

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

An Excellent Ministry

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Homiletics

Brief Studies

Book Review

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HOMILETICS

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MALACHI

MAL. 1:5

1. In today's Gospel (Luke 5:1-11) Peter would question the Lord as to the wisdom of further fishing. He discovers the wisdom of obedience to the Lord's word. Malachi's writing is filled with dialog between the Lord and rebellious priests—"I say," but "you say."

2. The "storehouse" would be full if obedience to the Lord's Word were a reality (Deut. 28:2-12; Ezek. 34:25-31). Cf. Mal. 3:10.

Open Storehouses

I. Countries that Obey are Blessed

A. *Israel and Edom.* Despite her vaunted wisdom, destruction comes to Edom. This is a warning to all (Mal. 1:2-5; Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 25:12-14). God, by acts of power and grace, makes known His greatness and His love. (Rom. 9:10-13; Mal. 1:5; Obad. 2-16)

B. *Israel and Empires.* Egypt, under the Rameses dynasty (1200—1085 B.C.), was destroyed; likewise the Babylonians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians. "That night Belshazzar was slain." Malachi lived in the midst of a declining Persian empire. Israel as nation and people prospered, for "great is the Lord beyond Israel" (or, as Hebrew may have it, "over" Israel). The history of God's people is *His* story.

C. *History.* God is not merely "in" a nation or "with" a nation, but He is "over" a people and "beyond" the borders. He is eternal and omnipresent; there is no barrier or boundary. So His people are set in history but belong to eternity. God is with us, over us, in us, in Jesus Christ. In Christ we live forever. In Christ we have being. Nothing separates us from God's love. Cf. today's Epistle, 1 Peter 3:8-15. "At Your word I will let down the net" (Gospel for Trinity V).

As Israel was summoned to obey and be blessed, so are we in our "home and native land."

II. Covenants of Grace Give Bounties

A. God established *covenants* which also included *laws* (Ex. 19:1-25; 20:1-17; Deut. 29:1-29; 30:1-21). While the covenant had a sign and *seal* of circumcision (Gen. 17:2ff.; 22:18), while it assured a country, a land, and a people's Seed as *blessing* to all people, it also required obedience. Malachi's writing abounds with covenant references—and covenant breaking. Cf. 2:4, 5, 8, 10, 14; 3:1.

B. God remains *true* to His covenant of grace. The Sun of righteousness rises with healing in His wings, and a new day dawns (4:2). The Lord shall come to His temple (3:1). Malachi does not end with a "curse" as some suppose, but with a promise that the Messiah and His forerunner will come so that God will not curse. The storehouses of His grace are open! "Ye shall grow up as calves of the stall" (Mal. 4:2). The covenant is fulfilled in Christ.

III. Questioning His Bounties is not Pleasing

A. "You say" and "I say," repeated so often in Malachi's writings, is echoed in Paul's: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" (Rom. 6:1). Israel was not chosen for any other reason than that God is "faithful" in His covenant of grace (Deut. 7:6ff.). God's love to Israel forms the motive and model for Israel's conduct toward God. She is to be obedient to the covenant and aware of His power and grace.

B. As *priests and people* were asked to repent and respond, so we beneficiaries of His covenant of grace, realized in fullness in Christ, respond and repent. We are His, sealed and seized by Holy Baptism, incorporated into His body. We are redeemed only

by His grace in Jesus Christ. Our obedience of sacrifice (not merely "religion"), of loyalties in home and to authority, of money and muscle, is a response of faith.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

NEH. 9:33

Introduction

Opening words of Ezra, the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia (Ezra 1:2ff.), identical with the closing words of 2 Chronicles (36:23), order return of captives. Among the first leaders are Zerubbabel and Jeshua. The first project of the returning displaced persons is the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem, completed 515 B. C., 23 years after Cyrus' edict of return. Jerusalem's gates and walls were repaired under Nehemiah despite the fierce opposition of Sanballat, governor of Syria, and Tobiah, the Ammonite. Nehemiah probably worked under Artaxerxes I, and Ezra under Artaxerxes II.

Ezra was a priest and scribe. Nehemiah a cupbearer for the Persian king of Babylon. Ezra's concern was for the Word in the church and Nehemiah's for the walls of the city. No distinction or division in their minds. The Feast of Booths was celebrated. This preexilic feast reminded Israelites of the wanderings in the wilderness. To celebrate correctly they must separate themselves from their non-Jewish neighbors (Neh. 9:1ff.). Included in the ritual and action was a confession of sin. The text (Neh. 9:33) is part of that confession.

I. "*We Have Acted Wickedly*"

A. *We*. Confession begins with the governors of the people of Israel, priests, Levites, chosen leaders, as well as the people. Education and religious position does not exclude.

Confession is demanded of us all, for all have sinned (1 John 1:8, 10; Rom. 5:12; 3:23). It is so easy, and we are so quick,

to blame others for our sins or to point to sins of others. *We* have sinned.

B. People of God are called to remain firm and loyal to God in face of tensions and pressures around them. This the Jews had often failed to do.

C. People deserve punishment (Neh. 9:33a). No one tries to avoid or brush off the deserved punishments. If we do well, let us rejoice; but if we do wickedly, let us recognize God's judgments.

Judgment comes in home and in church. The 114 Levites and 18 priests (even mentioned by name in Neh. 9) are listed specifically as sinners. All people have done wickedly, and all are to be punished. None shall escape. Leadership in home and church is held responsible.

II. "*But Thou Hast Dealt Faithfully*"

A. *The true God*. "The God of heaven," who gives kingdoms (2 Chron. 36:23), who is good, and whose steadfast love continues forever (Ezra 3:10), is Israel's God. He is Lord alone (Neh. 9:6), the great, the mighty, the terrible God. (Neh. 9:32)

B. *He deals*. God deals, that is, He gives a portion, a lot, a share. It is not a chance deal. As a loving father gives wisely to a child, so God deals with us. And He apportions to us by Law and by grace. The wages of sin is death, and His gift is eternal life through Christ.

C. *Faithfully*. God is faithful. When Ezra dedicated the temple, the Passover Feast was immediately celebrated, a reminder of God's faithfulness. When the walls were dedicated, the Feast of Booths was immediately celebrated, a reminder of God's faithfulness. This is not merely a "faith forward" but also a "faith backward" thrust. God is never half-full of faith. His promises are "Yea" and "Amen." We are faithless; He is faithful. His faithfulness is full in Jesus' sacrifice.

D. *Steadfast*. God is steadfast, for He can-

not be moved. He neither leaves us nor forsakes us. The faithful covenant God reconciled the world unto Himself in Jesus Christ. He cannot be moved from His promises. He does the reconciling, not we. He is the one who runs after us who run from Him.

Conclusion

Well it is for us to go to the altar, stand with Ezra, the priest and scribe, with Nehemiah, the builder, with the Levites, and confess humbly but boldly: "We have acted wickedly, but God has dealt faithfully with us," by His grace in Christ.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ESTHER

ESTHER 4:14

Relation to Propers

The *Introit* (Ps. 47:1, 3) stresses God's enthronement as King of all nations, subduing people and nations under His feet. This certainly is the theme of the Book of Esther. The *Gradual* (Ps. 34) carries out the same thought of His victory over all. None shall defeat Israel. The *Collect* underscores the chronicler's narrative in Esther. God's "never-failing providence orders all things in heaven and earth."

The *Gospel* (Mark 8:1-9) relates one of the narratives of God's feeding the people in the wilderness. God has compassion on His people, as the scenery of a feast suggests. And the narrative of Esther with its three feasts relates the finger of God at work even if God's name is not mentioned in the book.

Introduction

Esther is a heroine of first rank among Israelites and Christians.

The development of the Feast of *Purim* is explained in the Book of Esther. Held the last month of the religious year to commemorate the defeat of Haman's plots to eliminate the Jews. That day two readings in the synagogue: Ex. 17:8-16 from Torah and Esther from

Kethubim. The theme of both readings is God's deliverance.

Esther — God Saves From Destruction

I. Feast of *Abasuerus*

A. *The occasion of the feast.* Xerxes I (485—464 B. C.), Ahasuerus of the Biblical account, holds feast in third year, 482 B. C., for army chiefs of Persia and Media (Esther 1). The exhibition of his pomp, glory, and power is followed by seven days of feasting. Queen Vashti entertains the women separately. Vashti is ordered to appear before drunken lords to display her beauty as a common dancing girl. She says No. She is banished.

B. *The outcome of the feast.* Four years later (479 B. C.), after defeat at Salamis and Plataea, Xerxes comforts himself in harem (according to Herodotus), and replaces Vashti with beauty queen winner Esther (formerly Hadassah). She is his delight. A little later Mordecai, her cousin, uncovers a plot of two bed-chamber servants to kill Xerxes, and through Esther's report the king is saved.

Lessons

1. The pride of life (1 John 2:16, 17) and of nations cannot prevent moral lapses or military defeats.

2. Beauty (Esther 1:10, 11; 2:7) is best when it is not merely external but also internal. (1 Peter 3:3, 4)

3. God uses even men's weaknesses to show forth His strength. Cf. synagog reading for Purim, Ex. 17:12; cf. 2 Cor. 12:9

II. Feast of *Esther*

A. *The occasion of the feast.* Two feasts were suggested by Esther. Her request concerning Israel's enemy was made at the second feast. Haman's plot is related to the king.

B. *The outcome of the feast.* Between the two feasts the king is unable to sleep.

Chance reading of history reveals Mordecai not properly honored for saving king's life. Haman in humiliation honors Mordecai. At the second feast Haman falls from King's favor and is hanged on the gallows prepared for Mordecai.

Lessons

1. Sins come home. Saul failed to kill King Agag, and now an Agagite (cf. 1 Sam. 15:7-9; Esther 3:1; 2:5) would destroy Saul's fellow Benjamite. When we fail to obey God's commands, even the third and fourth generation suffer.

2. "Accidents" of life, "perchances" to man, often are opportunities for God to act: Pharaoh's daughter's desire for a bath that resulted in her finding Moses; Ruth's gleaning in the fields of Boaz; a king reading history to put himself back to sleep. Cf. Rom. 8:28, "all things." The help is from "another quarter." (4:14)

3. Opportunities confront us wherever we are placed by God. Now, where we are now, in family, church, government. Live for God now and here. "If I had my life to live over again" has little meaning later.

III. Feast of Purim

A. *The occasion of the feast.* Traditionally it is held on the 14th and the 15th of Adar (about March) and is accompanied by a strong spirit of nationalism. Its origin is recorded in the Book of Esther's closing chapter. The word PUR refers to the "lot" to be cast (Esther 3:7; 9:26) for best time to liquidate the Jewish people.

B. *The outcome of the feast.* Consistently celebrated even at the Lord's time.

Lessons

1. The feast could give rise to vindictiveness. The inspired writings clearly reveal that God knows what is in man. Man needs redemption. He cannot redeem himself.

2. The word *purim* may seem to suggest

"chances" or "lots" in life, but God is in control, even if the word "God" does not appear in the Book of Esther. "Not everyone who says, 'Lord, Lord,' enters the kingdom"; the mere addition or use of God's name does not make an act holy. The invisible God and His invisible hand may not always be clear or known, but God is always at work. If any one person would demonstrate God's fulfilling purposes in life, it is Jesus Christ. Not by chance nor accident, but by purpose, by plan, by determination, by will of God the Father, He redeemed.

3. Dr. Louis Ginzberg (died 1953) of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York points out that Esther is the last book of Hebrew Scriptures. "The heroine of the last canonical book was named Esther, that is, Venus, the morning-star, which sheds its light after all the other stars have ceased to shine, and while the sun still delays to rise." (*Legends of the Bible*, Simon and Schuster, p. 646). The true Morning Star is Jesus Christ (Rev. 22:16). He is the One who ushered in the day of grace. By His redemption He leads up to the dawn of everlasting day, and He is the Sun of righteousness for eternal day in heaven.

4. Israel was saved for a purpose, not to exist for self, but to bring forth the world's deliverance.

Conclusion

Feasts of men and festivals of the church reveal man's needs, but a compassionate and merciful God feeds us with food convenient. God gives us gifts, and none are better than the gift of His grace and undeserving forgiveness in Jesus Christ. (Rom. 6:23)

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOHN THE BAPTIST

LUKE 1:57-80

Proper for the Day. — The Epistle (Rom. 8:12-17) declares that "sons of God" are

motivated not by flesh but by the Spirit. So John the Baptizer stressed people should not boast they are "sons of Abraham," for God could raise up children out of the stones (Matt. 3:9; Luke 3:8). The Gospel (Matt. 7:15-21) bids us produce fruit that comes from repentance, and so spoke John (Matt. 3:8). But it *takes* the Gospel to enable us to bear fruit. It all begins in the Gospel.

Introduction

Where does the "Gospel of Jesus Christ" begin? Mark 1:1: "Here begins the Gospel . . ." and then is unfolded first the story of John's appearing in the wilderness. Matt. 1:1 "A table of descent . . ." is first given, followed by assurance to Joseph and the Gentile Wise Men. But Matt. 3:1 begins the account of the works and words of Jesus with "About that time John the Baptist appeared. . . ." Luke's short dedication leads to (1:5): "In the days of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah. . . ." And after telling of the annunciation to Mary, Luke returns to the birth of John. The work of the Gospel continues in our lives as we remember how the Gospel begins with

John The Baptist—Prophet Of God

I. "My Child . . . Prophet of the Highest"

A. An unusual birth to Elizabeth and Zechariah, "both well on in years" (Luke 1:7). The "barren woman" bearing a child late in life recurs as a symbol of God's promised fulfillment. Cf. Sarah and the covenant with Isaac (Gen. 17:15-21; Luke 1:73); Hannah and kingmaker Samuel (1 Sam. 1 and 2). The birth is clearly not by the will of man but by the compassion of God.

B. A child of promise to be a visual demonstration of the promise of God. Call him "John" (Luke 1:60), which means "the Lord is Gracious," signifying more than a label for a baby. Even "all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, 'What, then, will this child be?'" (Luke 1:66)

C. A "prophet" speaks the words God puts in his mouth (Deut. 18:15-22). Signs do not always indicate that the prophet is speaking the will of God (today's Gospel). But when we know by the fruit that he is a true prophet, we should *hear*.

II. "The Lord's Forerunner, to Prepare His Way"

A. John was "more than a prophet" (Luke 7:27). He is the Lord's "forerunner," to "prepare His way." "He is the man of whom Scripture says, 'Here is My herald, whom I send on ahead of You, and he will prepare Your way before You.'" (Luke 7:27; Mal. 3:1)

B. Words of every prophet, promises to every patriarch, covenant at Sinai, oath to Abraham, foretell the visitation of God. John is the "forerunner" to "prepare His way." No ordinary event is John's coming, but it is one to bring the whole world into right relationships. His purpose must now bear fruit in our love to God and to our fellow-men.

III. Leader of People "to Salvation Through Knowledge of Him"

A. John led the people to the wilderness of repentance. This was a part of his message. "Repent!" is his theme (Matt. 3:1). Prove repentance by fruits (Matt. 3:8). Be baptized for repentance (Matt. 3:11), "a token of repentance" (Mark 1:4). Repentance is the road back to God, not ancestry. (Matt. 3:9)

B. John led the people to know the Lamb of God (John 1:29). "The very reason why I came baptizing with water, that He might be revealed" (John 1:31). John's testimony was important to make clear that he was not the Messiah. Life eternal is to know God and Jesus Christ sent by Him (John 17:3). That is the knowledge brought to us, now, through John.

IV. *Announcer of Forgiveness of Sins*

A. Luke 1:77 says salvation comes to God's people "in the forgiveness of their sins." It is not enough to see Jesus as another John the Baptist, as merely a "prophet of the Most High," or as merely another "way-preparer." We must know Him as the One through whom God's tender mercy forgives sins. We must know Him as the Savior and Light-Giver whom God has appointed to "guide our feet into the way of peace."

B. John's purpose as prophet, forerunner, and leader is that this "Gospel" shall be proclaimed. Is it proclaimed? Is Jesus the Christ? Is John's purpose in life fulfilled? Cf. Matt. 11:2ff. The answer of Jesus would appear anticlimactic. Yet miracles and even resurrection have no significance unless the Gospel of forgiveness is proclaimed. "The poor are hearing the Good News!" The final act of the drama of God's dealing with men is forgiveness. We are in the midst of the final act. Though we be minor characters, God enables us to be part of the happy ending.

Conclusion

This is where "the Gospel begins." Thus Zechariah could begin by saying: "Praise to the God of Israel! For He has turned to His people, saved them and set them free, and has raised up a Deliverer of victorious power from the house of His servant David." (Luke 1:68, 69)

THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MISSION AND MESSAGE OF JESUS

MATT. 5:20

Introduction

Today's Epistle (1 Cor. 10:6-13) reminds us of some of God's people who were destroyed by God in the wilderness: "23,000 died in one day." The Epistle warns us, "If you feel sure that you are standing firm,

beware! You may fall." The Gospel (Luke 16:1-9) does not make it any easier when we are told to use our worldly wealth "to win friends" for ourselves, "so that when money is a thing of the past you may be received into an eternal home."

It is not easy to stand firm. It is not easy to undertake an all-out, immediate, and bold act for the kingdom as did the squandering steward.

It is not easy to do all that is required of us. And yet the text says we must even be "far better men" than the Pharisees or doctors of the Law. Even the slightest improvement—and certainly the radical transformation that is necessary—must be achieved by God. That is

The Mission and Message of Jesus

I. To Be Far Better Men

A. Jesus denounced Pharisee and scribe (Matt. 23). Scribes were the doctors of the Law. They knew the "Scriptures," the writings, studied them diligently, supposing that in having them they had eternal life (John 5:39). Besides the writings they taught "as doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt. 15:9). They would "set aside the commandment of God in order to maintain" the "tradition of men." (Mark 7:8,9). Thus they "make God's word null and void." (Mark 7:13)

The Pharisees were an exclusive brotherhood, closed to the masses. "This created a gulf between them and all those who were ignorant or careless of the punctilious care involved in [their] strict observance of the Law." (Gaalyahn Cornfeld, ed. *Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia* [New York: The Macmillan Co., 1964], p. 578)

Scribe and Pharisee knew the Law and kept every portion of it, criticizing our Lord at times for His failure to keep the Law or laws.

B. Jesus says we are to "be far better men" than they. It is not the outward act but the

whole man that is noted by God. Our righteousness must go beyond the boundaries of the Law. The Law must be taken seriously. But our obedience is not to be displayed by an outward show of prayer, alms, fasting. Our life is to be leaven "in" salt "to" the earth, light "for" the world. It is "in secret" that we give alms, pray, and fast. And this is "far better" than Pharisee and doctor of Law. And yet it is "far beyond" what we are able to accomplish. His grace provides more in the mission and message of Jesus.

II. *To Be in the Kingdom of Heaven*

A. The kingdom of heaven is linked with Jesus. He knows to whom the Kingdom belongs (Matt. 5:3, 10, 19, 20). In Him they who are now with Him will see the Kingdom. (Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1)

B. His parables deal with the Kingdom, as does His Sermon on the Mount and on the Plain (Matt. 5-7; Luke 6). If the parables are (Matt. 13) of soils, darnel, mustard, yeast, treasure, pearls, or net; if they are about going out to search for lost coins, lost sheep, or lost sons (Luke 15); if they are of 2 women grinding, or 10 girls waiting, or of 3 servants capitalizing (Matt. 24-25); they all deal with the kingdom of Him who enters and remains. The Kingdom is "here and now," and it is "there and then." There is always the Kingdom to be considered.

C. His kingdom is without end (Luke 1:33). It is His to give (Luke 12:32; Matt. 16:19; 21:43). "Far better men" could include tax collectors and harlots (Matt. 21:31)! Not of this world (John 18:36), and it is available for all who would receive and enter (Luke 23:42). His message makes it clear. His mission makes it possible for us to be part of His kingdom.

D. His kingdom is lordship over all. We fear no one's purse or person. We dread no one's power or position. We are not choked with anxieties of this life or with anger against our fellowmen. Men enter life and

attempt to continue living, while *He* came to die and thus to destroy death, for He would rise again. He lords it over all. As His subjects (or is it objects?) in His kingdom, trusting and obedient, we become "far better men."

Conclusion

Because each of us has "missed the mark" of being a "better man," He comes and with grace bestows that which we do not deserve. His mission enables us to enter His kingdom. He kept the Law and fulfilled all righteousness. He did not get even for our unevenness. He did not force payment for our debts. He did not lengthen our shortcomings to an eternity of regret. He suffered for our mistakes. He endured our penalties. He was penalized for our crimes. This Kingdom life He bestowed graciously. He made us "far better men" than ever we could be. He linked us with Him "here and now," "there and then," with Him in His kingdom.

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SERMON STUDY

THE 10th SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MATTHEW 5:20

I

The church in which the Gospel According to St. Matthew was first written and read was apparently under Jewish pressure and attack. Christians who had formerly been Jews were accused of clinging to a spurious Messiah, an unknown Galilean who could hardly be the Son of David (i. e., Messiah), whose ignominious end in Jerusalem demonstrated that God's people had rejected Him. His teaching was dangerous and destructive to the Torah, the religious life and institutions of Judaism, and removed the Old Testament as a guide to life. In short, the Jewish people around this group of Christians suggested that Jesus and Chris-

tianity ran counter to the evident intention of God in the Old Testament, were disturbing the people of God (the Jews), and were in danger of destroying the relevance of the Torah for ethics.

The Gospel of Matthew demonstrates the error of these attacks by recounting the origin, ministry and teaching, and the Passion and resurrection of Jesus. In doing so Matthew presents Jesus as the Son of David (cf. 1:6, 7; 1:20; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 21:9; 20:30, 31), who is born the King of the Jews in Bethlehem. As Son of David He is the King par excellence, the Messiah predicted in 2 Sam. 7. He is also an ideal Israelite, the Son of Abraham (1:1, 2), who goes through a new delivery from Egypt (2:15), who identifies Himself with Israel as He responded to John the Baptists' call to Baptism (3:15, *πρέπον ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρωῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην*) and who undergoes temptations similar to those of Israel in the desert (4:1-11), yet triumphs over Satan with the word of Moses on his lips.¹ As ideal Israelite and Messianic King He taught, healed, called disciples, founded the church, died, rose, and commissioned His disciples to preach and teach. He is present as the living Lord of all authority in His church (28:20; cf. 18:20). This life was lived in fulfillment of the Old Testament, from beginning to end (1:23; 2:6, 15, 18, 23; 3:3; 4:15, 16; etc.). Far from running counter to the will of God revealed in the Old Testament, He makes that will evident and clear by fulfilling it.

II

Matthew gathers Jesus' teaching thematically into five great discourses (5-7; 9:36-10; 13:1-52; 18; 24-25).² These five dis-

¹ Cf. T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, Rev. ed. (London: SPCK, 1949), pp. 42-46.

² K. Stendahl, "Matthew," *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, edd. Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), p. 770.

courses show that the church and its founder are the true inheritors of the Old Testament and the result of the activity God had promised there.

The text for this Sunday stands in the first great sermon (5-7), which is an explication of the life of the disciple. Hunter even titles it *A Pattern for Life*.³ Matthew makes clear that this is "disciple teaching" by the introduction to the sermon (5:1, 2), in which Jesus goes to a mountain after seeing the crowds and speaks to the disciples.⁴ The sermon opens with the Beatitudes, which emphasize God's rule as a gift. The sermon is addressed to men who have received everything from God, even though they had no claims on Him. They are the poor, the mourners, the meek, the hungry, and the persecuted. These very people are *μακάριοι*, blessed, recipients of God's actions to save. This adjective in the Old Testament described people who stood in the proper relation to Yahweh (Ps. 1:1; 32:1; 112:1). In later Judaism it came to be used more and more to describe those Jews who would share in the blessings of the Messianic age (cf. Ecclus. 48:11; Tobit 13:14; Ps. Sol. 18:6; and especially Ps. Sol. 17:44; *μακάριοι οἱ γενόμενοι ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις, ἰδεῖν τὰ ἀγαθὰ Ἰσραὴλ ἐν συναγωγῇ φυλῶν, ἃ ποιήσει ὁ θεός*). This same emphasis, participation in the blessings of the *βασιλεία*, seems to be a consistent note in Matthew's use of the term (11:6; 13:16; 16:17). The Beati-

³ Archibald M. Hunter. *A Pattern for Life: An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953).

⁴ Note that in 7:28 the crowds, apparently left behind in 5:1, 2, are present. In Matthew the crowds (*ὄχλοι*) are generally made up of people who are uncommitted, who have not taken a stand for or against Jesus; cf. 9:8, 36; 16:7 (cf. 16-19); 12:46; 13:2; 21:11; etc. The sermon is a call to repentance for such people. Even amazement (7:28) is not an adequate response.

tudes underscore the blessed estate of those who by God's gift share in the Kingdom.

This gift does not leave man a free agent. Man under God's rule is a man with a task, an obligation, a function: to be salt and light (5:13-16). *Gottes Gabe ist zugleich Aufgabe.*⁵ These verses are a warning to the Christian to be what God has made him. Salt was one of the basic necessities of life in the ancient world, on a par with fire, iron, water, and clothing (cf. Eccles. 39:26). Salt purifies, seasons, and preserves.⁶ But salt can lose its distinctive character (cf. Mark 9:50: ἄναλος)⁷ and be fit only to be thrown into the street, the ancient refuse dump. Israel had claimed to be a salt.⁸ But she had

lost that characteristic by hoarding God's revelation to herself. She had also claimed to be the light of the world, appropriating to herself this designation of the Servant Songs (cf. Is. 42:6; 49:6; Rom. 2:19). The function of giving light had also been lost by Israel. She was not the reform force that she should have been; Israel herself had become sheep without a shepherd (9:36; 10:5, 6). What Israel had been promised had now been given to the disciples (cf. the descriptions in the ἔτι clauses in vv. 3-12). But disciples remain what God has made them only by exercising the functions they have been given. There is no room for the quietistic onlooker among the disciples in Matthew. Men's lights are to shine.

⁵ The sermon contains other notes of God's grace to men. Cf. 6:12 (the Fifth Petition), 6:14, 15; 7:1-5, with the comments of Harvey K. McArthur, *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Harper, 1960), p. 72: "Thus, somewhat paradoxically, the Sermon demands that its hearers do all these things but at the same time contains the recognition that the demand will be but partially fulfilled. Surely this was grist for the Pauline mill."

⁶ Cf. Lev. 2:13 as interpreted by Philo, *De victimis*, 6, as cited in Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, "Das Evangelium nach Matthäus erläutert aus Talmud und Midrasch." *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 2d ed., I (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1956), p. 235.

⁷ Apparently a current Jewish proverb; cf. *Babylonian Talmud*, Bechor. 8b: "Salt, if it becomes putrid, wherewith shall it be salted?" Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 123, suggests that an Aramaic *double-entendre* may lie behind this. The Aramaic can mean either (1) be unsavory (ἄναλος, Mark 9:50) or (2) be a fool (as here).

⁸ Cf. the story of Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah (died about A. D. 90), told in *Bab. Tal.*, Berakoth 8b: When a student asked, "If the salt becomes savorless, with what will it be salted?" he replied, "With the afterbirth of a mule." The student retorted that a mule, being barren, cannot have an afterbirth. R. Joshua replied, "Neither can the salt become savorless." Apparently this is a sarcastic comment on Jesus'

III

The body of the sermon (5:17—7:12) is a commentary on vv. 13-16. As Luther⁹ says: "The Lord Jesus Christ now takes the next step. He starts salting and shining as an example to them." This major section of the sermon falls into three sections that correspond to the three basic emphases in the Jewish faith.¹⁰ The Mishnah (*Pirke Aboth* 1. 2), reports a saying of Rabbi Simeon the Just (who died about A. D. 90): "Upon three things the world standeth; upon Torah, upon Worship, and upon the showing of kindness."¹¹ The Torah is the Old Testament revelation, the charter of life for the

saying. The rabbi means that Israel, like salt, cannot lose its true character. Cf. Manson, p. 132; Strack-Billerbeck, p. 236.

⁹ M. Luther, "The Sermon on the Mount," *Luther's Works*, ed. J. Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), XXI, 67.

¹⁰ This section owes much to W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: University Press, 1964), pp. 304—307. This entire volume deserves careful study.

¹¹ Cited according to *Pirke Aboth. The Ethics of the Talmud: Sayings of the Fathers*, ed. and trans. R. Travers Herford (New York: Schocken Books, 1962), p. 22.

Jew. Worship refers to the service of the temple, the way of worship appointed to man by God. The showing of kindness denotes "unselfish beneficence" (Herford) or acts of loving kindness as expressions of piety (Davies). Each of these three is taken up by the sermon and shown to be brought to its full realization in the Christian community:

Matt. 5:17-48 = Jesus' Torah (cf. 5:17).

Matt. 6:1-18 = Jesus' worship (cf. 6:1: *θικαιουσύνη*).

Matt. 6:19—7:12 = Jesus' showing of kindness.

The Law must be used in a more excellent way by the church (5:20), worship is to be offered to God alone, life is to be an expression of Hosea's word, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13; 12:7). Each area is thus an illustration of the righteousness that excels (5:20). Each is a claim on behalf of the community against the Jewish attack. We do well, therefore, to look at the paragraph in which our text is found.

5:17: "Think not that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (RSV). The sentence uses a form that recurs in Matt. 10:34. In both cases the emphasis is placed on the last word of the sentence; in 10:34 on *μάχαιραν*, here on *πληρῶσαι*. These words of Jesus that speak of His coming have a special solemnity about them.¹² Jesus underscores that He has not come to "tear down," "annul," or "repeal" the Old Testament,¹³ but to fulfill" it. The precise

¹² Cf. Luke 19:10; Mark 1:38; 10:45. J. Schniewind, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus. Das Neue Testament Deutsch II*, vierte Auflage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950), p. 54, calls them "besonders feierliche Jesus-worte." Cf. also R. Hummel, *Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kirche und Judentum im Matthäusevangelium* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1963), p. 66.

¹³ The word *ἦ* is here equivalent to *καί*, joining two parts of a whole or two similar

sense of *πληρῶσαι* in this passage is not easy to determine. Luther¹⁴ understands it as "to show its real kernel and meaning." E. P. Blair¹⁵ feels that it means to "carry out" or "perform," describing the kind of conduct that conforms to what is demanded. E. Schweizer¹⁶ emphasizes, *per contra*, the *ἕως ἄν πάντα γένηται*, of 5:18 in the light of the phrase *τοῦτο δὲ ἔλον γέγονεν* (1:22; 21:4; 25:56), which always occurs in close proximity to the verb *πληρῶω*. This suggests the meaning "bring to fulfillment," which is accomplished eschatologically in the coming of Jesus. According to 7:12 and 22:40 His coming makes clear that the Law is to be understood as the Golden Rule interpreted as the law of love. Jesus thus is not concerned with individual commands, but with whether and how the Law in its totality is fulfilled. Its fulfillment is really the annulment of its individual precepts. It may be that this is how the NEB translation "complete" is to be understood. R. Hummel (pp. 68, 69) points out the weakness of this position. 5:18, 19, which follows closely on this concept of fulfillment, indicates that Matthew does not regard the Law as abrogated by its fulfillment. Jesus' concern is to underscore the abiding validity

things. Cf. W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Ed. and trans. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), s. v. *ἦ*, 1b. For the concept, cf. Matt. 7:12; 22:40; Luke 16:16.

¹⁴ Luther, p. 70. He is followed by Ned B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1958), p. 197.

¹⁵ E. P. Blair, *Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 121.

¹⁶ E. Schweizer, "Matthäus 5, 17-20. Anmerkungen zum Gesetzverständnis des Matthäus," *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 77 (1952), cols. 479—484; reprinted in *Neotestamentica* (Zürich und Stuttgart: Zwingli Verlag, 1963), pp. 399—402.

of the Law in such a way as to radicalize it. It is to become the base for the righteousness that surpasses (5:20). "Er hält sie (die Ordnungen Gottes) fest und setzt sie in Geltung."¹⁷

5:18, 19. These verses underscore the validity of the entire Torah without any deletions or relaxation.¹⁸ Jesus apparently makes use of a distinction that shows up in later Jewish thought,¹⁹ where "light" and "heavy" commandments were distinguished. The rabbis counted 613 commandments in the Torah. Light commandments were those that were not punishable by death, were really not important (e.g., Deut. 22:6 on the nesting mother bird), while heavy commandments were important (cf. Matt. 22:36, μεγάλη) and violators were to be punished by death (e.g., Ex. 20:12, the Fourth Commandment). Jesus says that not even a light commandment is to be annulled or relaxed. The entire Law remains in force. A teacher's status in God's dominion will be determined by his attitude to the Law.²⁰ How little Jesus here was setting up a new type of legalistic system can be seen from vv. 21-48, where this very Law is treated with a freedom of the spirit, not a casuistry of the letter.

5:20. The Law remains firm. Of course, Jesus and Matthew know that the Law can be misused (Matt. 15:3 ff.; cf. Phil. 3:3-6). Nevertheless, Jesus does not dismiss the righteousness of the Pharisee as a totally spurious righteousness. He chooses the best in Judaism and tells the disciples that their δικαιοσύνη must surpass it. Δικαιοσύνη must here be understood as referring to "human

behaviour in harmony with God's will, and well-pleasing to Him — uprightness of life, doing what is right in God's sight."²¹ It is commented on in 5:48, where the disciple is told that he must be τέλειος. Τέλειος is here the equivalent of the Hebrew *tām*, which denotes the singleness of purpose that characterizes true worship of Yahweh to the exclusion of all idolatry (cf. Deut. 18:13; Gen. 17:1; Job 1:1). Τέλειος describes the sort of person who is willing to sell all he has, give it to the poor, and follow Jesus (19:21). Thus δικαιοσύνη defines attitudes and behavior. In 6:1 the term is used to describe the acts of piety and worship that the Jew elevated highly: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Δικαιοσύνη is defined in vv. 21-48. It is that attitude which takes the Law in all seriousness. It goes beyond a casuistic approach to the Law to search for God's will. The Law cannot be for this person a ground for confidence or boasting.

A man takes the Law seriously by taking seriously the fact that the Messiah has come who fulfills the Law. . . . Only in the new situation created by the coming of the Messiah, only under the creative word of the Messiah, is a man enabled to confront the Law as the bare will of God for him.²²

Thus the church is not ashamed before its attackers. As old Israel had the Torah, its charter of relation to God, and its founder Abraham, upon whom God built Israel on a rock, so, too, Jesus' disciples have the Law (Matt. 5—7) on which God builds His new ethics, and will have Peter as the new rock (16:18, 19) on which God will build His new people. It is only this eschatological

¹⁷ Schniewind, p. 54.

¹⁸ As the parallel Luke 16:17 suggests, Matthew may here be gathering related sayings of Jesus on the same topic. The grammatically difficult τούτων in v. 19 suggests the same procedure. Perhaps the repetition of the word μὴ led to this joining. Cf. Hummel, p. 64.

¹⁹ Strack-Billerbeck, I, 900—905.

²⁰ McArthur, pp. 65—87.

²¹ Gottfried Quell and Gerhard Schrenk, "Righteousness," *Bible Key Words* (London: A. & C. Black, 1951), IV, 35.

²² Martin Franzmann, *Follow Me: Discipleship According to Saint Matthew* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), p. 44.

people who take the Law with real seriousness.

We can do no better than end with a quote from Luther to show that this high view of the Law is still relevant centuries later. Comparing the Evangelical church of 1538 with the church under the papacy in 1517, Luther says of the Antinomians of his time:

Today, however, the times are completely different. They cannot be compared with the situation under the Papacy. Our Antinomian friends hold firmly our words, our teaching, and that joyful promise of Christ as sweetest theology. Unfortunately, however, this is all they want preached. They do not notice that men are different than they were under the hangman pope, that they are lulled by a false sense of security, that they are bad and without proper consideration of the past, that they

have become and are thievish, yes, Epicurean, and show no fear of either God or man. And it is precisely these people whom they strengthen and confirm with their doctrine.²³

²³ *D. Martin Luthers Evangelien-Auslegung*, ed. Erwin Mühlhaupt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939), II, 83 (from a Disputation against the Antinomians of 1538): "Nun aber, wo doch ganz andre Zeiten sind, die denen unterm Papst durchaus nicht gleichen, halten unsre Antinomer also süsse Theologen unsre Worte, unsre Lehre, jene fröhliche Verheissung von Christus fest und, was schlimmer ist, wollen sie allein gepredigt haben. Und beachten nicht, dass die Menschen anders worden sind als sie unterm Henker Papst waren, dass sie nämlich sicher und schlecht, rücksichtslos, räuberisch, ja epikurisch werden und sind und weder Gott noch Menschen scheuen. Und grade die bestärken sie und befestigen sie mit ihrer Lehre."

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