

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Fourth Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifteenth Chapter of the First Book of Samuel, otherwise called the First Book of the Kings.³

“Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus saith [SETH] the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek [AM-uh-leck] did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek [AM-uh-leck], and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass. And Saul gathered the people together, and numbered them in Telaim [*tih-LAY-imm*], two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah. And Saul came to a city of Amalek [AM-uh-leck], and laid wait in the valley.

“And Saul said unto the Kenites [KEN-ights], Go, depart, get you down from among the Amalekites [AM-uh-leck-ights], lest I destroy you with them: for ye shewed [SHOWD] kindness to all the children of Israel, when they came up out of Egypt. So the Kenites [KEN-ights] departed from among the Amalekites [AM-uh-leck-ights]. And Saul smote the Amalekites [AM-uh-leck-ights] from Havilah [HAV-ih-luh] until thou comest to Shur [SHOOR], that is over against Egypt. And he took Agag [AY-gag] the king of the Amalekites [AM-uh-leck-ights] alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag [AY-gag], and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.

“Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night. And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal [**GILL-gal**]. And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites [**AM-uh-leck-ights**]: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel? And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites [**AM-uh-leck-ights**], and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD? And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag [**AY-gag**] the king of Amalek [**AM-uh-leck**], and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites [**AM-uh-leck-ights**]. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal [**GILL-gal**]. And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

PROPOSED IN 1928 39 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxiii (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxi (CIPBC 1963).

³ I Samuel 15:1-31 (KJV).

⁴ I Samuel 16:1-end (KJV).

⁵ St. Matthew 5:17-end (KJV).

⁶ Deuteronomy 11:29-31 (KJV).

⁷ Deuteronomy 27:12-13 (KJV).

⁸ Deuteronomy 18:15 *ff.*

⁹ St. Matthew 5:44-48 (KJV).

¹⁰ I Corinthians 13.

¹¹ Romans 5:8 (KJV).

¹² Romans 6:3-11.

¹³ Romans 6:3-11.

¹⁴ St. John 19:30 τέλειω.

¹⁵ Psalm 84:9.

¹⁶ Psalm 132:10.

¹⁷ Ephesians 1:6.

¹⁸ Revelations 5.

¹⁹ Rector, St. Benedict's Anglican Catholic Church, Chapel Hill, NC.

“And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD. And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel. And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him, The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou. And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent. Then he said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God. So Samuel turned again after Saul; and Saul worshipped the LORD.”

Or,

Here beginneth the sixteenth Chapter of the First Book of Samuel, otherwise called the First Book of the Kings.⁴

“And the LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons. And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the LORD said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will shew [SHOW] thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto me him whom I name unto thee. And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

“And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab [**ih-LYE-abb**], and said, Surely the LORD’s anointed is before him. But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. Then Jesse called Abinadab [**uh-BIN-uh-dabb**], and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. Then Jesse made Shammah [**SHAM-uh**] to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah [**RAY-muh**].

“But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him. And Saul’s servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee. Let our lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man, who is a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well. And Saul said unto his servants, Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me. Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the LORD is with him.

“Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep. And Jesse took an ass laden with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid,

Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lion who appeared as a Lamb that had been slain.¹⁸ God’s only begotten Son, incarnate as a man, alone pleased the Father, and that Son, alone of all mankind, paid the penalty and full price for the rest of us.

But, to see this takes humility. Our Book of Common Prayer does not flatter us, and does not lie to us. Some people have decided that religion is a self-help program. Be warned; if your idea of the Christian life is some sort of self-improvement program, you are in grave danger of missing the whole point. Unless and until you see yourself as hopeless without God’s perfection of love and mercy; unless and until you see yourself as unworthy to eat the crumbs that fall from His table, thus rejecting any illusion about some righteousness of your own; unless and until you see that *only* Christ has pleased the Father, and that you have not, this whole liturgy we call Holy Communion, and the whole message we call the Gospel, is entirely closed to your understanding.

The words of this service of the Lord’s Supper, the *Eucharist*, were written to affirm the truth of the Bible, that each one of us needs that love and mercy of God revealed in Christ, that is extended to us because we are in Christ, because we could not save ourselves. This service was written to give each of us a way to confess and pray that truth, saying it to God with gratitude. Let us then offer *Eucharist*, that is, good thanksgiving, the offering that is sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

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The Rev’d Robert Hart¹⁹
July 11, 2010

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Mass on the Sixth Sunday after Trinity, 2010.

² *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS

speak of baptism making us dead to sin and alive to God in some allegorical way, using poetic license to mean something else. He means this as a spiritual reality, a fact, beyond our comprehension but in our experience. Only through faith can we become aware of the newness of life in Christ. Some people, after baptism, may resist knowing this new life in Christ, becoming aware of it only after a specific point in time. Others may refuse ever to know it, living as nominal Christians, or walking away completely, but, either way, shutting out the light of Christ. But the *fact* of your new birth in baptism is an objective one; some believe that a later conversion was new birth, because the experience was so real. In fact, what awakened in them was faith, adding a subjective cognizance to the objective fact of having been baptized into Christ.

So we learn two things: 1) Christ has paid in full¹⁴ the price of all human sin, the price of your sin and mine, and 2) God sees us in Christ. The old prayers of the Psalmist come to life for us: “*Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed*”¹⁵ and “*turn not away the face of thine anointed.*”¹⁶ The face of His anointed, that is His Messiah or Christ, is our shield. Because we are in Christ, and because the Father will not turn away the face of His Christ (that is, His anointed one), He accepts us, “*To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*”¹⁷ We ought to be the objects of wrath, but in Christ, as God has willed in eternity, we are the objects of mercy and love.

At the Bible Study one Wednesday evening, we talked a bit about the baptism of John the Baptist. When John’s baptism to repentance was taking place, sinners repented and were forgiven. But one Man stepped into the water not to lay down His sins, for He had none. He stepped into the River Jordan to pick up the sins of all repentant sinners everywhere, and so, about Him and Him alone, the Father said “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.*” The Father is not well-pleased with any other human being, for no man was found worthy, in heaven or in earth, to break the seals and open the book, except the

and sent them by David his son unto Saul. And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly; and he became his armourbearer. And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, Let David, I pray thee, stand before me; for he hath found favour in my sight. And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the seventeenth Verse of the fifth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁵

“¹⁷Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

¹⁸For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

¹⁹Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

²⁰For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

“Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca [**RAH-kuh**], shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and

offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”⁹

How can a commandment to be perfect offer hope? Hasn’t Jesus made it even worse for us? But look closely at this perfection of our Heavenly Father: “*Love your enemies*”, He says. Why? The answer is, “*That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? ... Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*” This perfection he speaks of is the perfection of love, specifically the love we call charity (*caritas* [**KARE-ih-tass**], *agape* [**AH-gah-pay**]).¹⁰ Jesus shows us, even while diagnosing to us our mortal illness of Original Sin, and our own helplessness, that God loves even His enemies. Frankly, being the sinners that we are, Jesus means that the Father loves you and me, and does good to us.

Of course, the whole point of Christ’s coming, as we know from the larger picture of His ministry and teaching, and most of all from His death on the Cross and His Resurrection, is the love of God to save those of us who, born in sin, were His enemies from the start. As St. Paul would put it, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”¹¹ St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans¹² lets us know that God has done for us what we never could do for ourselves. We could never attain a level of righteousness that pleases Him but Christ could and did. We have been baptized into Christ, we have died to sin, and entered a new life by being, simply put, “*in Christ.*”

If you had any doubt that baptism is new birth, Paul’s Epistle to the Romans clears that up.¹³ Spiritually, your life began when you were raised from the death of sin by new birth in Christ. St. Paul’s words are not metaphorical; he does not

religious, upstanding Orthodox Jewish people called the Pharisees, Jesus crushes our self-confidence: “I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca [**RAH-kuh**], shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.” I don’t know about you; but, that alone does it for me. I look back on my life, if not the last week or day, and see no way to hold up my head as more righteous than anybody.

Why would our Lord begin his preaching by utterly devastating us? He has, in this sermon, judged and found us guilty, for His very word has judged each one of us. We are all convicted as sinners. If ever we despised our own Prayer of Humble Access, we can do so no longer. For I know of one man who reacted to the words, “we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table” with an angry protest: “Indeed, we are worthy!” he said. But, when I read the Sermon on the Mount, I know that, as St. Paul said, “in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing,” and that I most certainly am not worthy to gather those crumbs that fall from the Master’s table.

The Sermon on the Mount gives us, however, one ray of hope. Significantly, and crucially, that one ray of hope lies outside of each of us. In fact, that hope is found only in God:

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis said that anyone who *likes* the Sermon on the Mount would like being hit in the face with ball peen hammer. If you thought the whole sermon was simply those opening Beatitudes, then Lewis’ remark can’t make sense to you. If you have read all three chapters that record this sermon, however, that is Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7, you know exactly what C.S. Lewis meant. Frankly, the Sermon on the Mount is not there for you to *like*, in the emotional sense of liking a thing. If it moves you to fear of God, to an honest evaluation of your own soul, and repentance from all known sin, *then* you understand it.

The Beatitudes, beginning with “*Blessed are the poor in spirit*”, and going on from there, were somewhat repeated by the Lord on another occasion we call the Sermon on the Plain, recorded in the sixth chapter of St. Luke. In that sermon, Jesus patterned His words after the Blessings and Curses of the Law. To understand that, we need to go back to the days of Moses. We find, in the Law of Moses that is, the Torah, these words:

*“And it shall come to pass, when the LORD thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerizim [**GARE-ih-zimm**], and the curse upon mount Ebal [**EE-bull**]. Are they not on the other side Jordan, by the way where the sun goeth down, in the land of the Canaanites [**KAY-nunn-ights**], which dwell in the champaign [**SHAM-pane**] over against Gilgal [**GILL-gal**], beside the plains of Moreh [**MOE-reh**]? For ye shall pass over Jordan to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God giveth you, and ye shall possess it, and dwell therein.”⁶*

*“These shall stand upon mount Gerizim [**GARE-ih-zimm**] to bless the people, when ye are come over Jordan; Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin: And these shall stand upon mount Ebal [**EE-bull**] to curse; Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.”⁷*

The blessings were pronounced on those who would obey God, and the curses on those who would rebel against God. Centuries later, Jesus Christ in his role as the Prophet like unto Moses⁸ spoke first the Blessings, or Beatitudes. In place of the curses, He spoke words of severe warning, the Woes.

All of that makes sense to me, as one who has studied the Bible seriously for decades. The New Covenant Lawgiver following the pattern, as clearly He does in Luke, is easy to understand. But as I observe the Sermon on the Mount, recorded by St. Matthew, at first it seems to be missing the Woes. The pattern of the Blessings on Mount Gerizim [**GARE-ih-zimm**] and the Curses on Mount Ebal [**EE-bull**], more perfectly revealed as the Beatitudes and the Woes, does not appear in Matthew, for the Woes are missing—or, are they?

I think it is wise to see the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew as beginning with the Blessings, the Beatitudes, and then the bulk of what remains throughout Chapters 5, 6 and 7 constitute a large text full of the Woes. The Sermon on the Mount stands as a sharp rebuke to sin. It is the most terrifying passage in all of the Bible, the long text in which Jesus Christ tells us of the consequences of unrepentant sin, the penalty that everyone of us deserves, mentioning at times the danger of Hell. In the Sermon on the Mount, furthermore, He makes it clear just how high God’s standard of holiness really is, and how utterly helpless we are to meet it. After all, who has never lusted? Who has never been unreasonably angry? Who has never spoken an unkind word? Based on the Sermon on the Mount, I know for a fact that I have earned only one penalty: Eternal damnation, that is, Hell.

Hell, in the original Greek New Testament, is the word *Gehenna* [**geh-HENN-uh**], a simplified form of the Hebrew for the Valley of Ben Hinnom [**ben HINN-numb**]. The Valley of Ben Hinnom [**ben HINN-numb**] was the place where backslidden Israelites had offered their own children to Moloch [**MOE-lahk**] (or Baal [**BAY-ull**]—the same false god). By the time of Jesus it had been for hundreds of years the municipal garbage dump. The fires that never go out, the worm that never dies, or never seems to die because worms are always there eating the garbage, reinforced the image brought on by the name of the place, *Gehenna* [**geh-HENN-uh**], that it was the dump. The warning against the fires of Hell is a warning that unrepentant sinners face being thrown away, burned as trash is burned. It is a warning against the danger of being cast out forever.

And, the opening of today’s Second Lesson, taken from this very Sermon on the Mount, makes our hopes sound all the more elusive: “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” And, just in case anyone may begin to measure his own righteousness against that of those very