

Would Schilder Pass Classis?

A.J. de Visser – CRTS conference – January 15, 2016

Intro comments

- Why this topic?

Schilder's reputation as a preacher

- H.O. Old
- Rudolf van Reest
- J.H. Gunning

Schilder's theological emphases

- J. Faber: "Schilder devoted himself to the reliable Word of the God of the covenant in the history of mankind. That meant negatively speaking a fight against subjectivism and positively a fight for the acknowledgment of Holy Scripture."¹

Key aspects of Schilder's view and practice of preaching

1. Redemptive-historical progression
2. Covenant
3. Christology
4. God's revelation
5. Man's office

Evaluation

1. General aspects
2. Exegetical aspects
3. Christology
4. Application

When Klaas came to classis...

¹ J. Faber, "Klaas Schilder's Life and Work," in J. Geertsema (ed.), *Always Obedient: Essays on the Teachings of Dr. Klaas Schilder* (P&R Publishing, 1995), 15.

K. Schilder – Sermon # 1 (1920)

Text: Matthew 2:1-12

Scripture reading: Matthew 2:1-12

Introduction: A wise man from the East has appeared in Europe. His name, Tagore, is on everyone's lips. In the great year of our Lord some wise men came from the East to visit Bethlehem. Nobody knows their name. Isn't that interesting? The wise man who came to Europe in our time went home with treasures he had gathered for himself. The wise men who came to Bethlehem offered their gold, frankincense and myrrh as gifts to the newborn king.

In our time people look once again to the East for wisdom. They forget that the East itself once came to Bethlehem. Let's see how God brought people from East and West together to worship the Son-of-man.

Theme: The wise men from the East and the Word of God

1. They are lured by the Word of God in creation
2. They are guided by the Word of God in Scripture
3. They kneel before the Word of God in the flesh

1 Love is creative. Love lures. God's perfect love lures too. In love he lures wise men from the East by speaking to them in creation. That is why they come to Jerusalem and ask for the newborn king of the Jews. "For we saw his star... and have come to worship him." They saw his star in the East. But God resides above the stars...

They come from Mesopotamia, the land of the Euphrates and the Tigris, the land of the ancient paradise. In their souls it is still dark but there is a beginning of dawn. Centuries ago, some light had come into their darkness when Jewish exiles lived in Babylon. After the exile, some Jews remained in Mesopotamia and spread the message about the Messiah who was to come. Advent-preaching in the East! Daniel has not been forgotten, even after many centuries.

Of course, they were misguided in their belief about the connection between the stars and what happens on earth. But God uses it. He "answers the fools," but He does not answer them according to their folly: He speaks to them in a sign language they can understand. Whatever it was – a star, a comet, a conjunction of planets – it is a powerful sign to them. Let's marvel at the love of God who stoops down to speak to sinners in such a way that they are able to understand.

Let us marvel at God's grace! Remember that God came to us as well, found us in our folly and used words from *our* vocabulary so that we would be able to understand.

2 We have Psalm 19 and we know that God's testimony in the Scriptures is clearer than his message in creation. So when the wise men move from the stars to the Scriptures, it is an improvement. But to them, it must have felt like they were going down. Just imagine: having seen the glorious sign in the sky they are led to a stuffy room in Jerusalem where theologians with wrinkled faces find information in old parchments. The question: Where will the Messiah be born? They provide the

answer: in Bethlehem of Judea. Having answered the question, the theologians leave in order to go... to Bethlehem? No, they go home.

What about the wise men from the East? The lacklustre response in Jerusalem must have been discouraging. Remarkably, they decide to press on. They respect the words of the prophecy. And God confirms them in their decision: the star they had seen before appears again and guides them to Bethlehem! But the star is now subordinate to the Scriptures. First, they came because of the star. Now, they press on because of God's Word.

It is still true today: People look for wisdom everywhere, even in Eastern religions. Some look for guidance in the stars. But we find our way to Bethlehem in the Scriptures. This may be humbling, but remember that humility comes before exaltation. Let's study the Scriptures and find our Saviour in them, guided by the Holy Spirit.

3 The wise men enter the house in Bethlehem and see the child with Mary. There is no indication that this child is special: no royal chambers for the newborn king. Poverty instead. Is this the one the star was pointing to? Yes, the wise men fall down and worship! They trust God's Word and guidance. They know: this is the newborn king of the Jews and they worship him. This is the victory of Christmas.

But this is also the problem of Christmas. We need to stop adoring the star and romanticizing about the cattle and the crib. We need to accept that the Son of God was clothed in poverty *because of our sins*. It is a humbling experience. Do not yearn for wisdom from the East, which is darkness. Rather, focus on the miracle of God's love, revealed in the humble birth of his Son.

One day the Son of God will appear in his glory. On that day He won't speak to us through the stars or even through the Scriptures. He will speak to us as God's Word in the flesh.

Comments:

- Core idea: God's revelation to his people as it develops and increases, with a focus on Christ. Also the aspect of the humiliation of Christ which was necessary for our salvation. We receive salvation by faith in Him.
- Theme and division: very well crafted.
- As a young preacher KS often quoted poems in his sermons.
- Application: flows naturally from the text.

K. Schilder – Sermon # 2 (1932)¹

Text: John 20:28

Scripture reading: John 20:19-29

Introduction: We have celebrated Easter. What is next? Does Christ's resurrection put distance between Him and his disciples? No, the fellowship between him and his disciples is intensified! He comes to the gathering of his disciples on the Sunday and makes their number complete by reinstating Thomas.

Theme: Thomas's confession that Christ is God and Lord of life²

1. The fact of this confession
2. The content of this confession
3. The manner of this confession

1 Notice that it says: "Thomas *answered* him." Thomas was responding to something Christ had done. Therefore, we need to focus first and foremost on what Christ had done, not on what was going on in the soul of Thomas. Scripture has not been given to us to tell us about the condition of the souls of people but to show us how God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. If we were to focus on Thomas we forget the most important thing: The Bible wants to tell us how Christ was coming to his own in his office as Servant of the LORD. Christ is not just searching for a lost sheep here. He is doing the Easter work which He is called to do.

So let's focus on what Christ had done. A week earlier, on the first Sunday evening after his resurrection He had visited his disciples as they were gathered together. He had greeted them and revealed himself to them as risen Messiah. He had appointed them as his office-bearers, given them the Holy Spirit, and given them authority to forgive sins. It was a meeting of the church, a worship service, and Thomas had missed it! Why he had missed it is not clear and we should not speculate about it. The point is that Thomas had missed his own installation. This helps us understand why Christ returned a week later: Thomas needed to be installed as apostle (quote) "because the church could not proceed unless *all* the apostles were installed in their office on the day of the Lord." Why did Christ not go and talk to Thomas during the week? Why did He wait till the next Sunday? Because Christ wanted to honour the Sunday as the day of rest and the day of worship. Thomas *had* to wait, a full week!

We see, then, how Christ wanted the number of disciples to be complete: the number was down to 10, with Thomas He makes it 11, and in due time it will be 12 again. Therefore, the main issue is not Thomas as a person but Thomas as office-bearer. (Quote) "The kingdom of God could not proceed if Thomas wasn't present in his office as apostle." As long as Thomas' situation is not solved, the church cannot move on. See how Christ helps his church-gathering work move forward by visiting his disciples on the second Sunday evening and by installing Thomas in the presence of the other apostles. It is to this initiative of Christ that Thomas responds. And we are called to respond in faith as well.

¹ Date is not certain but must be between 1931 and 1933. Schilder said that he had not "dared" to preach on this text before 1931 (J.J.C. Dee, *Schriftgeleerde aan het Woord*, Vol. 1, p. 87). The sermon was published in 1933.

² Original: Christus, als Levensvorst en God door Thomas beleden

2 Thomas's confession is rich in content: "My Lord and my God," he says. Thomas has addressed Jesus as "Lord" before (John 14:5) but now, after Jesus' resurrection, this confession has so much more meaning. It means that Jesus is his owner and master. By saying "my Lord" he acknowledges that Jesus has authority over his life and that he is willing to do whatever Christ tells him to do. He also calls Jesus "my God." He now understands the words spoken by Jesus earlier, that Jesus and the Father are one (John 10:30). Whoever has seen Jesus, has seen the Father (John 14:9).

Thomas will have reflected on his confession for many years to come. He will have reflected on the fact that Christ revealed himself to him in the gathering of his people. We meet God in the Sunday worship service. That is where we experience the power of the ministry of the Word.

3 Notice also the form of Thomas's confession. The way he formulates his confession shows that this is not a sudden emotional outburst but rather a well-considered statement. In the original Greek, the words are not in the vocative (used to address a person) but in the nominative (used to say something about a person). In other words, this is not a spontaneous exclamation but a well-considered confession. (Quote) "Thomas is not excited but speaks with sober judgment." We can imagine that Thomas has done a lot of thinking during the past week. He may have reflected on the questions regarding Jesus' identity more than any other disciple. And now, on the second Sunday after Jesus' resurrection, Thomas has come to a full understanding of who Jesus is.

We want to join Thomas and rather use sober prose than speak ten thousand words in a strange tongue. Let's continue to meet during our Sunday worship services, and let's continue to confess our faith in well-considered language. Know that Christ is here, in church. And allow Him to open your mouth carefully. Do not speak *out of turn*, ecstatically, but *respond* to Him: My Lord and my God.

Comments:³

- Redemptive-historical aspect is clear. This is the second Sunday after Christ's resurrection, and the church-gathering work of Christ needs to move ahead.
- Schilder's aversion against exemplaric preaching and subjectivism (too much attention to the person of the believer) comes through clearly. He emphasizes that this is not about the person or the soul of Thomas but about his office. Question: why the dilemma? Could Christ not have had both in mind? Both Thomas as a person and Thomas as an apostle?
- Schilder's exegesis of the vocative/nominative ("my Lord and my God") is debatable. Many exegetes agree that although the words are in the nominative, the effect is still vocative (Thomas still addresses Christ). The nominative "adds a certain sonorous weight" (Carson, commentary on John, 659). Schilder's application illustrates his aversion against emotionality and enthusiasm.

³ Used comments by Dee, *Een Schrift-geleerde aan het Woord*, Vol. 1, 86-89 (comments by Dee), 163-182 (text of the sermon), 243 (comments by KS)

K. Schilder – Sermon # 3 (1934)

Text: Hosea 12:3-4a

Scripture reading: Genesis 32:22-32

In Biblical historical narratives Christ should have the focus of our attention, not the human person in the story (even if he was a “saint”). Many preachers focus on Jacob’s inner struggles. But we do not know what went on in Jacob’s heart. Even if we did know, what would we gain? Some people say: “I want to have my own *Peniel experience*.” But that would be impossible! *Peniel* was a unique historical event. It cannot be repeated.

We are not called to discuss the state of Jacob’s soul. We are not even *allowed* to do so! (Quote) “The point of Biblical narratives is to tell us about God who reveals Himself in Christ Jesus! At every point along the long road of the history of redemption God arrives at a certain stage of that process, and in so doing He is moving closer towards his end goal.” At *Peniel* we see two men struggling: The one is Jacob, the other is a man-of-mystery. Jacob is the father of the people of Israel. He is destined to become the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But who is that man-of-mystery? Our text says: It is “the angel.” We know who that is: It is the “Angel of the LORD,” the angel of the covenant, the Son of God. It is the Son acting in his pre-incarnation state. In other words, we see the Son of God (pre-incarnate) struggling with his father according-to-the flesh, preparing him for spiritual “fatherhood.”

Theme: The Son of God, before his incarnation, forming his father-according-to-the-flesh

1. The prelude to that formation
2. The fact of that formation
3. The first sign of that formation

1 From eternity God had the intention to prepare Jacob for his calling. His calling is to be the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This implies more than just having children. Jacob also needs to be father of Christ in his faith life (just like Abraham walked in faith); Jacob must be Israel, not just in name but also in his life; this was Jacob’s *office*. For this reason the battle between the old and the new man must be waged in Jacob’s life. This struggle reaches its climax at *Peniel*. *Peniel* is the *chorale*. But there was a *prelude* already at Jacob’s birth: at birth Jacob grasped the heel of his twin brother Esau.

In Genesis the story is told without commentary. It seems to be just an interesting detail regarding the birth of the two boys. But the prophet Hosea connects the story about Jacob’s birth to his struggle at *Peniel*. Remember that the Lord had revealed to Rebecca that the two boys were two nations, that there would always be war between them, and that the youngest would be victorious.

What tension we see! The seed of the woman (Jacob) and the seed of the serpent (Esau), struggling already before they are born. We understand that there was nothing coincidental. Even the little hand of Jacob that clasped the heel of his brother was put there by the Lord.

As Jacob grew up, he tried to take his brother’s position by making clever plans. It did not work. Jacob needed to learn the lesson that *God* was going to do it. He had to learn to live by faith.

Later on, as Jacob travelled back to Canaan, he had not learned much yet. His brother Esau was waiting for him and Jacob was afraid. Jacob had sent presents ahead to appease his brother. What

should happen here? We might say: the Lord needs to intervene and fight for Jacob, the Lord needs to struggle against Esau and defeat him. But the Lord does not do that. The Lord struggles against Jacob!

2 Now we see that the real struggle is not even the one between Esau and Jacob; the real struggle is in Jacob's heart; old man and new man are struggling for dominance. Jacob comes under attack of the Angel of the LORD: the Son of God. Hosea reports that Jacob struggled with the angel and overcame him; in this long struggle Jacob learned to see that the victory depends on the question whether the Lord is with him; he learned to proceed by faith. Jacob came away from that struggle limping, but strong. In human weakness the Lord's power is made manifest.

3 Hosea says that Jacob "wept and begged for his favour"; this is the first sign that Jacob is being formed to become the father of Christ according-to-the-flesh. Jacob did not stop struggling till he had received the Lord's blessing. Now he is ready to take up his calling as father of the covenant community! (Quote) "Israel, the one who struggled with God, has become father-wrestler. Now You may come, Lord Christ, now You may come." We see Christ preparing the rock from which He will be cut (Isa 51:1).

Should we then try to have our own personal *Peniel experience*? No. Peniel cannot be repeated. We should not desire a *copy* of Peniel but we should understand the *rule* of Peniel. The rule of Peniel is: "not by might nor by power but by my Spirit" (Zech. 4:6).

This points to things that were to happen later. Peniel becomes the prelude for Golgotha – Christ solving the mystery of Peniel in his own suffering and death. Because Christ ultimately took the wrath of God upon himself He was able to prepare his own father-according-to-the flesh and then (later) became Jacob's descendant.

The rule of Peniel still applies today as an Advent message. "In the same way as Christ was working, at Peniel, for the preparation of his first coming, so He is still working today (December 1934), working towards his second coming." But then the church should not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Let us therefore listen to the rule of Peniel, and not look for a copy of Peniel.

Comments

- Fascinating perspectives: the two lines (seed of the woman, seed of the serpent) wrestling with each other; Jacob vs. Esau; the old Jacob vs. the new Jacob; the idea of the pre-incarnate Christ preparing one of his earthly ancestors for the task as ancestor of the Messiah
- Much hinges on Schilder's understanding that "the angel" is the "Angel of the LORD"
- Core message is Biblical: the rule of Peniel; not by might nor by power but by my Spirit
- J.J.C. Dee comments: this sermon is a typical example ("schoolvoorbeeld") of Christ-centred, redemptive-historical preaching; Schilder shows how far God had proceeded with his plan of redemption, and how Christ works to break through this moment of crisis. Nothing psychological, nothing about Jacob's struggle being an example for us to be followed
- Main weakness: context in Hosea (both canonical and historical) is totally ignored

K. Schilder – Sermon # 4 (1939)

Text: 2 Kings 5:10

Scripture reading: 2 Kings 5:1-15a

Introduction: When we preach on historical narratives, our first question should be: what is the point? In this case, we might say: it is a story about a king of Israel. Should we therefore preach on politics? Or perhaps it is a story about a Syrian general who is healed. Should it be a sermon on healing? There is also a Jewish girl in the story. Is the point that she should serve as an example to us?

No! It is all about Christ. All history shows God in the history of revelation to his own people. All stories become one story, all words become one Word. All appearance becomes the revelation of God in his Son. We need to see Christ and we need to see God revealing himself in his own Son to pagan Syria.

Christ himself preached on this text (Luke 4). He told the people in Nazareth that God bypassed his covenant people and called Gentiles from the nations instead, as a prelude to Pentecost. There were many who suffered from leprosy in Israel at that time but no one was healed except for Naaman, the uncircumcised Syrian. Naaman humbled himself and saw the light dawning in Israel. This does not mean that Elisha disowned the people of Israel. The tree of the covenant was not cut down. God will never do that. But He will cut out the dead branches. When Israel does not come to the Lord with its leprosy but the Syrian does, the Syrian will see the light. Therefore, the message must be one about the offence caused by the preaching of the gospel and the foolishness of the message of the cross.

Theme: The power and weakness of the Word of the cross as proclaimed to Naaman the Syrian⁴

1. The offence of this preaching
2. The folly of this preaching
3. The fruit of this preaching

1 The preaching of the grace of Christ causes offence (as described in 1 Cor 1-2). The preaching of Christ becomes a stumbling block to the Jews. They want to receive salvation but the Jew-according-to-the-flesh wants a salvation in which he plays an important role himself: it must be his devotion, his sacrifice, his honor. But Paul says: our Saviour is different: He brings salvation through his work. We need to humble ourselves at the foot of the cross.

If this is a hallmark of the preaching of the Christ, it will be found in the preaching of this story of Naaman the Syrian. And indeed, we see it: Elisha, instead of meeting the mighty Syrian general himself, sends out a servant to talk to him. What a humiliation for the general!

But the offence had started earlier. When Naaman led the Syrian army to a great victory over Israel, they said: the God of Israel was weak today – our gods were stronger. But the truth is: This was from Yahweh the God of Israel. He used Naaman as a scourge of Israel.

Now “the scourge” comes to Israel with his leprosy and says: please heal me. The king of Israel does not get it. He thinks: If this man dies in Israel, Syria will use it as an excuse to start another war

⁴ In the original Dutch: De kracht en de zwakheid in de werking van het Woord des kruises aan Naaman de Syriër

against us. Nobody had seen the light yet, neither Naaman nor the king of Israel. The king of Israel should have gone to the Lord in prayer!

By the grace of God Elisha sends a message to the king of Israel: Send the Syrian general to me. Naaman comes to Elisha's house. Strange: Elisha does not come out to meet him. He sends his servant. That's outrageous and disrespectful! But Naaman, the scourge, needs to learn the lesson: Shall the axe boast over him who hews with it (Is. 10:15)? Naaman was used to humiliate others, including God's people. Now the time has come for Naaman to humble himself under the covenant people of God.

So we see that all involved, the people of Israel, the king of Israel, the Syrian general, need to humble themselves and learn that salvation is by the grace and power of God only.

2 The folly of preaching comes out in Elisha's word: go, wash yourself in the Jordan, and you will be clean. Naaman had expected the prophet to come out and do perform some magical rituals on him. But the prophet does not even come out of the house! Instead, he needs to go wash himself in the dirty Jordan... This is foolishness! There is no connection between the means and the intended goal.

But Elisha says: let the Word be enough. You have been the Lord's scourge to Israel but you should not elevate yourself. In Elisha we see Christ coming to his people. He too will save from leprosy and death, not by a power that is available here on earth but by a power that is from heaven. Nobody saw the connection between (the means of) the cross and (the goal of) salvation. "Flesh" will laugh about it. Faith will accept it.

3 First, there was a stumbling block to the flesh, then a folly, but now the contrast: If you do this you will be clean. Walk in the way of the Spirit and you will receive salvation. Naaman needs to give up his pride and his logic. He will find grace if he believes. Here we see the power of God and the wisdom of God. The power: because his power to heal comes from above. The wisdom: the logic is not from this earth. The LORD takes delight in the one who fears Him.

We see this line in all history. Think of the sermon in Nazareth: In Israel itself there is unbelief, elsewhere there is salvation. This is still the same today. Faith is still the only condition (and it is not really a condition because even faith itself is a gift from God). The people of Nazareth became angry. People today laugh about the gospel. May we as Reformed people speak the language of our fathers and of Christ himself in Nazareth and at Golgotha. In life and death our only comfort is in the blood of Christ. Whoever accepts this, from whatever nation, is pleasing to God.

Comments

- Introduction illustrates how Schilder is opposed to any form of exemplarism.
- 1 Cor 1 is used in a creative way to interpret the story (God's Word is a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles). This also provides a way to find application: the message of the cross of Christ is still a stumbling block and folly to many; it requires faith.

K. Schilder – Sermon # 5 (1941)

Text: Ezekiel 9:3-5

Scripture reading: Ezekiel 9:1-11

It is good that the covenant is discussed in our time. But we need to speak and preach about it according to the Scriptures. The covenant has two parts and two corresponding sanctions. The two parts are promise and obligation. The two sanctions are blessing and curse. Whoever does not believe the promise and rejects the obligation will be struck by the curse of the covenant. When the apostle Peter says that the judgment begins with the house of God (1 Peter 4:17) he refers back to Ezekiel 9:6. This makes preaching the calling of the covenant to be serious business.

Theme: The covenantal judgment as seen by Ezekiel

1. The substance of this judgment
2. The direction of this judgment
3. The boundaries of this judgment
4. The result of this judgment

1 What is the essence of the judgment seen by Ezekiel? It is described in verse 3a: “Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house.” The glory of the LORD had been with Israel from the days of the Exodus: a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When Israel settled in the promised land, the glory of the LORD appeared over the mercy seat that was on the ark in the tabernacle. The *shekinah* was the sign that the Lord himself dwelled in this place (and as such, the *shekinah* pointed to Jesus Christ in whom God dwells physically).

The sign is not the LORD himself but it points to the LORD’s presence. It would be possible to take away the sign (as sometimes happened in the history of Israel) while God still remained present among his people. But this is worse: now the glory of the Lord, in other words the Lord himself, is leaving the temple. This was fulfilled on Golgotha when the curtain of the temple was torn in two. And it was confirmed on the day of Pentecost: the glory of the Lord was no longer on display in the temple but it came down as tongues of fire that rested on the believers in a house somewhere in Jerusalem.

In Ezekiel’s vision the signs are still there in the temple, but they have become ‘empty.’ The matter that they point to (God dwelling among his people) is no longer there. His glory leaves the temple and moves to the Gentiles, yes also to us here in Holland, descendants of the Batavi. But in the new covenant covenantal judgment is taken a step further yet.

2 How is the judgment carried out? What direction does it take? This is described in verse 3b: “And he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his waist.” This man was not alone. He came with six others (verse 2), each one with a deadly weapon in his hand. They came from the north. In other words, these men come for judgment.

Notice that there are seven men, six of them armed, and one (the leader) carrying a writing kit. This teaches us something important about the covenant. On the one hand, there is a corporate aspect to the covenant. We are in it together. On the other hand, blessing and curse are administered

personally. The man with the writing kit is going to mark individual people: those who belong to the covenant not just with the body with also with the heart. The ink mark becomes a sign of salvation. This points to the Last Judgment when the books will be opened and everyone will be judged according to what they have done in this world, whether good or bad.

3 There are boundaries to the judgment. In verse 4 we read that the Lord instructs the man clothed in linen: “Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.” Who is this man clothed in linen? He is the Angel of the LORD, the LORD himself. He is one with the Father, yet he is messenger. This is Jesus Christ before his incarnation.

As the judgment begins with the house of God, there are six angels of judgment but there is also one priest clothed in linen. He prays to the Father, and he acknowledges that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), but he also prays for those who have been given to him (John 17:24). Those who will be spared, receive a mark on their foreheads (it is the Hebrew letter *Tau* which looks like a cross). The man in linen puts it on their foreheads.

So we see both effects of the covenant: judgment and blessing. These two always go together, throughout the Bible (see Rev. 7 and 13).

4 Finally, we see the results of this judgment. Verse 5: the other six men receive the command: “Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity.” This is judgment but it is not the real judgment. This is physical death. It merely follows spiritual death that had started much earlier. The real judgment is to be separated from God. The real judgment is that the LORD withdraws himself with his Word and his mercy.

That there is war and plunder and bloodshed is not necessarily wrath of God. The ultimate wrath of God is that the gates to eternal life are closed.

Let this be a lesson to us. We have been baptized. We have received the signs. Congregation, cling to those signs! But never separate it from the matter that is signified by them. Always seek the essence of the matter: “I am the LORD your God.”

When then the mark is put on the foreheads but passes by the one on the cross, remember that the Son of God has carried the judgment for all our sins. Therefore, He is entitled to receive fullness of life. In Him all are marked who died with Him and have been raised with Him.

Comments

- Good example of how Schilder understood the covenant in its twofold effect (blessing and curse) and how this places God’s people before their covenantal responsibility.
- The sermon also illustrates that there was no ‘covenantal automatism’ in Schilder’s thinking. Covenantal blessing and covenantal curse are administered personally.
- Notice how Schilder interprets the man clothed in linen to be the Angel of the Lord (the pre-incarnate Christ).

K. Schilder – Sermon # 6 (1941)

Text: Genesis 14:18, 19a, 20b

Scripture reading: Hebrews 7:1-17

When Melchizedek came to Abraham with bread and wine in order to bless him, it was a difficult moment for Abraham. After all, the Lord had told him that he would be a blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:1-3). But here comes Melchizedek to bless Abraham... Wasn't it supposed to be the other way round? After all, Hebrews 7 says that the inferior is blessed by the superior. Thankfully, we have Hebrews 7 as a commentary on Genesis 14. Melchizedek points forward to Christ.

Theme: The revelation of the LORD in the meeting between the type of Christ – Melchizedek – and the father of Christ – Abraham

1. It reveals the true meaning of Genesis
2. It reveals the true meaning of Exodus
3. It reveals the true meaning of Leviticus

1 In our text we meet two men: Abraham and Melchizedek. Abraham's star is rising. He is going to be a blessing to all nations. Melchizedek's star is fading. He is a last shimmer of light among a nation that is fading into darkness. One would expect Melchizedek to be blessed by Abraham. But it is the other way round. What is going on here?

The book of Genesis contains a number of *toledots*. The word means: emergence, genesis, origin, history as it evolves. Genesis speaks of the *toledot* of heaven and earth (2:4), then Adam's *toledot*, then Seth, and Noah, etc. Then Terah, the father of Abram (11:27). These men are important not because of their natural origin, but because they have been chosen by God. Abraham has been chosen and appointed by God to be the father of believers (Rom. 4:16).

Now God sends Melchizedek to Abraham. And the father of believers, even the father of Christ, needs to kneel before Melchizedek, the king and priest who functions as a type of Christ. Melchizedek is king of Salem which means king of peace. The name Melchizedek as such means king of righteousness. Peace and righteousness are combined in this man. Abraham, the victorious warrior, needs to acknowledge that he depends on the blessing of the king of peace.

Abraham could have thought: I have the promise of the Lord that this whole land will be given to me. Who is Melchizedek that I should humble myself before him? But Abraham still needs to acknowledge that salvation is from God. Abraham is not blessed because of his own merit. Yes, God will bless the world *in* Abraham, but not *because of* Abraham. Abraham's place is secured by his own Son Jesus Christ. The world will be blessed *in* Abraham, yes, but *because of* Abraham's Son.

Melchizedek stands there as one without *toledot*, without father or mother, as one raised up by God, a king, a priest, and a prophet who comes with a word from God. He is a type of Christ! Abraham may have been victorious on the battlefield, but today he needs to acknowledge that he has received everything by the mercy of God. Blessed is the man today who acknowledges his dependence on God's grace as revealed in Melchizedek's *anti-type* Christ Jesus.

2 Having seen Genesis in this event, we can now also see Exodus in it, because Melchizedek brings bread and wine to Abraham and he blesses him. This points to the meaning of Exodus, a book that tells us about the emergence of Israel as a free nation. Exodus tells the story of Israel leaving the house of bondage. They become a people of God, a church-people with their own laws and their own freedom.

Abraham needs to learn the message of Exodus (even before the book is written). He needs to understand what is explained to him so clearly in Genesis 15, that his offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and that they will be servants there, for four hundred years. But then the Lord will lead them out of that land with great possessions.

This is symbolized by Abraham receiving bread and wine from Melchizedek. This is not a personal gesture from one man to another. This is a symbolic act, a prophetic act. The man who functions as type of Christ brings to Abraham bread and wine from Jerusalem. It is a small but prophetic gesture that points forward to the kingdom of peace that will be established in and from Jerusalem.

Like Melchizedek, Jesus Christ seemed to be the inferior person. He seemed to have no power in the world. The Pharisees cast him out, outside the city. But Christ, precisely because he accepted this curse in humility, received authority afterwards to bless his people with bread and wine and everything.

3 Now the third aspect becomes clear as well: the meaning of Leviticus. Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything, and in doing so he acknowledged the priestly authority of Melchizedek. According to Hebrews 7, we might say that Levi himself (who was still in the loins of Abraham) paid tithes through Abraham.

Likewise, Christ Jesus has been elevated and now sits as receiver of tithes at the Father's right hand on the throne. He is the One to whom, symbolically, I give my tithes. He gave 100 % in order to give me fullness of life. Now He asks me to give him tithes, not in order to buy my place in heaven for even 1 % but rather to show my thankfulness to Him. So, with Abraham, we are taught the basic ABC: free grace, given to us not because of our natural *toledot*, but received by faith in Christ.

Comments

- This sermon could leave you with your head spinning: all these connections between this text and Romans 4 and Hebrews 7, but also with the books Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus, Abraham's *toledot*, etc.
- The main idea is that Abraham needs to learn to live by faith alone. He needs to humble himself and acknowledge Melchizedek's superiority as one sent by God. Schilder suggests that this would have been difficult for Abraham. After all, Abraham was chosen to bless the nations (Gen. 12), so why would he now accept a blessing from someone else? This is speculative. It is more likely that Abraham would have rejoiced in receiving a blessing from the king and priest of Salem. Why suggest a rivalry between these two men? They were fellow believers!
- Dominant perspective of this sermon is taken from places outside: Abraham the father of all believers (Gen. 17:5, Rom. 4:16) and Christ being a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7)

K. Schilder – Sermon # 7 (1949)

Text: John 11:35

Scripture reading: John 11:32-44

A man does not like to cry and if he does, he will try to hide it. For a man, to cry is a sign of weakness. The Son-of-Man cried and the Holy Spirit made sure we would know about it. Why? Because even the tears of Christ have a purpose. When He cries He does it in his office as Man of sorrows.

1. The riddle of Christ's sorrows
2. The message of Christ's sorrows, as apparent in his tears

1 It is quite remarkable that Jesus wept. Someone might say: Jesus' friend died, of course He would weep! After all, he is really human and he would have sympathy with two sisters who lost their brother. Indeed, as a Priest and as one who is like us, Jesus is able to sympathize with us and from that perspective it is not strange that He would weep.

But there is more. John wants us to understand that Jesus is different from us. Throughout chapter 11 there is something mysterious. There are a few riddles in this chapter. First, when Jesus is told that Lazarus is sick He does not immediately go to visit him. He stays where he is for a few more days. When his disciples tell him to go and visit Lazarus, He doesn't. But later, when Lazarus has died and they try to dissuade Him from going, He goes. In addition: Jesus says Lazarus has fallen asleep while actually Lazarus has died. What is this all about?

Jesus arrives at Bethany and Martha says: Lord, if you had been here, our brother would not have died. Martha focuses on the physical death. But what is death really? If physical death were the only concern of Jesus, and if He would save a few people from physical death, He would not be a sufficient Savior. Jesus is the Office-bearer of God who is called to bind Satan and rob him of his booty. Death is enmity against the LORD. Death is: forever hellish pain. Death is: guilt before God. Christ has come to save Mary and Martha and Lazarus from *that* death! That is what Martha needs to understand and believe.

The same applies to Mary. She too says: Lord, if you had been here, our brother would not have died. She too needs to understand that Jesus is not just a miracle worker. Within a few weeks Jesus himself will have died and risen again. And when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, the Jewish leaders take notice and say: this is serious business. Lazarus' resurrection will become for Jesus the beginning of his own death. Mary has not understood the Word about what death means and what sleep means and what a twelve-hour-day means.

That is why Jesus weeps. We often think that He weeps because of the friendship. We think He could not keep himself from crying. I say: No! It says that He *caused himself* to be troubled.⁵ Every word is important. He was troubled, that is one. He did it himself, that is two. When we are moved emotionally we *are* moved. When Jesus is moved, He is in control of his spirit. He is different from us.

⁵ The original Dutch is hard to translate: *Hij ontroerde zichzelf* (Schilder's translation of: ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτόν, vs. 33)

That Jesus has sympathy with us is not something that overcomes him; it is something He decides to grant us. Therefore, when I see his tears, I say: My Lord and my God.

2 Earlier in the same verse it says that Jesus *groaned in the spirit*. He became very angry. Inwardly, He was seething with indignation. Why? Because He knew that the people are watching him to see if He will be able to perform a miracle. As if the main point of Jesus' work was to help Lazarus survive and extend his life with a few more years. But if Jesus is no more than a *postponer* of physical death, what a pitiful Messiah we would have! The Lord groans in the spirit because of the way Abraham's seed reacts to his ministry. Nobody seems to understand. Even his own disciples say: let's go with him and die with him – it all comes to nothing. They need to understand that Jesus is the Messiah who defeats death and destroys its roots and all.

Lazarus' resurrection must be more than another miracle. It must be a sign of something else. A sign the life is possible even when you die. Life is: enjoying the favour of God. Death is: standing in the disfavour of God. The Lord weeps because here he is confronted with a wall. What wall? The wall of election and reprobation. He has the power to call Lazarus back to life, but the wall of unbelief can only be broken down by God himself through the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, they will remain dead in their sins and trespasses.

Every game has players and spectators. What is the role of the Lord Jesus here? Is he player or spectator? He is my Messiah: he watches us. He watches the Reformed churches and warns us: do not become sterile like the seed of Abraham. But He is also intensely involved. He groans in the spirit because of our unbelief, because of our foolish questions about life and death, and He weeps. He is the only person in whom spectator and player are fully harmonized. Therefore, I can trust him completely.

Remember, Lazarus' resurrection is a sign. Jesus says: If you believe, you will see God's glory. Not just at the last day when the graves are opened but even now: there you are dead but you come to life. Death and life have to do with guilt and salvation. When I'm born again, I am *more* than Lazarus!

Comments

- KS portrays Jesus as someone who was always in office. If He wept, it was because He *decided* to weep, not because He was *overcome* by emotion. This seems like reading too much in the text (literal translation of ἐτόραξεν ἑαυτόν). Plus, does this not take away from Jesus' true humanity? Why pose a dilemma between Jesus as human being and Jesus as office-bearer? Doesn't Hebrews say that Jesus is able to sympathize with us (4:15)?
- The interpretation of 'groaning in spirit' as 'seething with anger:' Schilder's suggestion that Jesus weeps because of the unbelief he sees around him, and because of the "wall" of election and reprobation, is debatable. Another interpretation would be that Jesus wept because he was confronted with death as the terrible result of sin.