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever (Rev. 5:11-14).

With these two goals in mind we offer the following suggestions:

A. Choose hymns according to an acceptable ratio that has proper balance. For instance, choosing hymns with good content, but also with unfamiliar melodies or difficult or "dreary" tunes may help with the first goal, but it will leave behind the second. Here is one approach for achieving such a balance: pick one favorite hymn, one familiar hymn and one that is unfamiliar or new.

B. What makes for a favorite hymn? Solid content and pleasing melody are a given, but beyond that there is a wide variety of opinion. In fact, one's favorites may change during a Christian's lifetime. For me the hymn "What a Friend we have in Jesus" (TLH 457) was very helpful in getting through the awkward teenage years. But it is not as high on my list now as some others. This realization has been a valuable lesson for me to remember. The youth in my congregation might benefit more from one of my old favorites than from one of my

new ones. In selecting hymns, the pastor needs to be careful in using his own current favorites. In fact, it can be helpful to let members take turns making hymn suggestions which the pastor can then use and place in the service as appropriate.

C. Don't forget the children and the sight-impaired. How joyful for a young child to be able to join the "big people" in singing a hymn learned in Vacation Bible School or Sunday School. Likewise, for those who have sight or mental problems, it can be a joy for them to join in singing an old stand-by which they know from memory.

D. Use the bulletin or make an oral announcement to explain difficult terms (see goal 1). For example, what is a "harbinger" in TLH 213:5 or the "beatific vision" in TLH 605:3? Our members may not know that "harbinger" expresses these meanings: a) one in the military who went ahead of the army and scouted for food and lodging or b) a forerunner. If we consider the fifth stanza of TLH 213 ("Still for us He intercedes; His prevailing death He pleads, Near Himself prepares our place, Harbinger of human race"), we find that the concept of forerunner fits well, and so does the military meaning. He has gone on ahead of God's army of believers and has secured food and lodging for eternity, all part of preparing our place! The "beatific vision" of TLH 605:3 is a theological term for the blessed scene revealed in Revelation 5, truly something that "glads the saints."

E. Traditionally the *sermon hymn* comes before the sermon. Placing it after the sermon, however, has some benefit. It offers opportunity for a well-selected hymn to reinforce the thoughts of the sermon just preached. Such a hymn can make more of an impression on the worshipers after the Word on which it is based has been presented to them.

F. The pastor should keep track of the hymns he has chosen and used. This will help in preventing certain hymns from being overworked and will allow the opportunity to use a variety of hymns from all sections in the hymnal.

G. There are a number of books that can help with hymnology, but none are more practical to users of *The Lutheran Hymnal* than the *Concordance to The Lutheran Hymnal* and *The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal*. The benefits of the *Concordance* are obvious. It can help to locate that elusive hymn with a memorable phrase, and it can lead to appropriate hymn gems by enabling a search for a key word in the sermon text or theme. *The Handbook* can be of even greater benefit. In addition to providing the history of hymns and hymn-writers and giving background to tunes, it has these most helpful features:

- an index to the Bible references (the ones found in the top left of each hymn in TLH);
- a table of hymns for each Sunday of the church year;
- an index of subjects/topics (a sort of *Nave's Topical Bible* for the hymnal);
- an index of the first line of all stanzas.

As an aid in using the *Worship Supplement 2000*, we offer the listings below:

1) Antiphonal Psalms found in the *Worship Supplement*

- Ps. 2:1-4; 7-8 (Ascension): page 30
- Ps. 8:1-2; 3-5 (Epiphany/Transfiguration): p. 27
- Ps. 23:1-3; 4-6 (Redeemer): p. 36
- Ps. 24:1-2; 7-10 (Advent): p. 25
- Ps. 30:1-3; 4-5 (Praise): p. 34
- Ps. 38:1-4; 14-15,22 (Confession): p. 39
- Ps. 45:1-3; 6-7 (Trinity): p. 32
- Ps. 51:1-3; 7-9 (Lent): p. 28
- Ps. 51:10-12; 15-17 (Pentecost): p. 31
- Ps. 66:1-4; 5,8,9 (Evangelism): p. 37
- Ps. 84:1-2a, 8-9; 10-11 (Word of God): p. 38
- Ps. 85:1-3; 10-13 (Justification): p. 40
- Ps. 91:1-2,9-10; 11-12,15-16 (Reformation): p. 33
- Ps. 96:2,3,9; 11-13 (Christmas): p. 26
- Ps. 100:1-3; 4-5 (Praise): p. 35
- Ps. 118:21-23; 26-28 (Easter): p. 29
- Ps. 121:1-4; 5-8 (Morning/Evening): p. 42

2) Topical index of the hymns in the Supplement

Advent	701-705	Church	764-768
Christmas	706-715	Evangelism	769-773
New Year	716	Word of God	774-775
Epiphany	717-718	Justification	776-779
Transfiguration	719-720	Ministry	780-781
Lent	721-724	Trust	782-785
Palm Sunday	725	Consecration	786
Easter	726-736	Morning	787
Ascension	737-738	Stewardship	788-789
Pentecost	739-740	Marriage	790-791
Worship and Praise	741-748	Thanksgiving	792-793
Baptism	749-753	Christ's Return	794-795
Lord's Supper	754-755	Evening	796
Redeemer	756-763	Liturgy	797-800

The LORD God gave His very best—a perfect creation! Then, a perfect Savior when we ruined His creation and ourselves with sin. Finally, the promise of a perfect life in heaven for eternity. Certainly, we should do our very best in putting together a worship service, including the selection of hymns, for God's people.

Sing to the Lord a glorious song,
Sing to His name, His love forthtell;
Sing on, heaven's host, His praise prolong;
Sing, ye who now on earth do dwell:
Worthy the Lamb for sinners slain;
From angels praise and thanks from men;
Worthy the Lamb, enthroned to reign,
Glory and power! Amen, Amen (TLH 132:5).
