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Alex W. Guebert

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Robert H. Smith

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Arno Klausmeier

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Standard Gospel Series

(Except for the extended study of the text for the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity, by the Rev. Robert H. Smith, Chappaqua, N. Y., the outlines which follow were abstracted and translated from C. F. W. Walther's *Evangelien-Postille* by Prof. Alex W. Guebert, St. Louis, Mo. The notes on the "Hymn of the Week" are by the Rev. Arno Klausmeier, Ft. Wayne, Ind.

THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATTHEW 22:1-14

By Robert H. Smith

Jesus ends His career as He began it, issuing the clear and clarion call, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). Some wags, and some serious men too, have entertained themselves by musing over the possible developments in the thought of Jesus, if He had lived to a ripe old age. Which of His earlier doctrines, they ask, would He have recast, and what new thoughts would He have cherished?

But the entire career of Jesus from baptism to crucifixion shows a singular lack of "development." He always had that purity of heart which is to will one thing. With massive concentration and unwavering consistency He bore in on Israel, announcing the imminent coming of the kingdom and the necessity of repentance. He challenged men to see the eternal kingdom drawing near in His own Person.

At the end of His ministry Jesus stands in a situation of desperate and unparalleled seriousness. Confronting Jerusalem for the last time, He is engaged in the final struggle for the decision of His people according to the flesh.

I

At the approach of the Passover season, Jesus had entered the holy city once more to call on Israel to repent and turn. His deeds as well as His words were eloquent of impending crisis. He drove the money changers from the temple (Matt. 21:12-13), withered the fig tree (symbol of Israel, 21:14-22), and rebuked interrogators by raising the question of John the Baptist (21:23-27).

And then with winsome, wooing words He struggled to elicit from Israel a response of repentance and faith. He told three parables, reminding Israel of her gifts and responsibilities. The Jews are God's sons (Matt. 21:28-32), God's fellow workers (33-41), God's guests (22:1-10). Israel is God's elect, His chosen people.

Israel knows her privileges and indeed flaunts them: We are sons of Abraham. Yes, says Jesus, but you don't have Abraham's faith. We have Moses and the prophets. Yes, surely. But you do not do the law and you persecute the prophets.

And when Jesus spoke the parable of the wedding guests, Israel was on the point of rejecting the gift and claim of God's ultimate grace: the sending of His Son. She is in mortal danger of forfeiting her ancient status. If Israel rejects Jesus, then she is like a son who shirked his filial duty, all the while insisting on his loyalty (Matt. 21:28-32), like wicked tenants who kill the owner's son (21:33-41), like guests who prefer not to act on the king's invitation (22:1-10). In all these cases judgment is meted out in no uncertain terms. The son will not enter the kingdom, the tenants suffer

a miserable death, the recalcitrant guests have their places preempted.

Israel blinded herself with two thoughts: we have been called; without us God would have no subjects. Jesus declares that "many are called but few are chosen." And, in the words of the Baptizer, if Israel does not bear fruits that befit repentance, God is able from the stones to raise up children to Abraham. (Luke 3:8)

If the Jews turn aside from God, He will adopt tax collectors and harlots (21:32), give the kingdom to another nation (21:43), and fill His halls with whoever will come, whether they are good or bad (22:9,10).

And lest one think that the last estate of such a kingdom will be worse than the first, Jesus says that anyone lacking a wedding garment will be cast into outer darkness. God's will—the creation of a new and righteous Israel—shall be done.

II

V. 1 — "Parables." It was Jesus' custom to phrase His teaching in the form of brief stories with elements from ordinary life. Whereas every feature of an allegory must be identified, a parable as a rule has one point of comparison, the *tertium comparationis*. The present text is more complicated in that it is a double parable, falling easily into two sections: vv. 1-10 and 11-14.

V. 2 — "Kingdom of heaven" is reverential periphrasis for "kingdom of God," that is, the activity whereby God establishes His rule among men. God's kingdom is not like an era without disease or a place without heartache or a territory without hate or a city with golden streets or a land of opportunity. It is like a *King* who made a marriage feast for His son.

From the days of Hosea God's relationship to Israel had been pictured as that between Groom and bride. Late Jewish and Christian eschatology pictured the climax of the history of salvation as a wedding feast. The empha-

sis in this parable is not on the social customs of ancient Israel. The parable focuses on the action of God, who is on the verge of fulfilling all the Old Testament promises and Jewish hopes of an everlasting reign.

V. 3 — The central word in the parable is "call." The servants of the King are sent to call (καλέσαι) to the feast those who have previously been called (τοὺς κεκλημένους), to invite those who have already been invited.

Throughout the New Testament there recurs, as something accepted without question, a basic usage of the Old Testament: God's relationship with His people is that of the Caller and the called (cf. Is. 42:6; 43:1; 45:3; 48:13,15; 50:2; 51:2). In Is. 41:9 the word "call" (ἐκάλεσά σε) is explained by the address to Israel: "You are My servant (or son, παῖς), I have chosen you" (ἐξελεξάμην). Here, as usual, καλέω and ἐκλέγομαι are synonyms (cf. Matt. 22:14).

The tragedy in Jesus' parable is that those who were called simply "prefer not to come" (οὐκ ἤθελον ἔλθειν). They renounced their standing. They were the called who failed to heed the call, the invited who spurned the invitation. That time, as much as our own, was "the age of the shrugged shoulder."

V. 4 — The King is patient and sends more persuasive servants, who bring His touching plea: A sumptuous banquet table has been spread for you. But the prodigality of the King does not stir the invited to joy and response. They remain glued to their indifference.

V. 5 — The King cared, but the invited guests did not care (ἀμελήσαντες). They paid no attention to the repeated call, but walked away from it. They are too busy with lesser joys to taste God's eschatological joy. Their farms and their businesses are the center of their lives. (Cf. Luke 14:16-24)

V. 6 — Others demonstrate their resentment of God's intrusion into their privacy by laying violent hands on God's servants,

maltreating them, and finally killing them. Jesus seems consciously to be shaping His parable in terms of the treatment accorded to the prophets in Israel's history.

V. 7—The killing of His servants angered the King. He gave vent to His wrath by dispatching His soldiers, who destroyed the murderers. And they burned their city. In the context of the cleansing of the temple and the withering of the fig tree, "the burning of the city" appears to point forward to the destruction of Jerusalem, the desolation of the holy city.

V. 8—The King has His plan. And no recalcitrant mortal can frustrate God's design. Those invited prove themselves unworthy of their call. God will issue a new set of invitations to other persons.

V. 9—God sends servants to the "thoroughfares" (RSV). Sticking close to the elements of the Greek vocable, Arndt and Gingrich explain διεξόδους as "the place where a street cuts through a city boundary and goes out into the open country." They go with instructions to "invite as many as you find." There can be little argument that Jesus meant that the invitation of God would go to the Gentiles if Israel rejected it. (Matt. 8: 11, 12; 15:21-28; 24:14)

V. 10.—The upshot is that the servants call in all kinds of people, "good and bad." The hall is filled with persons reclining on the banquet couches (*ἀνακειμένων*). Matthew has a definite tendency to recall words of Jesus critical of the worshiping community (cf. Matt. 7:21 ff.; 10:32 ff.; ch. 18 and ch. 25; J. Schniewind, *Das Neue Testament Deutsch* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1954], II, 221). Lest anyone imagine that it is sufficient for salvation merely to hold membership in the church, Jesus appends an additional parabolic caution.

V. 11—The wedding celebration in ancient Palestine was a protracted affair. When the bridegroom brought his bride home, the

feasting began. It normally extended over seven days (Gen. 29:27; Jud. 14:12) and sometimes lasted even longer.

The King looked in on the festivities and spied a man who lacked a wedding garment. The garment is correctly thought to be the gift of righteousness in Jesus Christ. The prophet Isaiah said,

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (61:10)

However, the entire larger context of the parable includes more than the bestowal of the wedding garment; it includes the glorious result of this bestowal. And so the wedding garment stands for the all-pervasive joy that comes with the new existence wrought in repentance and the life in Christ.

Joy is the key signature of life in Christ (Matt. 5:12; 13:44; Luke 10:20). Repentance is by no means the opposite of joy (Matt. 6:17; Luke 15:7, 10, 24, 32). As Helmut Thielicke put it, "Repentance is not a weebegone renunciation of things that mean a lot to me; it is a joyful homecoming to the place where certain things no longer have any importance to me." (*The Waiting Father* [New York: Harper, 1959], p. 191)

Vv. 12, 13—Refusal to accept the "glad tidings of great joy," stubborn adherence to the old way of self-righteousness and resistance to the joy of repentance exclude from God's kingdom. The crucial nature of the issue is baldly stated in the drastic consequences attending the lack of faith and joy in Jesus Christ.

V. 14—"Many are called, but few are chosen." The attempt to find a distinction between the words "called" and "chosen" seems ill-starred and unsatisfactory. Many passages where the words are obviously synonyms and simply designations of Christians

are found in the New Testament. (Rev. 17:14; Rom. 1:1-7; 8:28; 1 Cor. 1:24; Jude 1; cf. Is. 41:9)

Jesus' saying is a pregnant statement of the falsity of thinking: "Once saved, always saved." The Christian's call or election is never an objective, unassailable possession. He is never relieved of the necessity imposed by 2 Peter 1:10, "Be the more zealous to confirm your call and election." (Cf. K. L. Schmidt on κλητός, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1938], III, 495—7)

III

Originally the parable envisioned not so much Jesus' invitation to sinners as the warning that the kingdom, if rejected by the Jews, would go to the Gentiles. The Gospel according to St. Matthew contains the dictum, "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But it ends with the great command to evangelize and teach the nations. The parable strikes a fatal blow at any pride of place or race, nation or station, tradition or denomination.

And yet many church members unfortunately rely for salvation on their ancestry, faithfulness, or sacrifices. More offensive than public infraction against the Ten Commandments are the smugness of the pillars, the self-satisfaction oozing from every pore of quite unexceptional men and women, the sanctimonious ease with which these selfish, narrow-minded persons assume that they are on the coziest terms with God. Not only are they often boastful and censorious, but they seem vaccinated against the infectious joy that marked the earliest Christians.

And more than a few continue to walk in the same old ruts, evidently neither willing nor able to bring their lives into conformity with their profession. Every pastor has listened with more or less patience to the old plaintive melody about the church as repository for every brand of hypocrite, dis-

simulator, cad, and wretch. He usually manages to sequelch the impulse to say, "Come anyway; one more won't make any difference." In a less heated moment he even sees the unfortunate truth in the harsh allegation. Thielicke fingers a temptation within all of us: "We seat ourselves at the banquet table without a wedding garment when we allow our sins to be forgiven but still want to hang on to them." (Op. cit., p. 190)

The parable has an obvious connection with Reformation Sunday, November 4. Justification through faith (the invitation extended to as many as will come, both bad and good) is not the death warrant of love and good works. Faith alone justifies, but faith is never alone. The justified will *wear* the wedding garment.

The Reformation principle declares that the church, too, stands under the judgment of God. The modern phrase, "the conversion of the church," bandied about as a novelty, is the old Reformation wine in a new skin. The Reformation knew what the New Testament says: Salvation is neither our just deserts nor a possession we control. It is God's gift every morning, to be appropriated daily by repentance and faith.

"Few Are Chosen"

- I. You are God's table guests.
 - A. You are not like the many who turn a deaf ear to God's call.
 - B. You have come, and you sit at table in the wedding feast of God's Son.
- II. Improper dress threatens your position.
 - A. Refusal of the wedding garment is a refusal of repentance and joy in Jesus Christ.
 1. You may err as the Jews did. They imagined that they needed no repentance. They were smug in their reliance on performance, nation, race, and religion.
 2. You may err as the hapless guest.

- He heeded the invitation but continued to hold to his old way of life.
- B. The consequence of improper dress is twofold:
1. People outside the church are offended.
 2. But the final result for the man who lacks repentance is that he is cast into outer darkness.
- III. Through Jesus Christ God extends to you the solemn invitation to the joy of eternal fellowship with Himself.
- A. His call is genuine and valid whether you are good or bad.
- B. Jesus died in order to open the way for you into the wedding hall, where there is fulfillment of all your longing and the most complete joy of all.
- IV. Trust the crucified and resurrected Jesus.
- A. Renounce everything which hinders your communion with Him.
- B. By faith in Him you will live with Christ and the Father forever.

The Hymn of the Week: "O Lord, Look Down from Heaven, Behold," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 260.

Fred H. Lindemann draws from this Sunday's Epistle the following "message of the day": "Look carefully, then, how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil" (*The Sermon and the Propers*, IV, 91). The Introit calls on us to praise the "righteous" God; the Epistle prescribes "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"; in the Collect we pray that God's "pardon and peace" may enable "faithful people" to "serve . . . with a quiet mind." This "quiet mind" waits on the Lord, who hears the cries from the depths (Gradual), but whose invitation of grace cannot be spurned with impunity: the

man "not having a wedding garment" is cast out. (Gospel)

The hymn of the week is Luther's versification of Psalm 12, which first appeared in the *Nürnberg Achliederbuch* of 1524. In it he calls on God to raise up His arm in the defense of His poor Christendom and His truth. On the other hand the afflictions of Luther's "present time" do not cause him to lose his "quiet mind"—trial and temptation are merely God's method of purifying His "own congregation," His "little flock," so that *His Word* may shine the brighter. Here is a salutary despair in human wisdom and "outward show." Here is a faithful voice of praise even "out of the depths." Here is a "psalm," a "hymn," a "spiritual song" of mutual witness and consolation of brethren, "making the most of the time, because the days are evil."

Although the hymn was sung to two other melodies before the present melody was wedded to the text by Johann Walther in the 1524 Erfurt *Enchiridion* (*Es ist das Heil*, TLH 377, and *Der Herr ist mein getreuer Hirt* were used), the melody in our *Hymnal* fits the text amazingly well.

THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 4:47-54

The doctrine that a man is justified before God and saved alone by grace is offensive to many people, no doubt, because they think that man is saved *because* of faith and that faith is the *cause* of salvation. But all of Scripture has but one teaching: a man is not saved because of faith, but through faith. Faith is the hand that grasps the salvation Christ earned, the vessel in which it collects the gifts of grace, the key by which it gains access to heavenly treasures. To be saved through faith means to be saved by grace without works. To be lost means to be lost because the salvation offered without cost

is not accepted by faith. Faith saves therefore, not because it is a God-pleasing work, but because it accepts the grace of God. Scripture also clearly teaches that the faith of true believers is never perfect, but always retains certain faults and weaknesses. For these reasons the Christian cannot base his faith on his own works but on Christ, who is the cause of his salvation and to whom he clings by the hand of faith. Whoever depends on his own faith and expects to earn something by such faith has no true faith. It is very important for us, therefore, to learn to know the faults and weaknesses which mar even the faith of true believers. The Gospel for today gives me the occasion to talk to you about

The Faults and Weaknesses Which Mar the Faith of True Believers

I shall show you

- I. What these faults and weaknesses are
- II. How believers may free themselves of faults and weaknesses.

I

A. The nobleman whose son was sick undoubtedly had genuine faith in Christ, otherwise he would not have gone to Christ for help. As a resident in Capernaum, he had heard about Christ's teaching, divine power, and willingness to help people in trouble. By going to Christ for help he gave evidence of confidence and trust in Him, but his faith nevertheless was marred by imperfections.

B. In the first place, the nobleman insisted that Christ should come down and help his son. He supposed Christ would have to be in the sickroom, speak certain words and touch his son to effect a cure. In the second place, Christ was constrained to say to him: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." He regarded Christ as the Messiah, yet to be certain he wanted to wait and see whether Christ would perform the

requested miracle. In the third place, the nobleman's anxious cry, "Sir, come down ere my son die," expresses impatience and the thought that, if the son dies, there would be no further opportunity to ask Christ for help.

C. The faults we see in the faith of the nobleman are still present in the faith of many Christians today. Like the nobleman who wanted to believe firmly, if Christ consented to come to his house, many Christians today are ready to believe God is gracious if He answers their prayer immediately, if He gives them prosperity, if He blesses them with health and with success in their business. Like the nobleman who did not want to believe firmly until he had seen signs and wonders, many Christians today want to see before they believe. As evidence of their faith they rely on the presence of joy and delight in their heart. Again, many Christians today have a goodly amount of confidence in God's grace, help and deliverance, if in their opinion a change for the better seems possible. But if every prospect for a solution of their immediate problem disappears, their confidence is shaken.

D. These faults and weaknesses which frequently mar the faith of true believers, especially of beginners in the faith are serious, because faith deals with invisible and future things. (Cf. Heb. 11:1.) It is unquestioning confidence in God's Word and promises. When it seems to be forsaken by every one, it still believes in the nearness of God's grace. When it seems to be overwhelmed by sin, it still clings to the justification earned by Christ. When it seems to be cut in shreds by God's wrath, it still looks up to His mercy. When it seems that the jaws of death will close upon it, it sees and glories in eternal life. Abraham and Paul had such a faith. Unless a man's faith has this confidence, it has not reached full bloom and maturity.

II

A. Christ neither rejects the nobleman nor does He disregard the weaknesses in his faith. He purifies and refines it of its dross. He removes his doubts by saying: "Go thy way. Thy son liveth." Convinced that he would see his son alive, he received further strengthening of his faith as he drew near his home (vv. 51-53). The spark of faith which he had when he left Capernaum had grown into a huge flame, and he sought to win his whole house for Christ.

B. In this way every beginner in faith can be freed from the faults and weaknesses of his faith. When he hears and studies the Gospel promises, he must apply them to himself. Since God loved the whole world, he must say to himself that God loves also him. Since Christ sacrificed Himself to redeem all men, he can be certain that Christ is also his Redeemer, his Advocate, his Mediator, his Savior.

C. A Christian should not be disturbed by the thought that his conscience still accuses him of so many sins. Just as the nobleman did not wait to see the fulfillment of Christ's Word before he believed, so today, when the Christian hears Christ's gracious Gospel, he gives all honor to God and accepts Christ's promises of grace and forgiveness in spite of his sin and unworthiness. As he clings to His Word and lives with it daily, God will let him experience its power, as he finds rest for his soul, peace for his conscience, comfort in trouble and in the hour of death, power and strength to overcome world, sin, and Satan. Thus strengthened in his faith, he will also be an effective witness for Christ like the nobleman.

D. If you are not conscious of weaknesses in your faith, you may not know what faith is. It is the nature of faith to rise and fall. Yours is an imaginary faith if you think it is always strong. Those of you who know the faults and see the weaknesses of your

faith, follow the example of the nobleman, so that your faith may grow stronger and you may be witnesses for Christ. (Cf. James 5:19,20)

The Hymn of the Week: "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word," The Lutheran Hymnal, 261.

"The whole world" is ruled by God, the "King Almighty," the Creator, for the good of "the undefiled in the way, who walk in the Law of the Lord" under God's verdict of acquittal in Christ: "Blessed!" (Introit). Therefore we pray to Him "to keep [His] household, the church, in continual godliness, that through [His] protection it may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve [Him] in good works" (Collect). The war which we fight with Spirit-given weapons against demonic forces takes on many forms, but God's victory in Christ is the source of our trust (Epistle). The Creator of all defends His Zion (Gradual). The Word of God spoken by Christ is not an idle word, but a Word replete with the power of life and death. (Gospel)

After the apparent halt in the Turkish advance in 1529, the world situation again became desperate in 1541. Emperor Charles V had lost his fleet off Algiers; rumor had it that the pope had worked out a pact of common aggression against Germany with the Sultan and the King of France (hence the opposition of Luther to the "dual entente" of pope and Turk, as "the Antichrist"). The Winkworth translation in *The Lutheran Hymnal* chooses to avoid overspecification and lumps all the demonic opponents of the church under the phrase "those who fain by craft and sword would wrest the Kingdom from [God's] Son and set at naught all He has done." The history of the various forms of the hymn cannot occupy us here; suffice it to say that our three-stanza form appeared in Wittenberg in 1543. The melody *Erbalt uns, Herr*, which is a variant of *Veni, re-*

demptor gentium, was probably written by Johann Walther around 1542 and appeared in the 1543 Wittenberg *Geistliche Lieder*.

THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY

MATTHEW 18:23-35

The kind of life a man leads here affects him for good or ill in this life and in the world to come. There is a God who hates and punishes sin; there is a Judgment Day that all men must face; there is a hell in which all unpardoned sinners must suffer eternally. (Cf. Ps. 7:11-13; Heb. 9:27; 2 Cor. 5:10; Matt. 10:28b; Luke 16:23, 24.) Yet many people today ridicule this teaching of Scripture and refuse to believe it. Even some churches claim that all men will be saved and will enjoy heavenly bliss. This shocking denial of Biblical truth ought not surprise us. (Cf. 2 Peter 3:3, 4.) Others in a large segment of Christendom believe indeed that sin will be punished but also are committed to the pernicious view that a man may atone for sins even after death and thereafter enter eternal bliss. It shall be my purpose to show you:

How Utterly Groundless and Futile It Is to Hope That a Man Can Do Something for His Salvation After His Death

- I. Let me prove the utter futility of this hope
- II. Let me show what we are summoned to do in view of the futility of this hope

I

A. Natural man is exceedingly pleased with the teaching that he is able to do something for his salvation after death. But since without the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit he cannot arrive at the certainty of salvation solely by the grace of God, the mere possibility of making up for something that he has neglected to do in this life

appears very alluring to him even if it means enduring most terrible pains in purgatory. Though many people cling to this hope, it nevertheless is totally groundless. Let me show you why.

B. Many think they have found a powerful reason for their hope in the words, "till he should pay," in verse 34. They say the word "till" must point to a time when the debt will be paid in full, and that therefore Christ's words indicate that a man who has died in his sin can work out his salvation after death.

C. But that the words of Christ "till he should pay" do not have to mean "up to a certain time" is incontrovertibly clear from other Bible passages. Frequently the word "till" is used of things that never come to an end. (Cf. Ps. 110:1; Ps. 45:6a; Heb. 1:8a; 2 Sam. 6:23.) These examples show clearly that Scripture says certain things continue "until" such and such a time without denying their eternal duration, and that our text does not necessarily say the wicked servant will have a chance to work off his debt.

D. But the word "till" *can* not here refer to a limited time. Such a meaning would be in direct contradiction to God's Word which clearly says that Christ Himself carried all the sins of men and was the only One who could atone for them, that man cannot save himself, but is saved only by grace through faith in Christ. (Cf. Is. 63:3a; John 1:29b; 14:6; Acts 4:12.) Such an interpretation vitiates the cardinal doctrine of Scripture, justification by faith in Christ alone. When Christ says certain people will not get out of hell till they have paid all that is due, He is pointing to the severity of divine justice: such people are irretrievably lost. And He is urging us to accept His payment for our sins so that we can escape the eternal torments of hell.

E. Others believe that Christ alone saves

and reject the thought that a man can expiate sin in the hereafter and yet are of the opinion that a man who died in unbelief may still come to faith and be saved through Christ. The Gospel for today strenuously rejects this erroneous idea. For when Christ says that the wicked servant must *pay* his full debt after treading grace underfoot, He makes it quite plain that the time of grace for the wicked has come to an end. Whoever does not heed the Gospel words: "Be ye reconciled to God," must hear God's demanding, frightening voice: "Pay your debt in full!" (Cf. Is. 55:6; Eccl. 11:3b; John 9:4b; Gal. 6:10a; 2 Cor. 6:2b.) These passages, in fact all Scripture, are an urgent summons to the world to repent and believe in Christ, because in eternity there is no time for repentance. (Cf. Matt. 25:1-13)

F. See the futility of the hope that thinks something can be done for a man's salvation after death. Whoever bases his salvation on this hope, deceives himself. In hell he will see that Christ, and Christ alone, atoned for his sin, but that now he must pay for his sins without any prospect of ever completing that payment.

II

A. Let me now show you what we are summoned to do in view of the futility of such a hope. Even if there were any ground for hoping that the grace of God could be obtained at some future time, it would be foolish and godless to wait for one moment to seek and accept this highest good any man can possess. A man would be a fool to choose to stay in misery, if he could obtain happiness and prosperity immediately for himself and family. It is far more foolish not to follow this the-sooner-the-better principle in spiritual things. It is the height of folly to live under God's wrath here, and want to inquire about His grace in eternity, to be burdened with sin and an evil conscience here, and want to be delivered from

them there, to live as a child of hell here, and want to become a child of heaven there.

B. But as we have seen, the hope of doing in eternity what we neglected to do here is utterly futile. Anyone who has not accepted God's grace, therefore, ought to hurry and accept it immediately. Remember the wicked servant in the text. Through your innumerable sins against the Ten Commandments you owe God a fabulous sum, far more than the ten thousand talents the servant owed his master. God called you to account also, whenever you read or heard His Word preached or your conscience convicted you. Judgment has been pronounced upon you. But did you plead for patience and grace? Did you confess your sins? Did you admit you were lost? Did you come to faith in Christ who died for your sins?

C. Or did you have no time for such thoughts? Were your business affairs more important? Did pleasure or riches have a greater appeal? Why do you want to wait? Death can snatch you away quickly. If your sins are not removed by accepting the grace of God now, they will cling to you throughout all eternity. And the voice of God will din in your ears: "Pay what you owe Me!"

D. Those of us who have accepted the grace of God moreover are urged to be on our guard, lest we lose this treasure, the grace of God for our salvation. May we always walk in the fear of God now so that we may enter the joys of the next world. May each one of us truly repent, fervently pray, valiantly fight to the end, die in grace and so enter into the unspeakable glories of eternal life. May Jesus Christ grant this to us all!

The Hymn of the Week: "O Faithful God, Thanks Be to Thee," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 321.

As the end of the church year approaches, the eschatological note ("the day of Jesus

Christ" twice in the Epistle, the accounting taken by the king in the Gospel) comes to the fore. But we are always living in "the last days." The penitent plea of the Introit for forgiveness has been answered, and "there is forgiveness" with God through Christ. The God who is "the Author of all godliness" does "hear the devout prayers" of His church (Collect). The element of thanksgiving in the Epistle as Paul reflects on his brethren in the faith and the reminder in the Gospel of mutual brotherly forgiveness as people forgiven by God find echoes in the Gradual.

Nicolaus Selnecker's fine hymn was written as part of an appendix to three 1572 sermons, in which he treated the Chief Parts of the Small Catechism. Our hymn was intended for the Fifth Chief Part and is entitled "How one should comfort himself in Holy Absolution." The mutual forgiveness is proclaimed in the church by the formal absolution spoken by the minister; the note of individual forgiveness ("forgive . . . every one his brother"—the Gospel) is implicit throughout in the use of the first person: "us," "our," "me." Thus in the church there is pure and full forgiveness. (For notes on Selnecker see *CTM*, XXXI [Jan. 1962], 33.)

The tune *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten* was treated in *CTM*, XXXI (Feb. 1962), 104.

THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATT. 22:15-22

Christianity is a religion for all times and for all people. Anyone can become a Christian and be saved in any country, under all forms of governments, in every calling, at any age, under all circumstances. Christ's kingdom is not a kingdom of this world, but an invisible heavenly kingdom in the hearts and souls of men that cannot be overthrown

by any earthly power. We are fortunate that we are living in a country where the government does not interfere with religious beliefs and practices. Glorious as religious freedom is, many people here abuse its privileges. They suppose it means to be free from God, from divine services, from obedience to parents and government, from all discipline and good order. They seek a freedom which is nothing but license to do what one pleases. But God is still God. His throne is set up in every country. No one can walk out of His kingdom of power; no one can break His laws with impunity. The words of Christ, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" are still in effect. Today I want to talk to you on

The Unalterable Validity of Christ's Command: "Render Unto Caesar the Things That Are Caesar's, and Unto God the Things That Are God's."

- I. The command: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's"
- II. The command: "And unto God the things that are God's"

I

A. The words of Christ, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," do not seem to apply to us who live in a republic, where no Caesar, king, or prince has control over the citizens. But just as Luther points out in his explanation of the Sixth Commandment that its demand concerns everyone and not only married people, so Christ's command to give to Caesar applies to all men.

B. The Jews believed the Messiah would free them from the rule of the Roman government. When Christ made no such move, the Pharisees in particular were deeply disappointed in Him. They put the question in verse 17 in order to tempt Him and did not anticipate Christ's answer in verses 18—21.

"If you are using Caesar's money," Christ says, "you admit that you are his subjects. If he is ruling over you, pay your taxes, and give Caesar the obedience and honor due him." Christ is not inculcating mere obedience to an earthly sovereign, but is establishing the fact that He, the Messiah, did not come to abolish any of the ordinances God set up for the good of man and to release anyone who believes in Him from observing any such ordinance.

C. It is clear, then, that Christ's words concerning Caesar are unalterably valid in our country also. We have federal, state, and local governments. Without them our country could not exist, nor could we enjoy peace and prosperity. Though a republic with officials chosen by the people, our government is God's servant. Its laws should be holy and inviolable to us. We should gladly pay our taxes that the salutary institutions of the government may be maintained and God's will be fulfilled. We must be willing even to lay down our lives to protect our country. It is no small sin, then, to transgress any of the laws of the country or cheat the government in any form. If we want to be good Christians, we will want to obey Christ's command: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." (Cf. Rom. 13: 1-47)

D. Yet God has appointed a head not only for every city and country, but also for every home and family. God's Word places authority into the hands of parents (Cf. Eph. 6:1, 2), of men and women who employ servants (Cf. Eph. 6:5, 6), of a husband in relationship to his wife (Eph. 5:22-25). Thus we see the words, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" over the door of every home.

E. You sons and daughters, if you want to be children of God and enjoy God's grace, be obedient, thankful, and humble children as long as you live. Do not follow the ex-

ample of others who despise and neglect their parents. Remember, if you neglect and despise your parents, you are neglecting and despising God. Honor your father and mother, for this is the first commandment with promise that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.

F. You servants and employees, remember that you are serving Christ when you perform your various duties for your employers. If you are working only for money, your service before God is sinful and reprehensible. If you balk at hard work, are hurt by trivial things, are not able to take criticism which, at times, can cut deep, you may be far removed from real Christianity. Do repent and look to Christ; otherwise He will finally have to say to you, "I have never known you," you faithless servant, you greedy employee, "depart from me, you evildoer!"

G. You wives, also note Christ's words carefully. At the altar of God you promised to love your husband dearly, to be his helpmate, and to obey him according to the ordinance of God. Do not try to excuse yourself by saying that your husband is so weak, so gentle, so yielding that you rule over him by trickery, flattery, or through outbursts of anger. Your husband cannot ignore the responsibility God has put in his hand, for He has made the husband the head of the wife. You cannot upset the holy ordinance of God. Hear, if you have ears to hear!

II

A. Christ also issued the command: "Render unto God the things that are God's." He had a special reason for uttering this command. Many people are ready to give every man whatever may be due him, but they do not think of the obligation they have toward God. They believe they are good Christians and deserve salvation if they are good citizens and have obedient children. Others are guided by the principle that service to men precedes service to God.

B. Christ corrects such errors by saying, "Render unto God the things that belong to God." If we want to come to God, we must give Him everything that belongs to Him. Let us remember, everything belongs to God, our body, soul, heart, life, strength, joy, honor. He is the Creator of all things, the Master of everything, the Source from which all things come and to which all things must return.

C. Have you given God all things that belong to Him? For whom are you living? Are you living for yourself or for God? Is it really your intention to dedicate every hour of your life to the honor of God? Do you really believe you have nothing else to do in the world than to glorify God? Is this the goal you are pursuing? Is this the point at which all your wishes, desires, and longings come together?

D. By nature every man lives to himself, has enmity in his heart toward God, seeks rest and satisfaction in the goods, joys, and honors of the world. But when a man is touched by the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit and comes to faith in Christ, he becomes a new creature and knows God to be his highest good. Who among us has experienced this change of heart? Who among us can truthfully speak the words in Ps. 73: 25 and Ps. 115:1?

E. Someone now might say, "I'd like to serve God with all my heart, but I work among many godless people who make it impossible for me to think and talk about God." Another person might say, "I'd like to be an earnest Christian, but my parents, or

wife, or husband love the world and I must please them in many ways." If you have such an excuse, hear how Christ explains our text in Matt. 22:8; Luke 14:26; Matt. 10:37.

F. A decision must be made. If you want to come to God, you must leave the world and give yourself wholly to God. Whoever believes in God will not be deceived. He has peace that rises above all understanding. His heart is filled with comfort and hope. And when he dies, God will receive him into everlasting glory.

The Hymn of the Week: "Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 609.

Today's propers remind us that God's "thoughts of peace and not of evil" (Introit) include the return of "the captivity of Jacob" in and through the consummation of all things. The imminence of the End calls for our imitation of God's saints (Epistle). Let your faith find expression in your mundane as well as in your religious activities; citizens of the heavenly fatherland should be good citizens of the commonwealths of earth (Gospel). Our final trust and boast, however, remains in Him who has saved us from our enemies, who has put to shame them that hated us, and who has revealed Himself as the Help and Shield of those that fear Him (Gradual).

The January issue of this magazine carried brief notes on the life of Philipp Nicolai. His "King of Chorales" needs no introduction—it speaks for itself and virtually sings itself! "Hallelujah *in saecula saeculorum!* Amen."