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Sermons to Seminarians

David Lau

Homiletics Sermon #3 (Fall 1998): Romans 7:18-25

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Dear friends in Christ:

When I was a seminary student and a young pastor, I tended to have the opinion that any religious problem or moral problem among Christians could be resolved quickly and easily by presenting what God's Word had to say about the matter. I had confidence in the power of God's Word to straighten out bad situations and resolve them in a God-pleasing way.

As I grew older, however, I observed that many problems do not appear to be resolved either quickly or easily, even when God's powerful Word is at work and faithfully applied. Many problems continue on and on, without much change for the better. Thus as we gain experience in dealing with the problems commonly confronted in the pastoral ministry, we tend to become cynical. We begin to lose confidence in the power of God's Word to effect beneficial changes. We may even expect nothing ever to improve, but rather to become worse as time goes on. Hence those who begin their careers as idealists tend to become skeptics as they get older and experience some frustrating outcomes to their diligent efforts.

Our text for today strikes a happy medium in the swing from idealism to cynicism. The apostle Paul reveals a reason why progress in the field of religion and morality can be so slow and so difficult. At the same time he does not want us to despair or give up hope because of this reason. He presents in our text some of **THE HARD REALITIES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**, while at the same time pointing out the **ULTIMATE RESOLUTION OF ALL PROBLEMS IN JESUS CHRIST**. May the Holy Spirit bless our study of these words and their application to our own spiritual lives and to our work as pastors.

1) The first hard reality that each Christian has to face is that ***every believer in Christ retains his sinful flesh***. Yes, God has called me out of

the darkness of unbelief into His marvelous light. I know that I have forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation in Jesus Christ. Because of what God has done for me and because of the work of the Spirit begun in me, I want to do that which is pleasing to God. I want to improve in every area of my life, but always, always, always my sinful flesh gets in the way. **Every Christian retains a sinful flesh**, even the apostle Paul, who said about himself: **"I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells."** Paul retained his sinful flesh, in which there was nothing good.

Many Bible students of this text have a hard time thinking that such a great man of God, such a zealous missionary as Paul, could have a sinful nature in which there is nothing good. So they claim that here the apostle Paul was talking about his early days, his spiritual state before he was a Christian. But that will not do, for the Bible teaches that those who are not believers, those who are in the flesh, cannot please God at all, nor do they even want to please Him. Paul, on the other hand, says: **"To will is present with me."** That is, he wants to do what pleases God. He even says of himself: **"I delight in the law of God according to the inward man."** Such words cannot be true about an unbeliever. No, Paul was describing his current life as a Christian. He had the Holy Spirit living in him. He had **"an inward man."** That is, he had the new man, who was in perfect agreement with God's will and desirous of pleasing Him in every way. He calls that inner new man his **"mind"** by which he serves the law of God.

Yet none of this changes the hard reality that he retained his sinful flesh. **"Evil is present with me,"** he says. He ruefully confesses that he serves the law of sin with his flesh. There was nothing good in that flesh of his. His flesh was capable of committing every sin there is, even as our sinful flesh is capable of committing every sin there is.

2) Because each of us retains such a sinful flesh of our own, another hard reality in our Christian life is the **huge gap between desire and performance**. This gap is caused by our sinful flesh getting in the way of what our new man wants to do. So Paul writes: **"To will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find."** I want to do good, he says. Yes, there is a part of me that truly delights in God's Word and God's will. This part of me wants to do everything just the way God wants it, and even to do so with the right attitude and motivation, namely out of love for Him who first loved us. But at the end of every day we have to admit that our performance fell short of our desires. **"I do what I will not to do."** Paul's experience becomes our reality, and his words become our confession: **"The good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice."** The reason for this gap between desire and performance is the sin that still dwells within every believer.

The apostle Peter certainly loved the Lord Jesus and wanted to be faithful to Him. He was determined to stick with Jesus, even if all the other disciples would forsake Him. But what actually happened? How did the performance match the desire? It did not match at all. Because of his sinful flesh Peter renounced his dear Lord three times in one night, even though Jesus had warned him in advance that Peter was going to do exactly that.

At the beginning of this school year you are no doubt resolving and

desiring to do many good things in connection with your seminary studies. So am I in connection with my work as your teacher. But at the end of the year we will have to admit that our actual performance did not measure up to our desires. There will be a gap, a huge gap, between the good desire of our Christian hearts and the actual performance of our daily lives.

3) This leads us to see a third hard reality taught by our text, namely that **there is a lifelong struggle between flesh and mind.** The apostle Paul certainly found that to be the case in his own life. **“I delight in the law of God according to the inward man, but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”** Paul was at war with himself. His mind, or the new man within him, wanted to do God’s will, but that other thing within him—the sin, the flesh within him—wanted to do evil and refused to do good. The flesh had to be forced to go along, for the flesh will never be converted.

It is good for us to be reminded of this hard reality. For there have always been those voices in Christendom who say that we can reach the state of perfection here on earth. They say that we may get to the point already now in this life when the struggle is over, and we have won the victory to the extent that we do not sin anymore.

The Scriptures, however, do not present such a picture of a Christian anywhere. The apostle John certainly says some strong words about Christians not making a practice of sinning, but he never claims that they do not sin at all. On the contrary, he warns: **“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”** Both John and Peter tell us that in Jesus there was no sin. He was perfect and pure in every way. He had no sinful flesh which held Him back. But all the rest of us are and remain sinners until the day we die. In this regard the apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians: **“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected, but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. . . . I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”** (Phil. 3:12, 14). As we press on towards the same goal as Paul, it seems that we sin more rather than less, because we also become more aware of our failings. We become frustrated and disappointed in ourselves as we keep repeating some of the same sins over and over again. And as this battle continues between flesh and spirit, we sometimes reach the point of saying with Paul: **“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”**

Thankfully, from that same apostle we also learn that **VICTORY IS POSSIBLE**, but **ONLY THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.** Paul asks, **“Who will deliver me from this body of death?”** Then he answers his own question: **“I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

God is the One who delivers us from this body of death, that is, from this body which is corrupted by sin and subject to death. The deliverance comes through Jesus Christ, and it comes through Him alone. Already many years ago on the cross, God gave all of our sins and their complete punishment to His Son Jesus Christ. **“He Himself bore our sins in His own**

body on the tree,” says Peter (1 Pet. 2:24). When God raised His Son from the dead, in that very act He announced to the world that the sins borne by His Son on the cross have been fully punished and removed from His sight. On that basis He tells us that in Jesus there is forgiveness for all our sins: for the sins we committed as unbelievers and for the sins we continue to commit as Christians.

Now what about the control and prevalence of sin in our daily lives? He tells us not only that these sins are forgiven, but also that they have lost their power over us. When we were baptized into Christ, we crucified our sinful flesh. Every day we continue to drown this sinful flesh of ours by recognizing our failings, admitting our guilt and running to Christ for forgiveness and strength. The Holy Spirit continues to work within us and give us the victory over the power of indwelling sin. As long as we trust in Christ, we continue to receive and possess that which we are given: the victorious realities that our sins are forgiven and that the power of sin is broken. Our sins don't have the strength to condemn us. The Holy Spirit even gives us the strength to say no to sin over and over again, for **“by the Spirit we put to death the deeds of the body”** (Rom. 8:13). By the Spirit we mortify the flesh. We use the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, to repel the temptations of Satan against us. We talk back to the devil; we laugh at him; we plunge God's Word as a sword into his back; and he retreats from us. We resist him, and he yields. And so we experience the truth that we sing in Luther's hymn: “One little word can fell him.”

Yet it is still true that we fall and we fail from time to time, as did Peter, John, Paul and all the rest of the prophets, apostles, martyrs and confessors down through the ages. That is also why we, as ministers of the Gospel, see failures occur over and over again among our members. We see them in ourselves as well. Whenever this happens, we need to crawl back into the cleft of the Rock of Ages. We need to return to Jesus, find forgiveness and strength in Him and resume the battle with His promise of victory.

Finally, the day will come when the battle will be over. Our Lord Jesus will return at the end of time, or He will end the length of our stay on earth. Then will come the moment we've all been waiting for, the moment when believers in Jesus will lose their sinful flesh forever and be set free to live out that glorious and perfect eternal life with our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, together with all believers in Him from all ages of the world. There will be no complaining or wretchedness then. There will be no imperfections of which to complain or repent. For it is written in the book of Revelation: **“There shall by no means enter it [the New Jerusalem] anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life”** (Rev. 21:27).

O Lord Jesus, when the time is right, take us from this vale of tears, frustrations and imperfections to Yourself in heaven, where we shall know as we are known, where we shall see You as You are, where we shall be like You, having white robes washed clean through Your blood, having no more hard realities of a sinful flesh to plague us. Amen.

Homiletics Sermon #4 (Fall 1999): Acts 21:40-22:22

So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to *them* in the Hebrew language, saying, "Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now." And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said: "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished. Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.' And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus. Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt *there*, came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him. Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.' Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.' So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'" And they listened to him until this word, and *then* they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a *fellow* from the earth, for he is not fit to live!"

Dear fellow Gentiles who are called to faith in the risen Christ:

Have you ever considered how Christianity changed from being a small Jewish "sect" (cf. Acts 24:5, 24:14, 28:22) to being a worldwide religion? Of course, it did not just happen that way by chance. It was God's plan from the beginning. When God chose Abraham to be the father of the Jewish nation, He said to him: **"In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** This promise was repeated throughout the Old Testament, particularly in the book of Psalms and the writings of the prophet Isaiah. Concerning the Jewish Messiah to come, the Lord said through Isaiah: **"It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth"** (Isa. 49:6).

What God planned from the beginning He began to carry out not long after Jesus ascended to heaven. Our text from the book of Acts shows God at work in the training and calling of **PAUL, GOD'S MISSIONARY TO THE GENTILES**. Since we too are Gentiles who have been brought into the flock, let us listen to the way Paul explains to the Jews at Jerusalem how he became God's chosen missionary to Gentile people. It was not his own idea; that is clear from this text and the history recorded in Acts. It was God's idea, so that Gentiles like you and me could hear the word of salvation, believe in Christ and be saved through Him. It was God's love for us that led Him to do with Paul what is written in this text.

Let us consider the life of Paul, God's Missionary to the Gentiles, according to the following sequence of events: first he was ***trained in strict Judaism according to the Law***, then ***converted by the risen Jesus Himself***, then ***baptized by a devout Christian Jew*** and finally ***directed specifically to go to the Gentiles with the Gospel***. Surely this was all part of God's plan, which He carried out because of His desire to bring Gentiles like us into His flock of believers.

First in the sequence of God's plan, we see how Paul was ***trained in strict Judaism according to the Law***. Our text is mainly Paul's explanation of his past, spoken to the Jews in Jerusalem on the stairway leading from the temple courtyard to the Fortress Antonia. The Roman commander had just arrested Paul because he saw the tumult in the courtyard and had thought at first that Paul was a certain Egyptian rebel currently on the most wanted list at that time. When the commander learned that Paul was a Jew, he gave him permission to speak to the crowd. And because Paul spoke in the Hebrew language, the Jews were inclined to give him their attention.

Paul began by telling them of his training in Judaism. **"I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished."**

At this point it may not readily occur to us that Paul was being trained

for Christian mission work to the Gentiles. But surely his training as a Jew under the guidance of Gamaliel was part of God's preparation for his future work. Christianity, after all, has a historical foundation on the promises God had given to the Jews. It was God's plan from the beginning to choose one people from whom the Savior would come, and then from that nation to spread the Gospel of salvation to the entire world. Certainly God's missionary would need to know the Old Testament with all of its laws and promises to God's covenant people. For the Old Testament was not intended to be just a Jewish book. It was a book for God's people in Old Testament times, but also for God's people at later times. We today need to know the Old Testament, so that we know who our God is and what He has done and said from the beginning. If Paul was going to bring a message from that God to Gentile people, he would have to be well acquainted with what God had said from the beginning to the Jews. Thus as a Jew from Tarsus, Paul received such training, not in Tarsus entirely, but mostly in Jerusalem, where the famous rabbi Gamaliel was Paul's teacher. In his letter to the Philippians Paul says more about this training as one who was **"circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless"** (Phil. 3:5).

Paul's persecution of the early Christians was in line with his training as a Pharisee. For he was convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was a fraud, and that His followers were idolaters who were leading people away from the true God of their fathers. Thus Paul believed that he was serving his God when he persecuted Christians before his conversion.

Then there came that fateful day when his life was changed completely, the day when he was ***converted by the risen Jesus Himself***. Paul describes it in these words: **"Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.' And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus."**

Certainly God could have converted Paul by a different method. He could have sent angels to appear to him and show him the truth. He could have had Peter, James and John bring the truth of the Gospel to him. But you see, God wanted Paul to be an apostle of Christ on the same level and with the same basic experience as all the other apostles. All the other apostles were eye- and ear-witnesses, having spent much time with the Lord Jesus in person, and above all, having been with Him after His resurrection, so that they could testify to all whom they met that they had seen and heard

the risen Lord Jesus with their own eyes and ears. God wanted Paul to be such an apostle, and therefore the risen Jesus Himself appeared to Paul and convinced him that Jesus' other apostles were not liars in their testimony about Him. No, they had told the truth when they said that Jesus was risen from the dead. For there He was, right before Paul's own eyes. There was no denying the truth of what he saw and heard on that road. What an amazing thing this must have been! **"Who are You, Lord?" "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting."** Paul had been hurting followers of Jesus, and now he was told that by so doing he was hurting and persecuting Jesus Himself, the Jewish Messiah and the exalted Son of God. From that moment Paul's life was turned around. The one who had hated the very name of Jesus so vehemently now knew who Jesus was, and as he said, he had no other course but to become an apostle of this Jesus and to spread His name everywhere.

However, it was first necessary that Paul join the company of Christians who lived in Damascus. He needed to become a confessing member of Christ's Church. He needed to have the Holy Spirit give him the washing of regeneration which Jesus had instituted for all His people. God chose to have a Jewish Christian in Damascus by the name of Ananias talk to Paul, heal him of his temporary blindness and administer to him the sacrament of baptism, thereby washing away his sins. Yes, in accord with God's plan and God's grace Paul was ***baptized by a devout Christian Jew.***

According to Paul's account this is the way it happened. **"Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him. Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'"**

It must have seemed strange to Paul to be called a "brother" by a Christian who knew very well that Paul had been the enemy of the Christians, that he had come to Damascus in order to persecute Christians, both men and women, and that he had the authorization to drag them off to Jerusalem for trial, torture and even death. But now Paul indeed was a Christian, and so Ananias truly was his spiritual brother. Now as a new believer in Christ, Paul also had to rethink his whole theology, and that is probably what he did during the time he spent in Arabia, of which the Bible says nothing except that he was in Arabia for some time before returning to Damascus (cf. Gal. 1:15-17). This too was part of God's plan for the training of His missionary to the Gentiles.

At this point in his speech to the crowd, Paul jumped ahead a few years and took his audience to a time when he arrived in Jerusalem after his conversion and thought that he, now a Christian, should testify to his Jewish kinsmen concerning Jesus Christ. To Paul it seemed only right that he, once a Pharisee who had zealously persecuted Christians, should now preach the

Gospel to his fellow Jews. Surely he was the ideal man to do this, for he could speak to them as a Jew who had formerly been an opponent of Christianity and a persecutor of Christians. But this idea was not part of God's plan. The Lord had other plans for Paul, and on this visit to Jerusalem He told Paul what those plans would be. Let us listen in and hear how Paul was ***directed specifically to go to the Gentiles with the Gospel.***

This actually happened some time after his baptism by Ananias. Paul says: **"Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.' So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'"**

Paul did not want to leave Jerusalem at first. He wanted to stay right there and testify to his former Jewish allies. Certainly they would listen to someone who had been one of them and who had such experiences as Paul had. But God did not agree. Yes, Paul would preach the Gospel to many Jews in the course of his journeys and his labors, but his main service to the Lord would be in bringing the Gospel to many Gentile people around the Roman Empire. This was God's plan, His plan from eternity, we might add, for God wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

How did Christianity change from being a small sect of Jewish followers to its current state as a worldwide religion? Right here is a major portion of the answer. God chose, prepared and called Paul to be His missionary to the Gentiles. Paul's whole life was in God's hands, and everything that had happened to him was part of God preparing him for this ministry. Paul even notes God's hand on him before he was born: **"It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles"** (Gal. 1:15-16). In fulfillment of the Lord's will Paul went on his mission journeys, and soon Christianity was no longer confined to Jewish settlements. Soon the Jewish Christians were outnumbered by the Gentile or non-Jewish Christians, and thus it has continued to this very day.

Sad to say, many Jews could not understand this, and even some of the Christian Jews had trouble accepting New Testament Christianity as a religion for non-Jewish people. We see the Jewish lack of understanding and acceptance illustrated by the last verse of our text, where we read that after Paul said God was sending him to the Gentiles, the crowd of Jews got very excited. **And they listened to him until this word** [that is, the word "Gentiles"], **and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live."** Why was he not fit to live in their judgment? Not so much that he was telling Jews about Jesus of Nazareth, but because he claimed to be sent by God to the hated and despised Gentiles, and he was offering to these despised Gentiles the privilege of joining Christian Jews in the family of God, as people saved by

God—though not in obedience to Jewish laws— but simply by faith in Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, who was indeed the Savior of the whole world. This the Jewish leaders could not tolerate, and you know how they tried to kill Paul from that day forward, but did not succeed. God wanted Paul to preach the Good News of Jesus in Rome, the center of the Gentile world, just as that Good News had been proclaimed in Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish world.

Now this is where we come in. God had us in mind when He prepared Paul for his life's work. God had us in mind when by inspiration He had Paul pen the revelation of Christ that we now read in the New Testament epistles. These were steps God used to make us part of His worldwide Church, His flock made up of people from the Jewish fold and the Gentile fold, that is, believers trusting the same Gospel and worshiping the same Savior, who is in fact the only Savior of all people.

Let's go a step further and begin to see ourselves also as persons whom God has chosen, not to be apostles of Jesus as Paul was, but to be Gentile messengers of Christ who bring the Gospel of Christ to other Gentiles, and perhaps to Jewish people as well. Our whole lives up to this point have been training grounds in the Lord's hands, and our education is now continuing as we study God's Word together. What a joy it shall be for us to be part of God's worldwide mission effort, in continuation of what God has started through the apostles! As Paul was **God's Missionary to the Gentiles**, so may we at least be ambassadors of Christ to Gentiles of many kinds, races and nations. We rejoice in His plan and look forward to His direction and His blessing in our training under His Word. Amen.

Exegesis: Isaiah 49:1-13

Paul D. Nolting

Historic Introduction

Often considered the "prince of prophets,"¹ Isaiah lived and served the LORD during the latter half of the eighth century BC and the first quarter of the seventh century BC. He spoke of having served during the reigns of four kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (cf. Isa. 1:1). However, his ministry probably began in the last year of Uzziah, given the date cited as the time of his calling (cf. Isa. 6:1), and it probably extended into the reign of Hezekiah's son Manasseh, seeing that he recorded the death of the

Assyrian king Sennacherib (cf. Isa. 37:38), which occurred five years after Hezekiah's death.² Isaiah, therefore, served in the prophetic ministry for approximately sixty years, spanning a time from 740-680 BC, and he was probably the longest serving of all the Old Testament prophets.

We are told that Isaiah was "the son of Amoz" (cf. Isa. 1:1), a man whom Jewish tradition has identified as the brother of King Amaziah, the father of Uzziah. If indeed true, the blood ties to the Jewish royal family would have made Isaiah the cousin of kings. This would explain in part Isaiah's seemingly easy access to the royal court, as well as provide some insight into Isaiah's education. Isaiah's understanding of the geo-politics of the time, as well as his excellent literary style, suggest a high level of education and a broad level of experience, which in his day would have been limited to the elite within society. Isaiah was married to a "prophetess" (cf. Isa. 8:3) and had two sons, Shear-Jashub (Isa. 7:3) and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (Isa. 8:1-4).

Isaiah lived during a period of great changes, both political and religious, which occurred in Judah. Although at one point in his reign king Uzziah had usurped the authority of God's priests and was judged by God with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16-21), he was by and large faithful to the LORD and blessed by Him. The territory under Judah's control expanded during his reign, and the land experienced a great increase of material prosperity. His son Jotham likewise served the LORD and was blessed. Ahaz, however, rejected the LORD and served Baal. He allied himself with the Assyrians and found himself troubled by his neighbors, Israel and Syria. He caused great problems for Judah, misleading her people into the worship of false gods and losing control of Edom and consequently the southern trade routes which passed through that land. His son Hezekiah returned Judah to a proper worship of the LORD, cut political ties with Assyria and was blessed by the LORD in return. Yet he reigned during perilous times, as Assyria invaded Judah and threatened her very existence. The LORD, however, rescued His faithful servant Hezekiah, sending His angel of death to destroy Sennacherib's entire army (2 Kings 19:35-37). Unfortunately, Hezekiah's son Manasseh followed in the footsteps not of his father, but of his grandfather by returning Judah to the worship of false gods, which ultimately led to the judgment of the people and the destruction of both the city of Jerusalem and the temple of Solomon. Tradition suggests that Isaiah was among those individuals faithful to the LORD who were eliminated by Manasseh, as he sought to bring both the political and religious life of Judah under his control.

Literary Introduction

The Book of Isaiah is among the most significant of the Old Testament in view of its great number of Messianic prophecies and its frequency of quotation in the New Testament. Its theme can easily be summed up by the meaning of Isaiah's own name: "The LORD is salvation!" The book is divided into two major sections. Part I includes the first thirty-nine chapters and focuses largely on the law. It depicts the sin of Judah and the neighboring nations, together with their divinely appointed judgment if they failed to

repent. Part II includes the final twenty-seven chapters and focuses largely on the gospel. It expresses words of comfort to the believing remnant and detailed prophecies concerning the promised Messiah. It is important for the proper understanding of Isaiah to recognize that the prophet "is preaching to an incurably hardened people and to a preserved remnant. It is his mission to harden the incurable ones through his preaching and, also through his preaching, to preserve the remnant."³

Part II of the book can be further divided into three sections of nine chapters each. In the first nine chapters Isaiah clearly identifies the LORD (Jehovah) as the one true God and Redeemer of the remnant. He announces the coming judgment of the Babylonian Captivity, while identifying the LORD's "Anointed, Cyrus" (Isa. 44:28-45:1) as the one through whom He would deliver Judah from bondage and return them to the Promised Land. The second group of nine chapters, begun by the verses under consideration in this article, puts the focus on the LORD's "Servant," the promised Savior. It speaks of His mission, His methods and the proclamation of His message of deliverance. This section of Isaiah can arguably be considered the heart of the entire book. It contains the very famous fifty-third chapter, which addresses the substitutionary nature of God's plan of atonement, as well as the lesser known prophecies, including the one in our text which addresses the universal nature and extent of God's salvation plan. The final group of nine chapters addresses the future restoration of Jerusalem, which prefigures God's New Testament Church and the ultimate glories of heaven.

Translation and Exposition of Isaiah 49:1-13

In Isaiah 40-48 the LORD God comforted His believing remnant with the certain truth that He alone as the one true God is their "Creator" who "neither faints nor is weary" (40:28) and their "Redeemer" who "blots out" their sins for His own sake (43:14, 25). He urged them to "look to Me, and be saved" and extended that invitation to the "ends of the earth" (45:22). To those who still hesitated or were contemplating resistance, He stated emphatically: "Listen to Me, you stubborn-hearted, who are far from righteousness; I bring My righteousness near, it shall not be far off; My salvation shall not linger. And I will place salvation in Zion, for Israel My glory" (46:12-13).

What is the source of the righteousness the LORD God intended to bring near? How and by whom would His salvation be accomplished? In the final verses of Isaiah 48 the LORD introduced the One whose "gift of righteousness," as we learn from the New Testament, would result in "justification of life" for all who believe (Rom. 5:17-18). In Isaiah 48:16 we recognize this One as speaking for Himself in the first person and also as distinct from Jehovah (the Father) and from the Spirit of Jehovah: "The Lord GOD and His Spirit have sent Me." Who is this One whom Jehovah would send? In our text in chapter 49 the LORD has identified Him as "My Servant" and has proclaimed the universal nature of the salvation Jesus Christ would bring.

Verse 1: Listen to Me, coastlands! Pay attention, nations from afar!

**Jehovah has called Me from the womb; from the belly of My mother
He has caused My name to be remembered.**

Speaking, as it were, from the temple heights of Mount Zion, Jesus commands the people near as well as the nations from afar to listen. The reference to the *coastlands* would have referred to the populated areas along the Mediterranean Sea, the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, all of which surrounded and were in close proximity to Jerusalem. The *nations from afar* included all other nations of the earth, but the listeners of Isaiah's day would undoubtedly have called to mind the great nations at that time: Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Chaldea and perhaps even the city-states of ancient Greece.

Jesus proclaims that His heavenly Father's plan for mankind's salvation would require His incarnation. The Son of God would become man, "*called from the womb, from the belly of (His) mother.*" Some suggest that *My Servant* (identified as such in verses 3 and 6) refers here to Israel as a whole, but the wording does not permit it.⁴ The reference made—not just to *the womb*, but also to the Servant's proceeding *from the belly of (His) mother*—demands the understanding of a single person, especially given the earlier prophecies of Isaiah. Remember Isaiah's pronouncement to unbelieving Ahaz: "*The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel*" (7:14). And his general announcement: "*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and from that time forward, even forever*" (9:6-7).

That same heavenly Father would and did "*cause (His) name to be remembered.*" The verb זָכַר suggests the idea of bringing something or someone to mind with a purpose⁵ (cf. Gen. 8:1). God the Father causes Jesus' name to be proclaimed and remembered, for as the apostle Peter states: "*There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12). The purpose of proclaiming His name is salvation, as the remaining verses of this section testify. But the purpose is also glorification, as the apostle Paul testifies: "*God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Phil. 2:9-11).

Verse 2: He has made My mouth as a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me and made Me as an arrow sharpened to a point, hidden in His quiver.

From very early on Jesus was identified in prophecy as the LORD's Prophet. Moses had told the people before his death: "*The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren.*"

Him you shall hear.... I will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him" (Deut. 18:15, 18b-19). In John's Gospel Jesus is identified as God's "Word" (John 1:1-3), and in his first epistle Jesus is identified as "*the Word of life*" (1 John 1:1). Jesus announced to His followers: "*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (John 8:31-32).

With the scope of His ministry in mind, we hear Jesus declare that His Father has set His "*mouth*" to be like a "*sharp sword.*" A sword is used both to defend and to contend. Jesus, who instructed Peter to "*put your sword in its place*" (Matt. 26:52), certainly used His word as a weapon both to defend and contend for the truth. His purpose was to bring His Father's word to a world that desperately needed it in spite of the fact that many would reject it. Consequently, on the night before His death He declared in His high priestly prayer as a summary of His ministry: "*I have given them Your word*" (John 17:14). It is not surprising then that several New Testament writers likewise use the analogy of God's word as a sword: "*The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*" (Heb. 4:12). "*And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*" (Eph. 6:17).

The observations of Pieper in his commentary *Isaiah II* are helpful: "The two clauses: 'In the shadow of His hand He hid Me' (as a sword), and 'hid Me in His quiver' (as an arrow) are poetic turns of speech which say that the Servant does not come on His own account, does not stand alone and independent, but is an instrument in the hand of His God, who chose Him and equipped Him to be an instrument which He carefully preserves for use at His chosen time, the day of salvation" (p. 353). These truths were consistently embraced by Jesus during His ministry as He repeatedly insisted that He had not come of His own accord, but rather had been sent by the Father to fulfill His good and gracious will: "*I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*" (John 6:38); "*I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true*" (John 7:28); "*I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me*" (John 8:16).

Verse 3: And He said to Me, "You are My servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified!"

Man through sin dishonors God and detracts from His glory. Jesus, whom Jehovah identifies as "*My Servant,*"⁶ would through His work of service glorify God and enable man once again to praise Him rightly. When hearing these prophetic words, one thinks of Jesus' earthly ministry, during which upon several occasions the Father spoke directly concerning His Son. At the time of His baptism He declared, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" (Matt. 3:17), and at the time of His transfiguration He once again stated, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,*" with the added directive "*Hear Him*" (Matt. 17:5). One also thinks of Jesus' own

understanding of His work of redemption. As the end of His earthly ministry approached, Jesus spoke to His disciples of His upcoming death in this way: *"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name."* Then a voice came from heaven, saying, *"I have both glorified it and will glorify it again"* (John 12:27-28). On Maundy Thursday night Jesus began His high priestly prayer with this thought: *"Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You"* (John 17:1).

God in eternity chose to save mankind in connection with Jesus Christ. This act of grace would also redound to God's glory, as Paul points out in his amazing hymn of praise in Ephesians: *"He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved"* (Eph. 1: 4-6).

In bearing witness to this same truth, the apostle John points to a time when God will be properly glorified and gives us a glimpse of the heavenly scene where all creatures will declare, *"Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!"* (Rev. 5:13).

Verse 4: Then I said, "I have labored in vain! For nothing and in vanity I have consumed My strength! Surely My just judgment is with Jehovah, and My reward with My God!"

Think of Jesus standing on the Tuesday of Holy Week, overlooking Jerusalem and the temple from the vantage point of the Mount of Olives. He had preached the word flawlessly and with authority (cf. Matt. 7:29). In confirmation of the words He had preached, He had performed miracles: healing the blind, causing the lame to walk, cleansing the lepers and even raising the dead. Still the vast majority of the people did not listen and would not believe. They complained of His *"hard sayings,"* and after a time when He refused to become their bread-king, they *"walked with Him no more"* (John 6:60, 66). Sorrowfully Jesus lamented: *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing"* (Matt. 23:37). As Jesus watched Judas and the crowd of soldiers approach Him on the Mount of Olives, as Jesus listened to the false accusations before Annas and Caiaphas, as Jesus endured the spitting and scourging at the hands of ruthless Roman soldiers, as Jesus prayed for ridiculing religious rulers and condemned criminals while hanging on the cross, He may well have been tempted to question whether or not He had spent His strength in vain. Here and only here would creation condemn and crucify its Creator!

Yet Jesus did not despair, for He was, after all, in the hands of His heavenly Father, the God of grace and goodness, the God of power and providence. He could and did commit the just judgment of His work of redemption to the Father, to Jehovah, and He died with the knowledge that

He would receive His due reward.⁷ Isaiah would later express very clearly the substance of Jesus' confidence. He would write: *"It pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief.... He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death"* (Isa. 53:10a, 11-12a). The apostle Paul recognized the just judgment of God revealed by the resurrection of Christ. He wrote in Romans: Jesus *"was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification"* (Rom. 4:25). In addition, he reveals Jesus' reward when addressing the Philippians: Jesus *"became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Phil. 2:8b-11).

Verse 5: And now says Jehovah, who formed Me in the womb to be His Servant—to bring back Jacob to Him and that Israel be gathered to Him (I will be honored in the eyes of Jehovah, and My God will be My strength);

In verse 5 Isaiah presents the Servant of Jehovah as returning to and repeating certain thoughts, but this is done to reemphasize and expand our understanding of the purpose for the coming Savior. Jehovah indeed formed Jesus in the womb of the virgin Mary to be *"His Servant,"* but it was for a specific purpose and with a sure end. He was *"to bring back Jacob to Him"* and to make it certain that *"Israel be gathered to Him."* God's plans and God's purposes will always and inevitably prevail. Of this we can always be certain! Therefore we need not ever fear. We can revel in the words of our Savior God who assures us, *"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand"* (Isa. 41:10).

As a parenthetical remark Jesus, who in the previous verse committed both His just judgment and reward to His heavenly Father, states most assuredly that He will be *"honored in the eyes of Jehovah"* and that His source of strength will be His God. Think of the picture provided in Revelation, that of the Lamb of God stepping forward to receive the scroll and to open the seals. We are told that all the inhabitants of heaven cried out, *"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing"* (5:12). And then joining with them all of the creatures on the earth were to shout out, *"Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!"* (5:13)

Verse 6: Therefore He says, "It is too insignificant for You to be My Servant just to cause the tribes of Jacob to arise and to cause the preserved of Israel to return. I will give You as a light to the Gentiles

to be My Salvation to the ends of the earth.

Note, first of all, that "the Servant of the Lord is ordained...to serve the chosen people of God. That is repeatedly emphasized in the New Testament; Jesus is the Savior of the Jews, Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:68f; 2:34; Acts 2:39; 3:26; 13:26, 46, 47; Romans 1:16, etc., etc. The Lord even speaks as though He had been sent exclusively for the Jews, Matthew 15:24. The reason for that is to be found in the special election and promise given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their seed, Romans 15:8ff, a promise of which the gentiles could not boast."⁸

Nevertheless, God's plans for the redemptive work of Jesus always have been and always will be much greater and more involved than the salvation of a single people. God told Abraham, "*In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*" (Gen. 12:3). Yes, God intended to save the Jews, His Old Testament people, but His promised Savior was to be a light also to the Gentiles. Later Isaiah would herald the announcement: "*Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising*" (Isa. 60:1-3). Jesus, identified in this last passage with Jehovah Himself, would declare, "*I am the Light,*" but not just of Palestine, or just of those portions of the world occupied by people of Jewish descent. Rather He would boldly declare, "*I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life*" (John 8:12).

As that Light in the midst of the darkness of sin, Jesus holds the only hope for the salvation of mankind. That is why His great commission is indeed "great!" "*Make disciples of all nations*" (Matt. 28:19), He said. "*Preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15). "*Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations*" (Luke 24:47). "*You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8). This was God's intention from eternity, and it is to be our vocation until we enter eternity!

Verse 7: So says Jehovah—the Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One—to Him who is despised by men, to Him who is abhorred by the nation, to the Servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and rise up and princes shall do homage, because of Jehovah who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, and He has chosen You."

What a precious name for God is the word *Redeemer*! Based upon the root לָקַח, it carries such a rich denotation of meaning from Old Testament history and within Old Testament theology. As noted in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, the root idea was expressed in four basic situations which applied to what a faithful man would do for his kinsman. First, it was used with reference to the buying back of land or of personal freedom for a kinsman, if either would have been sold in time of need. Secondly, it referred to the "redemption" or buying back of property or

certain animals dedicated to the Lord. It was used also of the "avenger of blood," that family member entrusted with bringing justice to a murderer. Finally, it referred to what Isaiah records here: God as Israel's "Redeemer," the One who would "stand up for His people and vindicate them." There appears to be a connotation of "ownership in the use of this word," and often a ransom is mentioned in connection with the rescue of God's people.⁹ Consider these words of Jehovah, recorded earlier by Isaiah:

Thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place" (Isa. 43:1-3).

The ideas of ownership and ransom are deeply embedded in New Testament redemption theology as well. Jesus proclaimed: "*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*" (Matt. 20:28). The apostle Paul alludes to that thought in his first letter to Timothy, when describing the wondrous position of Jesus: "*There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all*" (1 Tim. 2:5-6). He also applies that thought in his discussion of our sanctification: "*You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's*" (1 Cor. 6:20).

In Isaiah 49:7 we see the two extremes of man's view of Jesus. He is the One who is "*despised*" and "*abhorred*," but also the One before whom "*princes shall do homage*." Isaiah speaks of this seeming contradiction later when he writes: "*Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high ...He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him*" (52:13; 53:3). Throughout history we see evidence of the same. Roman emperors, such as Nero, bitterly opposed the cross, while others, such as Constantine, embraced it. Pious kings, such as Louis IX of France or Frederick the Wise of Saxony, would serve with faithfulness, while religious figures, such as Julius II and Leo X, used religion to pursue their own ungodly ends.¹⁰

Note that the reverence of men to God is entirely the result of God's faithfulness to us! God chose Christ to serve as our Redeemer. In connection with the redemption carried out by Christ, He chose us already in eternity and effected our conversion through His Spirit (cf. Eph. 1:3-14; 1 Cor. 12:3; Tit. 3:4-7). It is God who draws men to Christ (John 6:44). It is Jesus who can say concerning each of us: "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain*" (John 15:16). We thank God for being our faithful and holy God, our righteous and merciful Redeemer!

Verse 8: Thus says Jehovah, "In the acceptable time I will answer You, and in the day of salvation I will help You; and I will preserve

You and give You as a covenant to the people to restore the land, to give them a desolate inheritance.”

In this verse in particular and continuing through the second half of the text under consideration, it is important to remember the historical context in which these words were originally written. Isaiah had warned a rebellious people that Jehovah God would cause them to be taken into captivity, but he also conveyed the Lord's promise of ultimately bringing them back home to their promised land. Thus the prophecy in this section would have both an immediate and an ultimate fulfillment. God is promising His believing remnant that they will return from captivity and one day receive back again what they would have lost during the Babylonian Captivity. At the same time, the ultimate and most important fulfillment was to be found in the promised Savior and the advent of His kingdom.

In connection with this latter thought Pieper writes: "The restitution of land and inheritance figuratively represents the restoration to the chosen ones of Israel of their spiritual inheritance in the kingdom of God covenanted to them in the blessing of Abraham. Consequently, the believers among the gentiles, also counted as being of the seed of Abraham, belong to this people ('*ām*), and the promise also applies to them, since they are 'fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God' (Eph. 2:19). And the Servant of the Lord is the Son, who will open the kingdom of heaven to whomsoever He will, Matthew 11:27ff."¹¹

The concept of Jesus being a "new covenant" with God's people is one of the themes treated especially by the writer to the Hebrews. It was his purpose to convince wavering Jewish Christians not to give up their faith in order to avoid persecution, but rather to cling to their Savior Jesus Christ. After all, Jesus is, the writer says, a "*Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises*" (Heb. 8:6). The "old covenant" of the Mosaic Law, while familiar, was completely ineffective in matters of salvation. It could and did command; it could and always did condemn; but it could not save! Only Jesus could restore to them and provide for them entrance into the true promised land. Only Jesus could take what might appear to be barren and provide through the shedding of His blood an everlasting inheritance (cf. Heb. 13:20).

Verse 9: "To say to the prisoners, 'Go forth,' to those in darkness, 'Be revealed!' Upon the roads they shall feed and upon all the hillside pastures."

Jehovah continues speaking to His Son in this verse, further explaining His plan and intended purpose for His servant to be *a covenant to the people*. He is to free the prisoners of Satan, sin, death and hell. He is to provide spiritual light for those crippled by spiritual darkness. He is to lead the lambs of God into the pleasant pastures of truth and life. Later Isaiah would return to this thought and record the words of Jesus Himself, who repeats the Father's will for His gospel ministry: "*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He*

has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (Isa. 61:1-2a).

This same statement Jesus again repeated in the synagogue of His hometown as a summary of His gospel ministry and as fulfillment of this Messianic prophecy (cf. Luke 4:18-22). It was also to this prophecy that Jesus referred in Luke 7:22-23, when speaking to the two disciples from John the Baptizer and encouraging them to return to John with the evidence of His divine nature and calling.

It was Jesus who, upon His Father's urging, claimed the name and declared Himself to be "*the Good Shepherd*," the One who would lead His sheep, providing them with the good pasture of His word and also bestowing upon them the gift of everlasting life (cf. John 10:11, 27-28). What sweet messages of comfort Jesus was to bring!

Verse 10: They will not hunger, and neither will they thirst. The heat and the sun will not strike them, for the One who has mercy upon them will lead them to springs of flowing water.

This verse calls to mind what Jesus said: "*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die" (John 6:47-50).* To those who ask He also promised to give "*living water*," which "*will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (cf. John 4:10, 14).* In a society that seldom suffers hunger and in a land where thirst can be quenched at the nearest and seemingly omnipresent beverage machine, the idea of prevalent hunger and thirst may seem unreal. But in ancient times and in desert regions hunger and thirst were both very real and oftentimes deadly. Yet to those who face such physical conditions and to those who don't, Jesus' gospel message has provided the only nourishment for souls that would otherwise starve in spiritual death!

The next clause of verse 10, "*The heat and the sun will not strike them*," reminds one of the words of the Psalmist: "*The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night" (Ps. 121:5-6).* Again an understanding of ancient Near East geography can help one better appreciate the thought here expressed. The desert heat could easily overwhelm the unprepared traveler. The truths of Jesus, on the other hand, always shine brightly, but they never burn those who receive them by faith. In confident expectation they instead look forward to the streams of living water awaiting them in heaven, where Jesus fulfills His promise: "*I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son" (Rev. 21:6-7).*

Verse 11: And I will make all of My mountains into a road, and My highways will be raised.

Think again in terms of the remnant in Isaiah's day, who ultimately would travel from Babylon to Palestine. Travel in those days was a difficult endeavor, to be sure, especially in comparison to what is available to travelers today. There were few decent roads and no highways in any modern sense. Most travel was done by camel, horseback or on foot over rough and uneven country. High mountains and deep valleys were the bane of travelers in ancient times. Against this cultural backdrop we have the promise of Jesus to level things off, to cut down the mountains and raise up the valleys, and so provide the road of Jehovah for His people to travel. Regarding the last word in the verse (יָרֻמֶן), Pieper makes the following observation: "The final *Nun*, as in *yerumān*, usually expresses marked emphasis. The Lord makes the road passable for His people who are returning home, in fact, fills the whole world with smooth highways, because His people who have been freed shall return home from all corners of the world."¹²

One can hardly read these words without thinking of John the Baptizer, the one commissioned by the LORD to prepare the way for Jesus. Isaiah earlier spoke prophetically of John and his work in words later quoted by the evangelist Mark, as he opened his Gospel and announced both Jesus' and John's coming (cf. Mark 1:1-4): "*Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth*" (Isa. 40:3-4). Hearts are prepared for the coming of Jesus through simple repentance. The apostle John addresses this reality in his first epistle: "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:8-9).

Verse 12: Behold, these shall come from afar, and behold, these from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinim.

The LORD here speaks of those comprising the New Testament Church, using descriptions that have parallels in the New Testament Scriptures. While marveling over the faith of the centurion whose servant He would soon heal, Jesus said, "*I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 8:11). Speaking to the Gentile Christians of Ephesus, Paul stated, "*In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation*" (Eph. 2:13-14). The apostle John, as we learn in the Revelation, was granted a vision of heaven's court, where he beheld "*a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'*" (Rev. 7:9-10)

What a glorious and encouraging thought, that all believers—those we

can claim as spiritual brothers at this time and those we cannot—will come to hear and to rejoice and to dwell in the presence of our Savior Jesus, His Father and the Holy Spirit!

Verse 13: Shout for joy, O heavens, and dance for joy, O earth! Break out with a joyous cry, O mountains, for Jehovah has comforted His people and will behold the afflicted with the tenderest affection.

The prophecy ends with a celebratory and glorious conclusion. Isaiah invites and exhorts the heavens, the earth and the mountains to join in joyous celebration of God’s universal plan of salvation. Privileged to have been in this prophecy the mouthpiece of both Jehovah and His Servant Jesus, Isaiah provides the reason for such confident joy as Jehovah Himself! He has always comforted His people, and in His grace He will continue to do so.¹³

On that basis we too have good reason to join the celebration now in prayers and hymns of praise, calling to mind and expressing the same thoughts as those of the Herbert Brokering hymn found in our *Worship Supplement* (747:1):

Earth and all stars! Loud rushing planets!
Sing to the Lord a new song!
Oh, victory! Loud shouting army!
Sing to the Lord a new song!
He has done marvelous things.
I, too, will praise Him with a new song!

Endnotes

¹ Wood 297.

² Walton, in his *Chronological Charts of the Old Testament* (56-57), suggests the following dates for the kings cited: Uzziah (790-740 BC), Jotham (750-731 BC), Ahaz (735-715 BC), Hezekiah (715-686 BC) and Manasseh (695-642 BC).

³ Pieper 30.

⁴ Pieper: “It is just this *’immī* [אִמִּי] that is very important. It precludes all possibility of viewing the speaker as a personified collective noun or the people of Israel, as the Jews and the unbelieving interpreters explain the phrase. *mibbeten*, [מִבֶּטֶן] understood figuratively, would permit that interpretation, but the next phrase, ‘from the womb of My mother,’ certainly does not. Only an individual speaks like that. *hizkār shemī* [הִזְכִּיר שְׁמִי] means literally ‘He brought My name to mind’” (352).

⁵ Recognizing the verb form as Hiphil, we consider the observations of Pieper on הִזְכִּיר: “It is a meaningful strengthening of the thought expressed by *qerā’ānī*, and it says that He named My name with a purpose, designated Me, appointed Me a name.... Everywhere this Hiphil of *zākhar* goes back to the meaning of ‘to recall to mind, to bring to attention.’ These words strongly suggest Luke 2:21 (1:31), although there is no direct reference here to the name of Jesus” (352). Cf. also the input of the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*: “The Hiphil of *zākar* is generally translated in two ways: 1) to ‘mention,’ ‘invoke,’ or ‘declare’ and 2) ‘to cause to remember,’ i.e. the causative of ‘to remember.’ For the first group of meanings, the Hiphil designates the audible invoking of God’s name. . . . It refers to the ritual of invoking of the names of false deities. . . . In Isa. 49:1, the contextual parallel, ‘called,’ indicates that audible mentioning

is related to 'named my name.' Audible mention of the ark led to Eli's death (I Sam 4:18). Official proclaiming may be thus designated" (1:242).

⁶ Pieper explains that "My servant" is used in three different ways in the latter chapters of Isaiah: 1) as faithful Israel, 2) as the Promised Messiah and 3) in reference to unfaithful Israel. Concerning the second use he says in his commentary, pertaining to his exegesis of Isaiah 42:1: "The second appears again in 49:3,5; 50:4,10; 52:13ff.; 53:11; 55:4; 61:1ff. Who is this? Already the Aramaic Targum translates the opening words of this chapter as 'Behold, My Servant, the Messiah.' The LXX adds 'Jacob' to the first clause and 'Israel' to the second. In this and the other passages the New Testament recognizes the Christ: Matthew 12:18 (differing from the LXX); Luke 4:18ff, referring to Isaiah 61:1; cf. Matthew 8:17; Mark 9:12; 15:28; Luke 2:32; 22:27; John 12:38; Acts 8:30ff.; 13:47; Romans 10:16; 15:21; 1 Peter 2:22; Revelation 1:16. The later naturalistic and unbelieving commentators, in agreement with the Jewish-Rabbinic exegetes, explain these passages as referring only to the people of Israel.... For all Christian exegetes the Messianic interpretation is *a priori* the correct one because of the precedent set by the New Testament writers" (176-177).

⁷ According to Girdlestone's *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, the word מִשְׁפָּט "signifies the due administration of judgment" (101). In contrast, the word פְּעֻלָּה refers to one's *work* or *occupation* and then by extension to the *wages* one receives for work.

⁸ Pieper 358-359.

⁹ Harris 1:144.

¹⁰ For an interesting discussion of the lack of piety among the pre-Reformation popes, see either Schwiebert's *Luther and His Times* (9-31) or Durant's *The Story of Civilization V—The Renaissance* (441-477).

¹¹ Pieper 366-67.

¹² Pieper 368.

¹³ Pieper observes: "Whereas the perfect *niham* expresses an accomplished fact that has now become a fixed situation, the imperfect in *yerahēm* designates an act beginning in the present, continuing in the future, endlessly repeated" (370).

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The Son of Man as Preacher Interacting with His Congregation

William Henkel

* The concluding portion of "Der Menschensohn als Prediger im Umgang mit seiner Gemeinde—Fortsetzung" (*Theologische Quartalschrift*, 22:3, July 1925, pp. 193-201) is here offered with the same conventions employed previously in this series. One may consult the December 2006 issue, pages 14-15 for further explanation and also pages 24-25 for a review of the author's assertions which serve as the immediate basis for the following application made to preachers.¹

This goes to prove that we should not preach dogmatically. By dogmatic preaching we do not here understand doctrinal preaching per se, but preaching which draws its material from dogmatics and not directly from Scripture, that is, from the text. However, such preaching leans on the text only while explaining statements drawn from dogmatics. Whoever preaches in this way does not preach ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ in the fullest sense of the word. In objection some might state that our fathers, for the most part, preached dogmatically and accomplished great things with their preaching. Why should a dogmatic Lutheran sermon not be authoritative? The statements which they explain are truly drawn from scripturally sound dogmatics, and therefore these statements are divine truth. Certainly, but still divine truth in human dress.

If I preach on statements from Lutheran dogmatics, I present the truths of Scripture which these statements contain according to my interpretation of the interpretation of competent dogmaticians. After the waters of Scripture have been drawn in this way into two different vessels, they have not only lost some of their original freshness and good flavor, but because the vessel of human reason is always more or less impure, it is not to be discounted that the dogmatician has unconsciously given a coloring to the truth of Scripture, which it did not originally have, even though we can hardly detect it. Similarly, his words may trigger ideas in my mind [See/e] which do not altogether correspond to his own. No way of speaking has yet been found which reproduces the ideas in the mind of one person with absolute exactness in the mind of another. How much more authoritatively do I speak then, when I paint the picture of God and divine things, a picture which Scripture has planted in my soul, before the eyes of my hearers than when I repeat a copy of the original, as dogmatics presents it. How much more will my hearers prefer to drink the water of life, and how much more certain they will be that it is the water of life, if I draw it from the fountain of truth right before their eyes than if I take it from the vessel with which another has drawn it. I will never have more authority with my hearers as a

preacher than when I work out the truths of the kingdom of heaven from Scripture in their sight.

An endorsement of *analytical preaching*

This does not happen among us to the degree that it should. Our preaching has too little Scripture exposition. We preach synthetically too much and analytically too little. The analytical sermon wants, first of all, to set forth the text. It wants to bring the hearer to the understanding of that which the author² wishes to say in the entire text and in its individual parts. Therefore this way of preaching analyses the text—hence its name “analytical”—that is, it breaks it down into its chief parts and then draws these into a formal unity, the theme. The theme is therefore always the sum of that which is contained in the parts; it actually exists, and the preacher only has the task of finding it and setting it in verbal form. Since only one exegesis of the text is possible, there is only one theme, one arrangement possible; only the verbal clothing of the theme and its parts allows for variation. This way of preaching—which before all else wants to present the thoughts of the text in their original connection to one another and then to evaluate them practically and apply them to the hearer, and so lead him directly into the Scripture’s world of thought and let this speak to him—this way of preaching is not the usual thing among us.

We prefer to preach synthetically. The synthetic sermon does not desire primarily to set forth the text or present the thoughts of the text in their given context, but to explain the theme.³ Its theme is not necessarily a drawing together of the content of the text. It makes some thought or other of the text, or a truth derived from the thoughts of the text, into the main thought and arranges the remaining thoughts of the text around it without consideration of their original bearing to one another. It does not necessarily treat all the thoughts of the text, but limits itself to those which can provide useful service for explaining and establishing the main proposition.

How has it happened that we prefer this method of preaching? Perhaps with the older people among us this comes, most of all, from the predominantly dogmatic education, which formerly our preaching seminaries had offered almost entirely. Comparatively little time was devoted to the study of Scripture; the novice theologian was not led into Scripture’s world of thought to the desirable extent. And in so far as this was done, it was done frequently under the constraints of dogmatics. The Scriptures were explained according to the *regula fidei*, the analogy of faith, whose content was already determined by dogmatics. Thus our preachers were more at home in dogmatics than in Scripture. And since the dogmatic teaching procedure was deductive and synthetic, in so far as propositions were set forth, broken into their parts and established by Scripture, the deductive, synthetic teaching method became flesh and blood for young theologians, so that they used it in their teaching activity, in preaching and confirmation instruction.

The attitude which many of us formerly held toward the historical pericope also contributed in no small way to our preference for synthetic preaching. One frequently considered it to be something unsound, something

not Lutheran to refrain from preaching on it as a regular thing. To be sure, one can not year after year preach on the same pericope and use the analytical method. Otherwise, one would need to present the very same chain of thought again and again. Only if one preaches synthetically and one time makes these thoughts and the next time makes those thoughts from the text to be the chief thought of the sermon is one able to obtain new chains of thought. But then the sermon is no longer, in the strict sense of the word, an exposition of the text. The preacher sets the individual thoughts from the text under a point of view which was foreign to the writer. Therefore it is really somewhat amusing when we read in the foreword to *Gnadenjahr*, a collection of Dr. Walther's sermons on the Gospels, that the Lutheran church, in distinction from the Reformed, wishes to introduce its members not to a superficial width and breadth of Scripture, but to the depth of Scripture truth and has for this reason retained the historical pericope, an arrangement which requires the preacher to set the same texts before the congregation, year in and year out. The historical pericopes certainly have much in their favor, and what Lutheran pastor would not gladly preach on them often. However, they have also contributed in no small way to Lutheran preaching being, by and large, too little Scripture exposition, which does not do justice to the text and which even now and then plays with it and misuses it for homiletical stunts.

The need for synthetic preaching in the early days

Our preference for synthetic preaching, however, is explained in yet another way. Frequently we prefer it because it has many advantages over the analytical. Most of all, it wants to explain its theme, to unfold its chief thought from all angles, to present its subject matter to its full extent, and it can do this better than the analytical sermon can, for it is not tied, to the same degree as that is, to individual details of the sequence of thought given in the text. In the synthetic sermon the preacher can present in detail to his hearers precisely those thoughts which touch him at the moment, which he considers most relevant and important, and apply them to their lives. Hence one can also produce a certain measure of Christian knowledge more quickly through the synthetic sermon (and similarly through synthetic catechesis) than he can with the analytic. One can more quickly present the truths of the kingdom of God whole to his hearers and simply confirm them with Scripture than he can work them out from Scripture before their eyes. For this reason and in this sense the fathers of the orthodox Lutheran church of our land have accomplished much with their dogmatic preaching. With preaching that is primarily Scripture exposition they could scarcely have inculcated such a thorough [*rechtschaffene*] Lutheran knowledge in their congregations in so short a time.

This dare not induce us, however, to follow their example and preach dogmatically in our day. The dogmatic sermon had a certain justification in the pioneer days of our church, surely for the reasons just stated. But in the long run it does not satisfy. If a half-starved guest comes to our house, then indeed the housewife does not first run to the garden, fetch vegetables,

scrub and prepare them. She does not at first buy fresh meat and whatever else pertains to the meal. Rather she brings out whatever the pantry and cellar contain of prepared foods in order to quiet the gnawing hunger of the guest as quickly as possible, and it tastes delicious to him. But one does not want to always eat reheated foods; one cannot live for the long run on canned goods. One soon notices that it lacks the special flavor of fresh food, and one does not remain healthy for the long term when this fresh food is entirely missing. So too, one cannot thrive spiritually for the long run when one is constantly fed from the tin cans of dogmatics. In time this produces a more or less unhealthy Christianity, a Christianity that lacks something. The faith of our Christians should not rest upon dogmatics, but upon Scripture. They should not believe the fathers, but the apostles and prophets; they should believe those who have taught ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων.

If their faith is to be grounded ever more deeply and firmly, then we must lead them into Scripture. They must learn to draw fresh water from the living fountain; nothing else will satisfy them for the long run. Particularly now in our day of changing our language⁴—when the faith of our Christians is being tested much more than before and they must know the certain ground of the hope which is in them—particularly now they stand in danger of suffering shipwreck of their faith, if they do not have the compass and anchor of Scripture or indeed do not understand how to work with it. It helps them not at all in their temptations that they call upon their catechism or their pastor's word. Many of the sects, by whom our Christians are today being tested, operate with this very Scripture. How sad, how disastrous if now our lay members do not know the instruction of Scripture and do not understand how to work with Scripture, which alone teaches with authority.

Therefore, to get back to it, if the synthetic sermon need not be dogmatic in the bad sense, if also we are not able to dispense with it for more than one reason, then we want to keep it clear to ourselves that it is not actually Scripture exposition and that we should not make exclusive use of it, if we can not provide some other way to lead our Christians into Scripture, such as Bible classes. Where no Bible classes are possible, sermons should be delivered from time to time on entire books of Scripture, through which our hearers learn to understand a book of the Bible in its continuity. For example, if the Epistle to the Romans were explained in sermons and in so doing the exposition of Scripture would take place, then introduction into the understanding of the words and substance of the text would become most important and the homiletical format [*schulgerechte Form*] of the sermon would be a secondary matter. Then it would be strange indeed if a basic knowledge of salvation was not at the same time effected and the hearers were not inclined toward and capable of their own Bible study. This remains: The more immediately our sermon comes from Scripture, the more we permit Scripture itself to speak to our hearers, then the more we will be preaching ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχοντες καὶ οὐχ ὡς οἱ γραμματεῖς.

Practicing what we preach

This will be true, provided that the preaching of our personality

[*Persönlichkeit*], which comprises our official and private life, does not contradict that of our mouth. No teacher of the church can long teach with authority if a discrepancy seen by others exists between his teaching and his life. This reality holds true, in addition, not on the basis of the fact that a preacher is not pure and spotless, as the Teacher come from God was, that he does not dare to ask his hearers, as He did, "Which of you can accuse me of sin?" No honest pastor preaches that he is a perfect saint, but confesses with Paul, "This is certainly true and a dearly precious word, that Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners, among whom I am the most prominent" [1 Tim. 1:15]. He does teach, however, that in Christ there is an upright nature, that without sanctification no one will see the Lord, that it is seemly for the Christian to fight the good fight of faith. He admonishes his hearers to do good and not to become weary. If he does not take all these teachings and admonitions to heart himself, if it is plain that he does not fight the good fight of faith, that he lets the old Adam have his way, that he himself takes part in no good work of the church and imposes other burdens which he does not lift a finger to move, then it becomes clear to each hearer that his pastor preaches two fundamentally different sermons, which can not both have authority.

What evil doubts about the truth of Scripture may stir in the souls of many simple Christians if they have to see how teachers in the church are servants to sin, about which they warn others with great unction. Or they have to see how those who pretend to seek the honor of God alone are greedy of vain honor, can endure no one near them, want to take a position over everyone and, all in all, would rather tear apart their congregation or the church than to take a position second to anyone. How disturbing for members to see how they who preach so much on brotherly love envy their fellow pastors, speak evil of them, disdainfully judge them, cannot keep peace with them, and so bite and devour them. Or they see how they are subject to miserliness, which they so often and so sharply condemn in their congregation, and yet can never get hold of enough; it is for the sake of filthy lucre that they defile their conscience and become mute dogs. Do members see how they so insistently admonish the Christian education of the youth and then in their own house permit an unchristian spirit or permit their children to be educated by unchristian teachers? Is it evident how they warn about the friendship of this world and then prefer to consort with respected people of the world than with their Christian members? Is it evident how they admonish from the pulpit, "Whatever is honorable, whatever is chaste, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good report, think of that," and then outside of the pulpit show a preference to telling stories which are neither chaste nor lovely, but are swinish filth? Do they encourage mission work and can not treasure highly enough the worth of a human soul, and then deliver over to the heterodox a church member who has moved or let him become entirely churchless, because they would not grant it to a sister congregation or to a sister synod? No teacher of the church can live in such sins without more and more forfeiting his authority.

Our Christians expect more of those who labor in the Word and in doctrine [1 Tim. 5:17], those whom they should hold worthy of double honor

according to Scripture, than that they should give completely free rein to their old Adam. They expect of them that they are examples to the flock; that their daily relationship with the Word of God at the desk and in spiritual counseling [*See/sorge*] produces an earnest Christianity and an intensely Christian life within them. They expect that their pastors are mindful of the importance and responsibility of their calling and devote their entire time and strength to it and therefore do not let themselves become entangled in the business of this world. They expect them to be persons sanctified by the gospel, whose opinions and views on all things of this life and the life to come and whose activities are determined by the gospel and who are just as far from narrow-minded pettiness and sanctimoniousness as they are from wantonness and conformity to this world, and who also express in their outward life that God has made them priests and kings. No pastor can long disappoint his congregation in these expectations and still teach with full ἐξουσία. If in search of gain he is active in yet another calling alongside his pastoral calling, be it as farmer, real estate agent, politician or agent of a business firm of whatever sort, he will not teach as one who has authority. If he becomes an actor for the amusement of the pleasure-seeking public, gladly plays the buffoon and acts like a joker in and out of the pulpit, then his word will not have much weight in the pulpit. If he enjoys the role of a clown who makes no claim to be taken seriously and whose life is nothing but a fool's game, then he will not teach as one who has authority.

Today there is no little complaining about pastors whose personality and opinions stand in harsh contradiction to their office. Before us lies an article in the June 11 issue of the *Western Christian Advocate*,⁵ in which the no-longer-rare pastor is described, of whom the liberal element in his congregation and the people of the world say with praise, "You'd never take him for a preacher."⁶ He plays a large role in society. All the men crowd around him; such comical stories as he tells are seldom heard. They are, of course, not entirely clean, and one would not expect them from a pastor. And many a congregational member, who has heard the earnest preaching of the pastor on Sunday and has taken it to heart, is hurt and vexed. He has a winning nature, and he succeeds in winning a great number of prominent people. For the congregation, that is, not for Christ. Truly they are only prominent people whom he wins; for the others he has no time. In dealing with the female sex he is rather free and knows how to make himself adored by a part of them. The other part, to be sure, considers him tactless and impertinent. He is very industrious. All summer he is busy in his large garden, or he goes from house to house and sells what the garden has produced of vegetables and fruit. He is a clever businessman. To a few of his elderly colleagues he sells garden land in Florida, later proved completely unsuitable for this purpose, and so he deprives them of their entire savings. To an old farmer who is moving to town, he sells a building site, which this man did not first inspect, since he was dealing with a pastor after all, and found himself deceived. But no one can accuse him of having acted under false pretenses; he has only understood how to exploit to his benefit the confidence that was afforded him as a pastor. His sermons are good, as long as the supply lasts; but it does not last long, and then no one any longer

hears a sermon from him through which he is encouraged in his Christianity. His much bustling activity leaves him no time for sick calls and other such private soul care, and participation in the annual Elks convention and similar gatherings and events seems more important to him. Finally, it is generally said of him, and it is no longer meant as praise: "You'd never take him for a preacher."

Are there also preachers in the Lutheran church who throw away their authority in this way? How necessary it is that we are on the watch against our old Adam. How necessary it is that we do him violence, crucify him with his lusts and desires and daily sanctify ourselves through the gospel, so that we do not preach to others and become objectionable ourselves. In our honest struggle against flesh and blood we also will still place in the way many hindrances to the course of the Word. What harm it would be for the church if we—we who belong to the few who in our day still proclaim the teaching of Scripture as divine truth and the highest authority—were to help undermine its authority and cease preaching ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχοντες.

Endnotes

¹ For those lacking access to the previous issue, we offer a reprint of the final paragraph on p. 25:

If therefore we would have preaching ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ in our church as before, then there dare not arise among us any generation of preachers who have set for themselves the goal of repeating what the fathers have taught. To be sure, the danger does not threaten us from what the fathers taught nor from its study. It is self-evident that everyone who wishes to teach among us will make himself familiar with the teachings of the fathers, the confessional writings and the dogmatics of our church. Discontinuing this would mean despising and showing ourselves ungrateful for the magnificent gifts which God has bestowed on our church. But in mechanical repetition lies the danger. Mechanically repeating what the fathers have taught means receiving it uncritically, just because they have taught it. This leads unfailingly to falling away from Scripture. And there—not in the teachings of the fathers as such—is where the authority dwells, which alone commands respect in the heart and conscience and before which all opposition is silenced. Therefore only to the degree that we live in Scripture, absorb its world of thought, take our preaching material from it and found ourselves upon it—and only to the degree that our preaching is a witness of the truth of Scripture which has become living and powerful in us—will we preach ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχοντες.

² Without pressing Henkel's intention one way or another with the word *Verfasser*, we recognize that the Holy Spirit is the Author of His Word, which He has given to us through human writers. Thus in doing sound exegesis of a text, we seek the Spirit-intended meaning expressed by the inspired writer to his readers.

³ As further examination of Henkel's use of the terms analytical and synthetic, consider the distinctions made in the homiletics textbook *Preach the Gospel*: "In German circles textual preaching was designated as the biblical-analytical method while thematic preaching was designated as the synthetic method. . . . Our textbook, like other standard homiletics texts in America, employs the terms analytic and synthetic in a different manner" (p. 57). Earlier in the same chapter "Sermon Types" the authors, Joel Gerlach and Richard Balge, note that textual preaching is also known as expository preaching and thematic preaching is also known as topical preaching. However, topical preaching as we know it might not have been what Henkel had in mind with his use of the term synthetic.

⁴ Henkel here refers to the transition his church body was then making from German to English as the language to use in the worship services and parish ministry of Wisconsin Synod churches.

⁵ We know nothing more of this article than that it was published in 1925. The pastor here described perhaps was meant to be a current example of what was stated in the previous paragraph.

⁶ Henkel puts this quotation in English both times that it occurs.

Book Reviews

In this issue we do not intend to give full reviews of the books listed. The intention is only to make our readers aware of these books and give enough information to help them determine whether these books are worthy of purchase or of access through some library. The reader may also find that these reviews provide additional information and comments beyond the specific contents of the books reviewed.

Paul Lawrence: *The IVP Atlas of Bible History*, InterVarsity Press, 2006, hardcover, 190 large pages.

Because our salvation in Christ was worked out in the realms of time and space, the matters of history and geography are certainly important and meaningful to Christians, particularly the history and geography of those times and places where the prophets and apostles of our Lord and also our Savior Himself lived and worked.

This book by Paul Lawrence is filled with maps, tables and illustrations, plus an informative text that seeks to interpret and clarify. At the beginning of the book we find a chronology of events of Bible history combined with key events in the history of the ancient Near East. No attempt is made to date the creation of the world or the flood, although the creation date which Ussher proposed (4004 BC) is critically reviewed as having significant problems. The first date listed is 3100 BC, which designates the beginnings of writing in Mesopotamia and Egypt. The author treats the Bible's record of events as a legitimate historical source and attempts to reconcile biblical statements with archaeological findings. Occasional theological observations made in this atlas, however, are not necessarily statements we would completely accept.

On the crucial matter of the date of the Exodus, Lawrence presents both views: the early date of 1447 BC, favored by those who accept the information supplied by First Kings 6:1; and the later date of 1270 BC, accepted by many scholars on the basis of their understanding of Egyptian history. On the basis of an early Exodus Abraham lived from 2167-1992 BC. If the later date is adopted, Abraham lived from 1990-1815 BC. First Kings 6:1 says plainly: "And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD." Since it is generally acknowledged that Solomon began the building of the temple in 967 BC, there is every reason to believe that the Exodus took place in 1447 BC. The Septuagint translation reads 440 instead of 480, but even then the Exodus would be 1407 BC, not 1270 BC. To this reviewer it is good that Lawrence takes the early Exodus date into consideration. This indicates his recognition that the Bible gives correct historical and geographical information.

His treatment of New Testament events contains the following. The birth of Jesus is dated at 5 BC, and the death of Jesus is said to have taken place in AD 33. Other scholars, in contrast, have determined that Jesus more likely died in AD 30. The recommended view of Paul's letters is that Galatians

came first, after his first mission journey; First and Second Thessalonians were written on his second journey; First and Second Corinthians and Romans were written during his third journey; and the four letters written from Rome, while Paul was a prisoner, were Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians. The letter of James is said to be the earliest of the New Testament epistles, and the three letters of John the latest. Revelation is said to have been written within the years of 81 to 96.

Throughout the book the latest archaeological evidence is presented, along with detailed full-color maps and charts on almost every page. There is a wealth of fascinating information available to the reader. One can spend hours perusing the lists of Egyptian pharaohs or Israelite kings, or charting the journeys of our Lord and His apostles or the prophets on the various maps provided in this comprehensive Bible atlas.

Some sections of material not always available in atlases of this sort include two pages on the archives and libraries of the ancient world, four pages on the agriculture and climate of Canaan, two pages on the warfare and fortifications of Old Testament times, two pages on the trade of Tyre, twelve full pages on the history between the Testaments, two pages on amulets and scrolls, two pages on travel in the Roman world, two pages on the fall of Jerusalem and two final pages on the spread of Christianity.

The two pages devoted to Jesus' death and resurrection refer to several archaeological discoveries. In 1961 a Latin inscription was found near Tel Aviv which contained the Latin name of Pontius Pilate. In 1968 the skeletal remains of a victim of crucifixion were found just north of Jerusalem, with a seven-inch nail in the man's heel bones. But as interesting as such information may be, Lawrence also brings out the meaning of it all, quoting 1 Peter 3:18: "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (NIV). With reference to the New Testament accounts of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, this significant statement is made: "These reports have formed the pivotal point of faith of countless millions of Christians for nearly two millennia. They have never been satisfactorily refuted or explained away" p. 147).

At a certain time and at a certain place our Lord Jesus rose from the dead. This atlas helps its readers better understand both the history and geography of this pivotal event, as well as that of the prior and subsequent events which led to and stemmed from it. It is this reviewer's opinion that we all would profit from having this book in our personal libraries and in our church libraries.

Roger Patterson: *Evolution Exposed – Your Evolution Answer Book for the Classroom, Answers in Genesis, 2006, paperback, 301 pages.*

Anyone seeking to examine current biology textbooks on the topic of evolution will want to make use of this book, a recent volume published by Answers in Genesis. The author examines three biology textbooks from Glencoe, Prentice Hall and Holt to consider what they say about all the various facets of evolution. He then gives the reader the necessary information from the biblical creationist perspective to determine whether the statements in the textbooks are valid.

The section titles indicate the extent of what is being examined: What Is Science?, Classifying Life, Natural Selection vs. Evolution, Unlocking the Geologic Record, The Origin of Life, The Origin of Microorganisms, The Origin of Plants, The Origin of Invertebrates, The Origin of Vertebrates and The Origin of Humans.

The pattern of the book is the same throughout. After some preliminary remarks statements from the three textbooks are summarized, the exact page numbers in the textbooks are given, and direction is provided as to where to find specific information in Patterson's book to counter the textbooks' assertions. For example, in the section on the origin of humans all three textbooks make the claim that "humans are evolved from hominids evident in the fossil record from 7 million years ago" (p. 213). In response Patterson says on page 219: "The Bible makes a clear distinction between human life and the life of animals. We are to be stewards of the earth and have dominion over the animals, but we are created in the image of God, which makes us distinct from the apes."

In specific response to the textbook assertion mentioned above, the reader is directed to reference articles 10.1 and 10.3 (pp. 220-224). There in answer to the question "Did humans really evolve from apelike creatures?" it is stated that "starting from biblical assumptions, we see clearly that God made man in His image and did not use evolution.... The evolutionary assumptions demand that man evolved from an apelike ancestor and discount biblical authority." Then the so-called fossil evidence is discussed and shown to be generally fraudulent in reference articles 10.1 and 10.3. "No evidence from the fossil record directly supports a transitional series from ape to human.... People have always been people and apes have always been apes" (p. 224)

The last part of the book includes a glossary of terms, indexes to the three textbooks, plus a topical index.

The back cover includes this comment by Dr. David Menton: "Students as well as parents will find *Evolution Exposed* to be a desirable, if not essential, supplement to the typical biology textbook. This book will aid the reader in distinguishing empirical science from unverifiable speculation, particularly in the area of evolution. Developing the ability to think critically about science will serve students well."

Tremper Longman III: *Old Testament Commentary Survey*, Fourth Edition, Baker Academic, 1991, 1995, 2003, 2007, paperback, 157 pages.

Trustworthy commentaries on many books of the Old Testament are hard to find. With this brief guide Tremper Longman III is trying to "help students of the Bible pick those commentaries that are right for them so they might more fully understand the Word of God" (p. 10). The commentaries he covers are labeled L, M or S, or a combination of these three. L is for layperson, M is for minister, and S is for scholar. He suggests that seminary students should consider themselves ministers rather than scholars. The commentaries are also rated on a star system, with five stars being the top grade. An appendix lists the five-star commentaries.

Very few of the commentaries listed were written by Lutherans. To this

reviewer's knowledge none of the commentaries in his listing were published by Concordia Publishing House or Northwestern Publishing House. Thus this book has very limited value for confessional Lutherans, since what we consider good or great or excellent, such as August Pieper's commentary on the second half of Isaiah, is not even mentioned. E. J. Young, who wrote a three-volume commentary on Isaiah, gave high praise to Pieper's book, but Longman gives only two stars to Young. He does say, however, that Young was "a meticulous and detailed scholar," whose "commentary is well worth the money" (p. 104).

The *Hermeneia* series by Fortress Press receives a rating of five stars and is categorized as S (suitable for scholars). The author states: "The quality of the series is high. It intends to deliver the best of historical and critical scholarship, and usually succeeds" p. 26). But any series following historical-critical methods of interpretation will undoubtedly fail to receive high marks from those who profess verbal inspiration and biblical inerrancy and thus interpret texts according to the historical-grammatical approach.

Keil-Delitzsch, a series which many of us have used and loved for some time, gets a rating of four stars. The expositions, "although dated," are deemed to be "solid and competent." Longman adds: "This set is fairly inexpensive and makes a good backbone to a minister's library" (p. 27).

I am acquainted with the InterVarsity series entitled *The Bible Speaks Today*. Longman gives this series a four stars rating, calling it "readable, accurate, and relevant" (p. 24). To this assessment I can add that the commentaries I have used in this series have not disappointed me.

Leupold, a conservative Lutheran, wrote commentaries on Genesis, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Daniel and Zechariah. Longman gives Leupold only two stars, saying that "he tends to write more like a systematic theologian than a biblical exegete" (p. 28). It seems to me, however, that Leupold's work on Genesis at least should be rated much higher than two stars.

Zondervan gets high ratings from Longman for its commentaries on Genesis (Waltke and Fredricks), Psalms (Van Gemeren and G. H. Wilson), Isaiah (J. N. Oswalt), Ezekiel (I. Duguid) and Haggai-Zechariah (M. J. Boda).

For a much more helpful analysis of conservative Lutheran commentaries, one may consult John Brug's article "Old Testament Commentaries for the Pastor's Study." The fifth edition (2005) is available on the Internet in the Essay File maintained by the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, under wlsessays.net. As an example consider Brug's comment on the *Hermeneia* series praised by Longman: "All volumes are very poor theologically, some are quite useful linguistically."

Roger E. Olson: *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*, InterVarsity Press, 2006, hardcover, 250 pages.

The author of this book is Arminian in his theology and is attempting to defend Arminianism against those who attack it, particularly Calvinists. Olson believes that many Calvinists who attack Arminianism do not have an accurate understanding of what Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) or the early Arminians actually taught. His stated purpose is to set the record straight.

Although we often lack the time or the resources to do this as

thoroughly as is ideal, we agree with Olson's statement in his introduction (p. 13): "Every theology student should read books by proponents of the various theologies rather than merely read about those theologies by their critics." On the basis of actual quotations from the writings of Arminius and his followers, such as Simon Episcopius (1583-1643), John Wesley (1703-1791), Richard Watson (1781-1833) and the contemporary Thomas Oden, Olson defends Arminianism against its Calvinist critics. Each chapter addresses what Olson identifies as a myth propounded by Calvinist critics. We list these myths here so that our readers may get an idea of the contents of this book:

Myth 1: Arminian theology is the opposite of Calvinist/
Reformed theology.

Myth 2: A hybrid of Calvinism and Arminianism is possible.

Myth 3: Arminianism is not an orthodox Evangelical option.

Myth 4: The heart of Arminianism is belief in free will.

Myth 5: Arminian theology denies the sovereignty of God.

Myth 6: Arminianism is a human-centered theology.

Myth 7: Arminianism is not a theology of grace.

Myth 8: Arminians do not believe in predestination.

Myth 9: Arminian theology denies justification by grace alone
through faith alone.

Myth 10: All Arminians believe in the governmental theory of
the atonement.

Olson concedes that one reason these myths are so generally accepted is that later theologians in the Arminian camp departed from the authentic teachings of Arminius. We know what this is like, for the majority of so-called Lutherans in our day have removed themselves far from authentic confessional Lutheranism. Olson distinguishes between what he calls Arminianism of the heart and Arminianism of the head. Olson himself attacks Arminianism of the head, saying of it: "Its hallmark is an optimistic anthropology that denies total depravity and the absolute necessity of supernatural grace for salvation.... It is Pelagian or at least semi-Pelagian" (p. 17). Among such Arminians of the head Olson lists Philip Limborch (1633-1712), Charles Chauncy (1705-1787) and the American evangelist Charles Finney (1792-1875).

No doubt, it is true that when we think of Arminianism, we think of Finney's kind of Arminianism, which Olson condemns in saying: "He denied original sin.... He believed that every person has the ability and responsibility, apart from any special assistance of divine grace (prevenient grace) other than enlightenment and persuasion, to freely accepting the forgiving grace of God through repentance and obedience to the revealed moral government of God."

Nevertheless, we confessional Lutherans cannot give authentic Arminianism the label of orthodoxy. Let me mention just two marks of Arminian heterodoxy: synergism and predestination in view of foreseen faith. On the matter of synergism Olson says of Arminius that he defended "an evangelical form of synergism ... against monergism. ... Synergism ... means any belief in human responsibility and the ability to freely accept or reject the grace of salvation" (pp. 13-14). Lutherans influenced by the later

Melanchthon rather than by Luther have also fallen into the trap of synergism. Authentic Arminians believe in what they call "prevenient grace" which gives the sinner the ability to choose either to accept or deny the gift of salvation.

On the matter of predestination Olson plainly says (p. 35): "Only those will be saved, however, who are predestined by God to eternal salvation. They are the elect. Who is included in the elect? All who God foresees will accept his offer of salvation through Christ. ... God's electing foreknowledge is caused by the faith of the elect." Later in the book (p. 180) Olson repeats this same idea: "All true Arminians believe in predestination. ... That is, they believe that God foreknows every person's ultimate and final decision regarding Jesus Christ, and on that basis God predestines people to salvation or damnation."

Some of the later Lutheran dogmaticians tended to explain predestination in this same way. The Lutheran church in America was split apart by the election controversy which pitted Dr. Walther and his adherents against Dr. Schmidt and his adherents, whose teaching was very similar to the authentic Arminianism described by Olson in the above paragraph.

We on our part have taken our stand with Dr. Walther, the Synodical Conference and the *Brief Statement* of 1932, which carefully delineates what is orthodox and what is heterodox in regard to the doctrines of both election and conversion. While we find ourselves agreeing with many of the Arminian arguments against Calvinism and with many of the Calvinistic arguments against Arminianism, we do so neither as Calvinists nor as Arminians, but as confessional Lutherans.

Stephen Tomkins: *John Wesley: A Biography*, Eerdmans, 2003, paperback, 208 pages.

John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of Methodism, lived a long life, and many are the biographers who have told us about it. The present biography by Stephen Tomkins covers the usual ground: John's mother Susanna, the holiness club at Oxford University, the disastrous mission venture in Georgia, his association with the Moravians, his "conversion" on May 24, 1738, his untiring mission travels throughout England in the face of opposition and ridicule, his organizing of Methodist societies wherever he preached and finally, his coming out of the Church of England to form a separate denomination. Dr. Tomkins does not present these facts to the reader in such a way that John Wesley always looks good. In fact, there are times when he seems to present Wesley in the worst possible light, perhaps because John Wesley always presented himself in the best possible light.

Take, for example, his dealings with women. In Georgia Wesley fell in love with a girl named Sophie Hopkey, and he confused her by seeming to want to marry her, but he did not actually propose marriage. He followed the Moravian practice of casting lots to make his choice of three alternatives: 1) marry, 2) think of it not this year or 3) think of it no more. The lot he drew was #3, and soon Sophie was promised to another. After her marriage she was still his member, and he treated her badly. In fact, he barred her from the Lord's Supper. Wesley's biographer writes: "While with rigid logic he could justify his actions to himself as strict adherence to the canons of

Church discipline, the decision was doubtlessly fuelled by resentment. He was, he said, treating her more strictly than he would others because her lapse proved her earlier piety a wicked pretence – the interpretation of a bitter lover. To the people of Savannah, though, it seemed mere malice” (p. 55).

Many years later, when he was 45 years old and still unmarried, he was nursed to health by a young widow named Grace Murray, who would probably have been a good spouse for him. But again Wesley did not make a clear proposal, and there was a rival suitor. Consequently, everything got mixed up. In addition, John’s brother Charles, the prolific hymn-writer, did not approve of Grace, and the two brothers had earlier agreed that neither should marry without the approval of the other. The end result was that Charles encouraged Grace to marry the other man, and John became enraged. Tomkins claims; “Biographers and editors have tended on the whole to follow Wesley’s version” (p. 134); but “it is naïve to assume that his recollections were reliable – they were not even entirely consistent” (p. 134). What seems to be the case is that John Wesley tended to blame others for his troubles, although he himself was chiefly at fault.

Soon thereafter John Wesley married Molly Vazeille, and that marriage did not turn out well at all. John was always on the road with his evangelistic preaching, and Molly did not like to travel. They were separated a good deal of the time, and Molly was jealous of the attentions John paid to other women. Tomkins summarizes one of John’s last letters to her in this unflattering way: “He listed her multitudinous crimes and failings, her theft and lies, her quarreling and stubbornness, her murdering his character to vindicate her own. ... As ever, he scorned the notion of compromise and the nearest he came to admitting any fault on his part was when he explained that the list of her faults was incomplete because he did not have his journal to hand” (p. 179).

Yet in spite of his personality flaws, John Wesley did succeed in gathering together a large flock through his preaching tours. He organized them into groups, over which he ruled like an autocrat. Tomkins says: “He passed rules through Conference concerning every area of preachers’ lives and work” (p. 166).

The holiness churches of today look up to John Wesley as their teacher. In a chapter entitled “Perfection” Tomkins writes: “For almost as long as he had preached faith, Wesley had preached perfection. He passionately believed that the Bible promised the Christian life could be free from sin” (p. 156). In the 1750’s Wesley began to win adherents to his views, and so we read: “By 1760, the perfectionist revival was sweeping the societies across the nation” (p. 156). At this same time there were reported instances of visions, revelations, convulsions, contortions, trances, screaming, outbursts of laughter and healing. Did Wesley himself claim to attain perfection? It seems he did not claim it for himself, but certainly he believed that many of his followers had attained it. We note Tomkins’ conclusion: “Perfectionism faced considerable opposition from within the Methodist movement. ... Passions and denunciations became heated on both sides and the doctrine of perfect love proved to be another source of bitter

conflict" (p. 162).

Probably the most unflattering thing that Tomkins reveals about Wesley was his own apparent lack of faith in the God he was preaching. In June of 1766 John wrote to his brother Charles: "I do not love God. I never did. Therefore I never believed, in the Christian sense of the word. Therefore I am only an honest heathen. ... I never had any other evidence of the eternal or invisible world than I have now; and that is none at all, unless such as faintly shines from reason's glimmering ray. I have no direct witness ... of anything ... invisible or eternal" (p. 168). This startling confession leads Tomkins to say: "It is pitiful to see his faith, even after all these years, still so dependent on the vicissitudes of his emotions. ... Constantly to put a burden on your disciples that you have constantly failed to lift yourself is monstrous" (p. 169).

We would prefer to remember John Wesley for what he wrote in translating one of our well-known hymns into English: "Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness My beauty are, my glorious dress; Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, With joy shall I lift up my head" (TLH 371:1). Such a confession is certainly more in keeping with the testimony of his "conversion" in 1738, concerning which he said: "About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death" (p. 61).

- David Lau