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Homiletics: Outlines on Hannover Epistles

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HOMILETICS

Outlines of the Hannover Epistles

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JAMES 2:14-23

It is especially this section of the Epistle of James which has caused people to say that Paul and James contradict each other. Since both wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we know contradiction would be impossible. Yet how will we answer the objections raised and the questions asked about faith and works? Let us see.

WHAT IS THE RELATION OF FAITH AND WORKS?

First we must understand the terms "faith" and "works" as used by Paul and James. Both speak of the same faith: trust in God for salvation through Christ Jesus. (This thought should be expanded to give the sermon a real Gospel basis.) Paul and James do not, however, speak of the same works in the passages usually quoted. Paul speaks of the works of the Law; James speaks of the works which are fruits of faith. Paul emphasizes (cp. Rom. 3: 21-28) that works of the Law dare not be looked upon as an adjunct to faith to justify us. James stresses that works must be present as fruits of faith if such faith is real and genuine.

I

Faith Must Produce Works

A. To say one has faith does not make faith a reality (v. 14).

1. James implies there is no profit because there is no faith. Acts 5:1-11: Ananias and Sapphira.

2. He does not imply that all those to whom he writes have no faith, for he addresses them as "my brethren," v. 14. (It is important that we watch this point when we preach to a Christian congregation. Consciences must be aroused, but it dare not be a wholesale condemnation.)

B. Faith, if it does not produce works, is dead (vv. 15-17).

1. Anyone who claims to have faith should apply the test: "Are there works?" (1 John 3:17-18.)

2. God provides us with ample opportunities daily to demonstrate our faith by works (Luke 3:11). He will judge us accordingly, Matt. 25:41-44. (Give pertinent examples.)

C. Bare assent to articles of faith is no real fruit-producing faith (vv. 18-20).

1. A vivid dialog in v. 18: Mr. A: "You claim to have faith?" Mr. B: "I certainly do, and, what is more, I have works to show for it. Can you show me faith without works?" Mr. A: "I guess not." Mr. B: "But I can show faith by my works."

2. Merely to repeat expressions of articles of faith (like the Jewish Shema, Deut. 6:4, the first thing Jewish children learned) may be only that which devils also can do, Mark 1:24; Mark 5:7. (Here a reference could be made to the Standard Epistle for this Sunday, 1 Peter 5:6-11. One of the devil's traps is hypocritical confession of faith.)

3. Devils have no comfort but shudder in fear. So it must be with all those who have no real faith (Matt. 25:46).

II

Works Are the Evidence of Faith

A. We rest for our conviction of faith not on any works, but altogether on the sure Word of God (Rom. 10:17).

B. However, works demonstrate that faith exists (vv. 21-22; cp. Luke 7:35).

1. By what Abraham did, it became clear that he believed (Gen. 22:9; Heb. 11:17).

2. Abraham's faith "was made perfect," received its final, definite proof by his works.

3. In that sense Jesus emphasizes works in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:16; Matt. 7:17; Matt. 7:24).

C. Since good works are necessary for evidence of the existence of faith, it may be said that indirectly works justify (vv. 23-24).

1. Abraham could perform his difficult assignment by faith. He performed it; so he had faith; so he was justified (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3).

2. Because of such evidence of faith, Abraham received the title "friend of God" (2 Chron. 20:7; Is. 41:8).

You are a friend of God (John 15:14-15). Thank God for that. Use His Word ever more zealously that through its power your faith may shine forth all the more through its fruits, your works of love.

Milwaukee, Wis.

WALTER W. STUENKEL

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 PETER 1:2-15

Each Sunday a pastor greets his congregation from the pulpit, saying: "Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and Jesus Christ, our Lord"; or "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God, our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ." The greeting of Peter in this Epistle is also appropriate (v.2).

These words have great depth of meaning. Let us dig a little deeper into the well of this text and come up with a good spiritual drink of God's grace. (I would suggest reading text from R.S.V. for clarity and simplicity.)

THE AMAZING MATHEMATICS OF GOD'S GRACE

I

How God's Grace Is Supplied (vv.2-4)

- A. Faith comes by divine power (meaning of the Third Article).
 - 1. No man can come to faith by his own power or strength.
 - 2. The special operation of God's Spirit, a supernatural act, is needed.
- B. This same power also brings "life and godliness."
- C. This power is operative through knowledge of the Word (Rom. 1:16).
 - 1. Knowledge is important for God's Spirit to multiply His grace in us.

2. We must grow in knowledge through all of life, adding bit by bit.

3. The Church must teach and teach and teach. (Here mention should be made of the Spirit's operation in the teaching agencies of the local congregation.)

4. The Church's emphasis on emotion, activity, etc., is not enough—unless it also imparts knowledge.

D. God calls us by His glory and praise, unfolded in the Word.

1. This glory and praise has added His great and precious promises.

2. It has made us "partakers of the divine nature." We are sons of God with all of Christ's righteousness credited to us and all of His power in us to help us live righteously (Gal. 2:20 and Phil. 1:21).

3. It also gives power to escape the corruption of the world.

Summary: This power of knowledge, this power of the glory and praise which is unfolded in the Word, is amazing. It is God's grace growing up inside us to lift us from the muck of the world into the glory of the Kingdom.

II

The Addition of the Fruits of Faith, Also by the Grace of God
(vv. 5-7)

(These fruits cannot be added except that we have faith.)

- A. "Virtue" in the sense of moral strength, or, as Lenski says, "praise." It is that praise which makes faith shine.
- B. Knowledge in contrast to gnostic ignorance and falsehood.
- C. Self-control or temperance in contrast to legalistic abstinence.
- D. Steadfastness (patience) which never gives up.
- E. Godliness of attitude and true worship.
- F. Brotherly affection (brotherly kindness) in a close family tie.
- G. Love (charity) which is deeper than brotherly love and extends even to enemies.

III

The Results of Abounding in God's Grace (vv. 8-11)

- A. Fortified by knowledge we are kept from being barren and unfruitful.
1. Kept from spiritual blindness.
 2. Kept from forgetting God's mercy and forgiveness.
- B. The confirmation of our call and election. We will not rationalize by saying that what is eternally fixed by God cannot be made sure by us. We will remember that Christ said, "If ye continue in My Word," etc.
- C. The entrance into the eternal kingdom of Christ.

Application: The implied warning is that if we do not abound in these fruits and results of God's grace, we shall stumble and fall. These words were written as a fortification against false prophets who know nothing of the power of God's grace multiplying and adding in the Christian.

IV

The Constant Need for Reminders—Peter's Personal Concern (vv. 12-15)

- A. The operation of God's mathematics, adding and multiplying His grace, is something we must always keep in mind.
- B. We need it constantly. God's Word may be like pouring water over wool. The wool gets whiter.
- C. Church attendance and Bible study are important even for the best informed. We never get too much. We never hear the Gospel too often.

Conclusion: Grow in knowledge. Forget not the things learned. Do not impair the operation of God's grace.

Baltimore, Md.

GEORGE H. SOMMERMEYER

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 9:32-43

This text depicts two miracles of healing by the Apostle Peter during his ministry on the Caesarean Coast at Lydda and Joppa. For the Trinity season these miracles may be used profitably to show the power of Christ and His Word in the lives of His people, for not only the miracles but also the fruits of faith described in the text were effected by our Lord. The text preaches Christ, not Peter. Miracle texts are often difficult because one generally tends to preach in the same vein on all miracle texts; namely, on Jesus the Son of God, Epiphany, etc. Naturally this is the fundamental thought lying behind the miracle texts, but it is also salutary to use the doctrine in the concrete situation rather than the abstract. This the following outline attempts to do. Neither does it seem suitable to treat this entire text from the point of view of Dorcas, Peter, missionary work, power of prayer, work of the pastor, etc., all subordinate thoughts, or to make the two miracles the two parts of the sermon.

For the actual introduction the preacher might consider the following approaches: (1) The historical setting in the ministry of Peter (Acts 9:32—11:24); (2) The nature of miracles in the New Testament Church; (3) A brief outline of the general contents of the text in story form. Since the text may not be familiar to some people, the latter seems the most practical and would easily lead to our suggested theme: The miracles of Peter at Lydda and Joppa examples of

THE TREMENDOUS POWER OF CHRIST AT WORK
IN OUR CONGREGATION TODAY

I

*This Power Is at Work in Christian Hearts Bringing Forth
Works of Love. Do Not Take It for Granted!*

- A. It operated through the Word in our conversion (saints, v. 32).
1. Relate how the people of Lydda and Joppa became Christians. It takes God's power to convert a sinner.
 2. Note its power in the life of Peter.

3. Aeneas kept the faith in spite of his long illness.
 4. Examples from the local congregation?
- B. It operates in the work of the local congregation (our need, Christ's love, justification).
1. The works of Tabitha or Dorcas. She was raised that she might continue her works of love.

2. This same power operates today in the hearts of God's people. The exalted Christ, at the right hand of God, always with us. (Application to local situation. Does the congregation have a Dorcas or Tabitha Society? The divinity of Christ is shown in the deeds of His people.)

II

*This Power of Christ Not Only Sustains Our Faith and Life but Also Takes Care of Our Bodily Needs (cp. Sunday Gospel, Luke 5).
Thank God for It!*

- A. Note the outstanding example of Aeneas of Lydda (vv. 33-34).
1. The nature of his disease.
 2. Healed by Christ.
 3. The role of Pastor Peter.
- B. Examples from the church of today.
1. Diseases and sickness always with us. Sin.
 2. The work of the pastor with the sick.
 - a. Peter was sent for.
 - b. He went willingly.
 - c. He dwelt among them (v. 43).
 - d. The pastor ministers; Christ heals (body and soul).

III

*This Power Is the Source of Strength in the Outreach of the Church to Others (Vv. 35-42, cp. Epistle, 1 Peter 3:15).
Let Us Use This Power!*

- A. Note the effect of the miracles of Peter on the people of Lydda and Joppa. (General conversion?)

- B. Note how the works of the saints (Tabitha, vv.36,39) influenced others for Christ (the weeping widows were no doubt helped by Tabitha and converted through her).
- C. Application to mission endeavors today. The power of prayer and faith in personal evangelism (Epistle, 1 Peter 3:12).

IV

This Power of Christ Is with Us Not Only in This Life, but Also in Death and in the Eternal Life to Come. Believe It!

- A. With the power of Christ, death is only a sleep (John 11:25).
1. Tabitha's death — weeping helps none.
 2. Peter had to rely upon Christ's power.
- B. The Resurrection of Christ is the evidence not only of His divinity and glory, but also of our resurrection and future glory.
1. Not a reward, but a gift.
 2. Includes the body as well as the soul.
 3. Application: We have every incentive for a fruitful Christian life sustained by the power of Christ.

Conclusion: The preacher might dwell on the meaning of the Trinity season. Christ is Life. The outline offers some possible avenues of conclusion for each part (Do Not Take It for Granted, Thank God for It, Use It, Believe in It), which might be summarized here through an anecdote or Biblical example. It is suggested that the sermonizer draw on his own store of Scripture passages and parallels of which there are great numbers to illustrate the power of the risen Christ in the life of the Church.

Springfield, Ill.

LORMAN M. PETERSEN

SAINT JAMES THE ELDER THE APOSTLE'S DAY

ROM. 8:28-39

Which James? — Most dictionaries of the Bible list four men named James: 1. The Elder, son of Zebedee; this is the man whom we commemorate on July 25. 2. The Less, son of Alphaeus. 3. The Lord's brother, head of the church at Jerusalem in the Apostolic age. 4. The father or brother of the Apostle Jude.

Why July 25? — This date was not selected by the Church with reference to the death of James (which occurred just before the Passover, A.D. 42, Acts 12:1-3). It rather marks the anniversary of the removal of his remains, because of fear of the Arabs, to Compostela, seat of an archbishopric in the extreme northwestern part of Spain, in the eighth or ninth century. According to tradition, James had visited Spain before his martyrdom. For us, however, the significance of the date as such pales into insignificance, for we do not venerate the relics of the saints, but simply set the memory of the saints before us that we may follow their faith and good works (Aug. Conf., XXI).

Why Rom. 8:28-39 for this day? — The connection between the Apostle and the Epistle lies in the way in which James met his end. He was the first of the Apostles to suffer death by martyrdom, in fulfillment of our Savior's words Matt. 20:23 and Mark 10:39. Acts 12:1-2: "Herod . . . killed James . . . with the sword." Webber: "Clemens Alexandrinus gives us a vivid account of his martyrdom. As he was about to be beheaded, the soldier who had accused him before Herod was so impressed because of the Apostle's great Christian courage and faith that he fell down and implored forgiveness, humbly confessing his sins. The Apostle absolved him, saying, 'Peace, my son, peace be unto thee, and the pardon of thy faults.' The soldier arose and confessed Jesus Christ, and was beheaded by Herod, soon after the martyrdom of St. James." Reed: "The Lutheran Epistle is a noble passage from St. Paul concerning persecution, the sword, etc., and their inability to 'separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.'" Ressel: "The Epistle for today is one of the sublimest passages in the Sacred Scriptures. The great facts here set down by St. Paul are verified and demonstrated in the martyrdom of St. James. That surely, is the ultimate lesson we are to learn in our sufferings." What are those great facts, and what is that ultimate lesson? The facts are stated also in Acts 14:22: "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." And the lesson is stated also in 1 Peter 4:13: "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

A child of God can be sure of his salvation because the promise

of God is sure. He should be so sure as to be ready and willing to suffer all, even death, rather than deny his Savior. James was sure of his salvation. So was Paul, who for our comfort in suffering set forth the doctrine of predestination to salvation in Rom. 8: 28-39. This text speaks of

SURE SALVATION

I

The Doctrine of Predestination

Vv. 28-30.—Note: This part of the sermon should not be long, and particular care should be taken in order that the simplest language possible is used. The average hearer is to grow in Christian knowledge and be strengthened in his faith and assurance of salvation, but he is not to be led too far beyond his depth of acquaintance with terminology expressing abstract concepts.

The Abiding Word, I, 524, introduces a picture which is helpful:

"Note the golden chain extending from God's eternal purpose and foreknowledge and predestination through time, in which we are called and justified, to eternity, our glorification above. The fact that we have been called, that God has brought us to faith, should make us sure of our election before the world began as well as of our salvation after this time and this world has ceased to be. That golden chain was forged in the fires of God's everlasting love, eternal and unchanging as God Himself, and on the anvil of Calvary, erected in eternity by God's decree of redemption, on which the Lamb slain from eternity (Rev. 13:8), having been delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23), was made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). That chain—and every link thereof is unbreakable—that chain guarantees to us who believe our past election and our future glorification."

II

This Doctrine Is Our Highest and Greatest Comfort in Suffering

Our salvation is assured, because

- A. God, who is for us, is mightier than all who are against us (v. 31).

- B. God, who already has gone so far for us—all the way—will surely not stop at anything less (v. 32).
- C. No one can successfully accuse or condemn us (vv. 33-34).
- D. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, which is the love of God (vv. 35-39).

Note on V. 37: "More than conquerors." — This is the only place in the New Testament in which this combination form of the word occurs: *hyper* plus *nikao*. It carries us to the most sublime heights which can be attained by human language. What is there that can be desired beyond, over, and above victory? Only this, that it should last forever! A conqueror who has his victory nailed down forever might be called more than a conqueror, for he has accomplished what no other conqueror has ever accomplished, except the Son of God and those whom He draws to Himself in love to share in His eternal victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Conclusion: "The God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 5:7-11.)

A Collect for the Day

O almighty God, who didst grant unto Thine holy Apostle James the Elder grace to remain faithful, through suffering, unto his end, we pray Thee, by Thy Spirit, so to comfort us in all trials and afflictions and strengthen us in the assurance of salvation that we may abide steadfast in the faith unto our end; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Additional References: For an exegetical treatment of Rom. 8: 28-39 see CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, XXIII (May, 1952), 342—353. For an exegetical treatment of the doctrine of predestination as taught in Eph. 1:3-6, the other principal seat of the doctrine of election, see the THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY, V (January, 1901), 25—46.

Pitcairn, Pa.

LUTHER POELLOT