

PREACH

the Word

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Greetings IN THE NAME OF CHRIST OUR SAVIOR

The Epiphany season reveals mystery upon mystery: God becomes man; Gentiles are included in Christ; the Trinity appears at Jesus' baptism; water turns into wine; the God-man stands between heaven and earth with his spokesmen of the Old and New Testaments, and time is suspended as heaven's glory shines on the earth in the transfiguration. Yet as mind-boggling as all these mysteries are, the greatest one remains: God's Son loved me from eternity and willingly gave up the light and splendor of heaven to enter this cesspool of sin to rescue me from sin, death, and the hell my sins have earned. The Wise Men came and bowed before him. May we preachers of the Word, in humble awe, do the same. And may God in his grace give us the words to speak that will lead his people to marvel at – and rejoice in – these mysteries of salvation.

- KCW

THIS MONTH

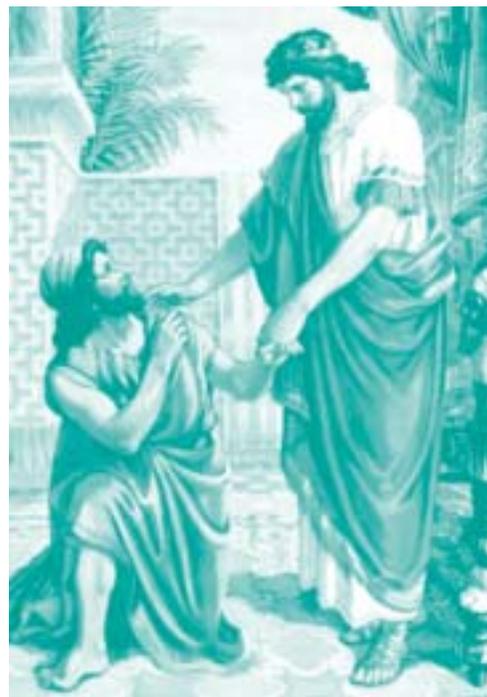
- Daniel Deutschlander on "Preaching Old Testament Texts" (conclusion)
- *Florilegium* (a bouquet of sage words)
- "But in the Original Greek..."

PREACHING OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS II

Daniel M. Deutschlander

Ed. Note: This article is a continuation from Vol. 7.2. In the previous installment, Prof. Deutschlander began walking us through the Old Testament, focusing on the lives of the patriarchs and the days of the Judges. He continues with the life of David.

Then there is the life of David! It too is an inexhaustible storehouse of life lived by grace, through faith and under the cross. Just the story that everyone knows, the story of David and Bathsheba has sermons in every verse, beginning with the first one: *In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab ... (2 Sam. 11:1)*. Why didn't David go? It was his duty. Did he make a small compromise, which begat another compromise and then another? How like the rest of us! How like the confirmand who puts the Bible, the Catechism and the hymnal on the shelf the day after confirmation. Does he intend to forsake the vows he made the day before? Certainly not! But it's time for rest from these things, just for a little while, just a small compromise. What a



commentary that first verse is on James 1:13-16. How many sermons are there in the rest of the chapter on themes not widely explored in the New Testament: Sin Always Has Consequences, From Punishment to Chastisement, Examples of Patient Submission, Submission to Suffering as Gratitude for Forgiveness, God Grace in Chastisement, and many more such themes. Then there are all the stories about David's efforts to provide everything that would assure the success of the temple and with it the success of orthodoxy long after his own death. How concerned he was, and rightly so, for the future of the church! But to what extent can one generation preserve the church of the next generation? How do we do what we can and walk the narrow road between arrogant trust in our own efforts and despairing resignation in the face of historical precedent and unheeded warning signs that the precedent is prologue?

Continued on page 3

“BUT IN THE ORIGINAL GREEK THIS *LITERALLY* MEANS . . .”

Wise Words for Exegetes

Benjamin Chapman, perhaps best known in our circles for his handy insert of Greek syntax and forms (designed to fit in the back of the UBS text, but also available as a Logos module), offers some wise words to students of Greek concerning exegesis. The principles given here are, naturally, also applicable to the handling of Hebrew. These words are especially valuable for pastors who labor over the original texts to correctly handle the word of truth as they prepare sermons to share with God's people. Dr. Chapman writes (p. 47-48):

“Preachers and teachers frequently give the impression that Greek exegesis is a mystical craft, designed to open whole worlds of meaning to the initiated. ‘In the Greek this word *literally* means...’ they intone, and they leave their hearers gasping, ‘I never would have found that in the passage!’ They ‘learn’ that Greek words possess stronger magic than their English equivalents. Nevertheless, such an approach is almost invariably wrong-headed and erroneous.

“Part of the task of exegesis is the defining of words ... You will not perform full-blown word studies on every one of [the 5425 words], but those you perform must be accurate and honest.

Your goal in word study will be to determine:

- Step 1: how the word was used generally at that time (of writing)
- Step 2: how biblical writers typically used the word
- Step 3: how this author typically used the word
- Step 4: how the word is used in this specific context

In fact, you may have stumbled on the true value of Greek exegesis: that while it occasionally yields insight into individual words, its goal is to help you follow the flow of sentences and paragraphs.”

“A note of warning! If you do a massive word study on, say, ἀκολουθέω in Matt. 8:19, and after all that work decide that in fact it means nothing more than “to follow,” a meaning you could have gotten right out of the NIV, you may become disenchanted with the value of your Greek learning. After all, how can you say, “In the Greek, this word *literally* means ‘to follow;’ “ when anyone with a Bible can readily spot that? **In fact, you may have stumbled on the true value of Greek exegesis: that while it occasionally yields insight into individual words, its goal is to help you follow the flow of sentences and paragraphs.”** (emphasis mine)

Chapman then goes on to give practical examples under the title:

FALLACIOUS METHODS OF WORD STUDY:

“The meaning of a word in a context is **NOT** fixed by:

“**Its etymology:** Etymology is a word's family history, but it is sometimes tapped in order to find some mythical ‘basic’ or ‘original’ meaning. It's remarkable that people try to define a word in the NT by the way it was used a thousand years beforehand. **A word means what it means when the author uses it.**

“**Its use in a very different context.** The verb καταρτίζω is used in Gal. 6:1, to direct spiritual Christians to *restore* a brother who has fallen into sin. The verb is also used in Mark 1:19, in which James and John are repairing their nets. But don't make the mistake of saying that restoring a sinning Christian “literally” means “to mend their net.” **A single word may have different connotations in different passages.**

“**All of its possible meanings every time it is used.** The verb ἀκολουθέω may mean “to come after,” “to accompany,” or “to follow as a disciple,” but it doesn't mean all of those in every single passage... Sometimes people will regard the NT differently from the way they regard other pieces of literature ... as if there is some secret code between two verses that happen to use the same word. Don't believe it! **A word means what it means in that passage.**

“**An English equivalent.** Some words are easily defined in that way: χίλιος means ‘thousand,’ and that's that. But λόγος can mean ‘word, message, speech, reason, matter, etc.’ **Defining a Greek word means scouting out what it may mean and what it does not mean.”**

- contributed by KCW



How about the prophets of the divided kingdom? What lessons they have for us about life under the cross, about the faithfulness of God in the face of the faithlessness of man, about grace for the undeserving and judgment for the nevertheless obstinate! Consider the unnamed prophet of 1 Kings 13. See how sternly God judged the prophet for what to us seems a minor unfaithfulness, compared with God's patience toward Jeroboam. But read the story carefully. It is a commentary on Jesus' words, *From the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:48)*. Not to be forgotten are God's words of encouragement to the complainer who has gotten tired of the cross. The essence of his answer to Elijah is: *Now that you've gotten all that off your chest, here's what I want you to do next! My Word accomplishes everything, and that's all you need and all you need to know! (1 Kings 19)*. Nor could we leave out Jeremiah when considering God's comfort to the comfortless. If anyone had something to complain about, it was certainly Jeremiah. But what does God say to him when Jeremiah is ready to look only at what he sees and feels at the expense of what God said and promised? What does the Lord give Jeremiah for comfort? He says in essence: *Cheer up, Jeremiah; this is the easy part! The tough times are yet to come! (Jer. 12:5)* Or how about this for encouragement under the cross? God calls Isaiah (Is. 6) and tells him to keep on preaching the gospel until all that is left is the stump, all that remains is Jesus and a remnant! No theology of glory there! It is always the little flock that is born of the Word and lives by the Word and dies in the Word.

Again, these texts and hundreds of others present the truths of grace and justification, of the power of the Word to create and sustain faith, of the life of the church on the whole and in the individual as a life lived under the cross. They paint those truths on a canvas of history that is at once thousands of years old and still as contemporary as the moment in which we read it.

We have been considering primarily historical texts. But much the same case can be made for the poets and the prophets. The Psalms are so rich in imagery that they serve the useful purpose of enriching our sometimes Teutonic (Dare I use the word in a pejorative sense?), somewhat wooden thought and speech patterns. The parallelisms, with one image enriching and completing another, the beautiful use of concrete terms for abstract truths (e.g., light = life and joy), which terms then make it easier for us to remember the abstract truth and to think about it. The Psalms, whether Messianic, Psalms of thanksgiving and adoration, Psalms of supplication, and even the imprecatory Psalms are always appropriate prayers for the church and for the faithful. For the individual believer and the church as a whole always is in desperate need of rescue, which can come only from the Messiah, which we expect because of the promise, and for

which we always give thanks, even when still waiting for it; the imprecatory Psalms remind us in their own special way of God's justice in forgiving the penitent made so by his Word and in smashing the obstinate made so by their own fault.

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One special use of the Psalms just has to be mentioned. Have you ever considered preaching a series on the Introit Psalm verses? The Introit very often is such a beautiful summary of the thoughts of the day in the other readings. While that may not be as apparent in some seasons as in others and may be the more obscure now that we no longer use the ancient church gospel and epistle readings, still there is one time in the church year when the Introit Psalm verses are really magnificent. That is during the Latin Sundays, the Sundays of Lent and Easter. The Latin names for those Sundays which perhaps only our older pastors now remember are taken from the first words of the Introit. They are trumpet calls. They are bolts of lightning between the eyes. They take the essence of Lent and Easter and turn that essence as a diamond to catch each week some new facet, some brilliant light that leaves us blinking in amazement. Consider just a few by way of example. The first Sunday in Lent is Invocavit: It is the promise of God to Christ first and foremost as Lent begins, and then as a result of Lent it becomes his promise to us under the cross: *He will call and I will answer him ... (Psalm 91:15-16)*. The second Sunday in Lent: Reminiscere – *Remember, O LORD, your great mercy and love ... (Psalm 25:6-7)*. We might expect that Lent is a call for us to remember; exactly the opposite is the case. First and foremost it is a call to God, that he would remember. What a gold mine of gospel thoughts in that cry in Lent! The other names are even richer: *Oculi, Laetare (Rejoice in the middle of Lent?!), Judica (The cry of Christ before his Passion, so rich in pathos, so provoking of gratitude for God's answer)*. The first day of Holy Week, Palmarum, is the only Sunday that doesn't have a specific Psalm reference in the name. But not to worry: The Introit is from Psalm 22! The six post-Easter Latin Sundays likewise have beautiful summaries of the season in their names, likewise taken from their Introit Psalm verses.

For the sake of useful brevity, to borrow a famous Lutheran euphemism, we can only briefly mention the prophets. Is it perhaps enough to say that it is worth learning Hebrew just to be

Continued on page 4

able to read Isaiah 40-66. What graphic pictures of the Savior! What exultant depictions of the church that triumphs but only beneath the cross! What grand and glorious promises accessible only to the eyes of faith! Then there is Jeremiah. He knows our century better than we do. He is so real, so un-American in his understanding of our Arminian soaked culture. How about Hosea? Was there ever an uncomplaining pastor, much less member like he was? Amos is such a rough and tumble character as God confronts the obdurate in grace and in justice, an "in your face" kind of confrontation.

How do we do what we can and walk the narrow road between arrogant trust in our own efforts and despairing resignation in the face of historical precedent and unheeded warning signs that the precedent is prologue?

But time and space prevent any further pleading that the reader consider preaching Old Testament texts a little more often than most of us do. Perhaps if we do it a little more often, we will become so much the more at home in the Old Testament that we will use it more often even when we preach on New Testament texts. Perhaps we will become so comfortable with it that instead of yielding to the temptation of bothering people with stories from our lives as ways of demonstrating some truth, we will use stories from the Bible. Perhaps we can help our people to see themselves and our great God and Savior still more clearly from the people and promises of the Old Testament, so that they too will use it more in their own reading and meditation. All of that will be worthwhile effort, blessed by the Spirit who inspired the Old Testament and intended it for our benefit.

Prof. Deutschlander teaches German, History and Religion at Martin Luther College

FLORILEGIUM

In medieval times, monks would send around "circuit letters" to the various monasteries in each administrative district. In turn, each monastery would add snippets of the latest news from their regions to the letter so that by the time it arrived back at its source, the single letter had "gathered" (legere) a number of "flowery" (flora) bits of news into a bouquet of information (florilegium). Here is our own arrangement of quotes for the preacher, plucked from various sources.

Readers are invited to contribute their own quotes to the editor for upcoming editions.

"If reason could have kept on the right road, the Scriptures would not have been given to us."

– M. Luther, *Sermons Vol. 1*, p.183

"But the hard thing is to march: to be good, not clever; to be faithful, not brilliant; to be honest, not urbane; to be the rough wool blanket that keeps the faithful people warm, not the flapping scarf of changeable silk that men admire."

– M. Franzmann speaking of the task of a pastor in *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets*, p.84

"On the contrary, Jesus said, the way to honor in the kingdom of God was the way of service: the honor was not compensation for the service; the service WAS the honor."

– F. F. Bruce, *The Time is Fulfilled*, p. 24

"The Christian Church is the greatest miracle that has ever been performed, because it has been built up on a doctrine antagonistic to everyone born in this world, the doctrine of salvation by grace."

– F. Wenzel, *Commentary on the Gospels*, p. 44

"Non multa, sed multum. (Do not study many different things, but much of one thing). Everything depends, not on how much we know, but how well we know it."

– C. F. W. Walther, *Law and Gospel*, p. 42

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

If you have any questions or comments about *Preach the Word*, feel free to contact this year's editor directly at wesselkc@mlc-wels.edu

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2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398 414/256-3265
FAX, 414/256-3899 • <brygerlach@aol.com>
<www.wels.net/worship>

Keith Wessel, editor <wesselkc@mlc-wels.edu>
Wayne A. Laitinen, managing editor <wlaitinen@newulmtel.net>