

[BEAUTIFUL CHRISTIAN CONSOLATION IN ALL KINDS OF SUFFERING AND TRIAL. WHAT BEING MERCIFUL IS AND ISN'T.]

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity; Luke 6:36-42 (2nd sermon)

THE RIGHT CONDUCT TO ONE'S ENEMIES.

1. Beloved Friends! Upon this Gospel a great deal might be said, but at present we will not consider it all, lest we overload ourselves and retain nothing. You have heard in the text how our dear Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, holds up to us the works of mercy, how we should be merciful; not to judge nor to condemn but gladly forgive everyone and in like manner willingly give and help all, as there is need. If we do this, he says, there shall be given to us again good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over. But if we will not do this, with the same measure we mete to others it shall be measured to us again. By this he would earnestly forbid his Christians to condemn anyone, to judge or avenge themselves, or to take from anyone, but rather to give and forgive. For a better understanding of this Gospel, we must in the first place reply to our adversaries, who hold up this text against us as a strong, firm ground of their doctrine, that a man can by works obtain forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and boast of it as though they already had surely gained the victory. They say: Here indeed it stands clearly written: "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; give, and it shall be given to you again." What can a man bring up against such clear passages? Therefore, it certainly follows from this, that a man can obtain forgiveness of sins by good works. Thus, by these and similar passages concerning works, they wish to prove that we are justified and saved by our own merit; and denounce and condemn us as heretics, because we teach that we are saved only through faith in Jesus Christ, who has been crucified and died for us, who gave his body and shed his blood for us for the forgiveness of sins. Thus they make Christ entirely unprofitable for us, and call the doctrine of faith simply an error and falsehood. Here we see how the blind lead the blind.

2. Well, we allow them to proceed, because they want to be blind and hardened. But if they were in earnest to know the truth, they could plainly see from this Gospel to what such passages, to which they so firmly hold, properly refer, and how they should be interpreted. For this Gospel evidently and plainly says, that Christ does not speak to those who shall first obtain grace, but to his disciples, who already are children of grace and justified, and are also sent out by him, that they should preach to others such grace and salvation; from which it clearly follows that they already have forgiveness of sins, and are pious and justified, and are not first to obtain salvation through works. I say, he speaks to those, and instructs them how they shall conduct themselves toward their enemies, namely, when they are persecuted by them, that they should not persecute them in return, but should patiently suffer all these things, and do them good for evil.

3. Hence it is not meant, that by such works as are here enumerated they should first obtain forgiveness of sins and the righteousness that avails before God; but Christ speaks plainly and

simply to his disciples whom he had chosen and called Apostles, as St. Luke shows preceding this Gospel. Christ teaches them how they shall conduct themselves when they preach, as though he would say: You dear disciples, I send you as sheep among wolves, and commend this office unto you to preach, and others shall hear your preaching, accept and believe it. And you will be so received that the world will be offended at you and regard you as enemies, and you will find just as much friendship and love in it, as sheep among wolves. For it will become wholly mad and foolish at your preaching, and will by no means tolerate it. Therefore see to it that you lead a better life and conversation than your enemies, who will practice upon you all kinds of unmerciful deeds by judging and condemning you. Moreover they will not only not forgive you any sin, but will proclaim your best works and deeds of mercy as the greatest sins. Again, they will not only not give you anything, but they will also hunt down that which is your own, and will take and keep it by violence. Thus they will treat you. But beware, that you be not like them; on the other hand where they judge, judge not; where they condemn, bless; where they take revenge, forgive; when they take, give. For immediately before, the Lord teaches the very same when he says: Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you.

4. In this manner St. Paul also admonishes the Christians at Rome (Romans 12:18-19): "If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men. Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto the wrath of God." Christ here teaches the very same when he says: Be merciful, judge not, condemn not, avenge not yourselves, give unto and assist everyone, in order that you may not become equally as bad as your enemies; but rather that they may be prevailed upon by your kind and friendly conversation, to give you a good testimony, and finally be compelled to say conscientiously: Behold, we judge and condemn these people, and carry out all our maliciousness against them; against this they neither defend or avenge themselves, but suffer it all patiently, and besides, they overcome evil with good. Surely, they cannot be bad people, because they have so much patience, and reward evil with good; I myself, will also hold to them, because they do no one any harm, although they have good reasons for so doing.

5. From this one can easily see that Christ does not here teach us to become pious and just through our works, but admonishes those who were already pious and just, that they be merciful like their Father in heaven, so that the heathen may thereby become better, and that thus unbelievers may be kindly enticed to become converted and edified, not only by preaching, but also by the merciful and blameless lives and good conduct of the good and just.

6. In the same sense St. Paul also teaches in 1 Cor. 7:13: And the woman that hath an unbelieving husband, and he is content to dwell with her, let her not leave her husband, as long as he will permit her to remain a Christian. Because it can so happen that the man may be influenced by the virtue of his Christian wife to become converted and say: I see by my wife, that Christians are good people; therefore I also want to be a Christian. Thus we also read of St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine, who had a strange and wonderful husband, who besides was also a heathen. But what did she do? She so conducted herself toward him that he did her no wrong. Other Christian wives were very much astonished at this, and went to her and complained about their husbands, that they could not do anything to please them, although they were Christians, and yet they were scolded and beaten by them; therefore they questioned her how she treated her husband, who, as every one knew,

was not only a wonderful man, but a heathen also, and yet he never beat her. Such favour they could not expect from their husbands, although they were not heathen, but Christians.

7. Kindhearted Monica answered them and said: I fear you give your husbands cause for doing this. If you were subject to them and would not clamour back, or especially when they begin to be strangely cruel, if you would not answer back, but be patient, submit and obey them, and with friendly words appease them, you would, of course, not be beaten. For thus I am accustomed to treat my husband; when my lord scolds, I pray; is he angry, I avoid him, or return kind words; in this way I have not only put down his anger, but I have also brought him so far, that he is converted and has become a Christian. Behold, the beautiful fruit that followed this conduct, because kind Monica was merciful toward her husband, and did not condemn and judge him. Thus it can often take place, as St. Paul says, that an unbelieving husband or wife, may become converted through the one who believes.

8. Thus, says Christ here, should you Christians also do, because you are children of grace and peace, not of anger and discord, and are also called to inherit the blessing. Therefore you should also bring the blessing among the people, first by your preaching and public confession, and after that also by your good outward conduct, so that when the unbelievers judge and condemn you, treat you unmercifully and rob you, you will be merciful to them, and not avenge yourselves, but give and forgive, and besides help, love and bless them, and speak the best things of them before God and the world; that they may also observe by your good conduct that you are pious and blameless people, who do not only suffer evil, but also return good for evil. By this you will obtain a good name among the heathen, and be estimable and honourable in my sight, who art your Lord and God.

9. Thus you see that this text does not at all permit us to conclude from it that forgiveness of sins is obtained by works; for Christ here speaks to those who are already children of grace, and does not instruct them how to obtain by works, as the Papists dream; the forgiveness of sins, which they already had by grace; however, he here teaches them how they are to conduct themselves, when they go forth and preach, toward the people who persecute, judge, condemn them, and afflict them with all kinds of torment and misfortune; that they immediately do the contrary, not judge, nor condemn, but forgive and give; and then they shall also be neither judged nor condemned before God or the world. And even though the world judge them, still God will not condemn them, as it is said in Ps. 37:13-40. So it shall also be forgiven and given them again.

10. Thus Christ admonishes his disciples with these words, that they diligently perform the duties of their office and preach with courage, let it offend whom it may, and that nothing whatever may lead them astray, even though all the world revile and curse; let them only freely continue and they shall be richly rewarded; for it is already determined in heaven that there shall be given unto them full measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over.

11. From all this it is certainly clear, that Christ does not here speak of that righteousness, of how a man becomes just before God, which takes place alone through faith in Jesus Christ, but teaches his disciples how to lead a good life here on earth among unbelievers, by which they may be of great benefit to those who judge and condemn them. When they do such things, it shall be rewarded unto

them again both here and hereafter; not that they thereby merit the forgiveness of sins; for no work, be it ever so good, is able to accomplish this; but when they on this account suffer or lose anything, it shall be returned to them even here in this life an hundred fold, as is written in Mark 10:30, and in the life to come they will be more gloriously arrayed and adorned than other saints. Why? Because they have suffered and done more for Christ's sake than others. For Daniel the prophet says, 12:3, that the teachers shall shine as the brightness of the firmament after the resurrection of the dead, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever. And St. Paul in 1 Cor. 15:41 says: "For one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead."

12. The Lord further says: When you fail to do thus, but return evil for evil, it shall be measured to you again, "for with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again." For by thus judging and condemning those who judge and condemn you, you sufficiently show that you are not my true disciples, and have not yet the forgiveness of sins, or else you would do what I have commanded you. From which it follows further that your faith is not right. So with you it will be changed, and you will hear from me that you have no faith and are false Christians.

13. This is sufficiently proved, because you still judge one another, and one does not assist the other. This my Christians will not do. Therefore your sins will remain upon you, and will only become greater, as is shown in the parable of the wicked servant who owed his Lord ten thousand talents and could not pay it; the Lord forgave him the debt out of pure grace. But as he would not forgive his fellow servant the very little debt, he again fell into his own former debt, which was forgiven him and brought down upon himself the great wrath of his Lord, who delivered him over to the tormentors. Mat. 18:34.

14. Thus our dear Lord would here kindly and lovingly invite us to do good works and lead a Christian life also among our enemies. But when we fail to do this he threatens us, that he would not regard us as Christians. For such works are as a sign or confession that we are true Christians. In addition to this, other people will be made better by such works, and so will we ourselves who do them, as St. Peter says, we make our calling and election sure thereby, and become richer in faith.

15. To this friendly admonition of Christ our Lord we Christians and especially we ministers should diligently give due heed, for we also have at the present day adversaries of our faith and doctrine, who are great and powerful, kings, princes, lords, Pope and bishops. To these our enemies according to this doctrine of Christ we show all mercy, and are not willing that a hair of their heads should be injured, or that they should be robbed of a cent. But this we wish them from our heart, that they may learn to know their errors and sins, and commit themselves to the grace of God and believe the Gospel. On this account they judge, condemn and persecute us, rob us of honour, goods, body and life, as though we were the worst rogues that tread the earth. Such things we do not to them in return, God be praised! but show them all love and kindness, and would willingly help them, if they would only permit it.

16. Yes, they say, you revile us nevertheless, both in writing and preaching, and condemn us as heretics, and will not permit us to be the Christian Church. Is such reproof and condemnation mercy? We answer: This is quite a different matter. Christ in this Gospel speaks of those who shall

suffer injustice. And it would not be right to apply this to those who by virtue of their office are required to reprove what is wrong. For those who have the office to judge and condemn, do no wrong thereby, in so doing. For as little as it agrees or is valid for a child to say to its father when he would punish it; father, be merciful, and God will then also be merciful to thee; so little is it valid against those who have the office of reproof. For it would be very inappropriate for a thief or evil doer to say to the officer of the law: Dear sir, forgive and do not judge me, and then our Lord God will again forgive thee. No, my dear fellow, the officer of the law by virtue of his office will thus answer and say: It is not necessary that I should forgive you. I do what is right, and doing right needs no forgiveness, but is praiseworthy. Thus also when father and mother punish their children, they do right, for this is called true punishment, when the office requires it. But beware, that you do not revenge yourself against him who must punish you, even if at times he treats you unjustly.

17. Wherefore it is not appropriate to twist this text, as though the Lord speaks of those who have the authority to punish the wrong, as ministers and all persons in authority, fathers, mothers, princes, lords, and finally also the executioner, who should not say to the evil doer, to whom he must administer justice, as however they are accustomed to do: "Dear Sir, forgive me, what I do to you today," for why should he say this? As he does right, he needs no forgiveness, which pertains alone to sin and wrong; for his office is to punish wrong. Just as it would be wrong if a father would say to his son when he would punish him: Dear son, forgive me, that I punish you. No, he does right, therefore the son should bear it, for thus God will have it.

18. Thus St. Paul says, 2 Cor. 5:13: "For whether we are beside ourselves, it is unto God; or whether we are of sober mind, it is unto you." In his first Epistle, Paul severely rebuked the Corinthians, which some thought was too severe; but he does not excuse himself in the least nor asks for grace, he simply says: If we rebuke too severely, it is unto God and we serve him; but if we are sober and deal gently, we do so for your good. He will not admit that he has done any sin at all, because he so severely rebukes them, but says he serves God by it, and if he has been too indulgent, he did it for their benefit. This is quite a poor answer to such a complaint as: Dear Paul, why do you strike us so hard? But as he fills the office of an Apostle, he gives no other answer but this: I rebuke and punish sin as I wish, I do right and serve God thereby; not on account of my person, but because God has so commanded and ordered it.

19. Thus also a judge can say, when by virtue of his office he sentences the evil doer unto death, that he serves God thereby. So also father and mother, when they punish their child as it has deserved, thus serve God; but if they punish it somewhat milder than it deserves, it is for the good of the child.

20. We must make a distinction however, for it is vastly different when a person punishes who has the

office to punish, and when one punishes who has not this office. An office, call it what you may, is ordained to punish sin; not to tolerate wrong, but protect the right. Therefore, because I and other ministers have this office, we do right, a work of mercy for the people, when we rebuke them, let whoever will do us good or evil for it.

21. Just as it is a great mercy not to allow young people to have their will and way, whether it be

accomplished by threats or by the rod; it will still cost trouble and labour enough to oppose and prevent evil, even though we punish severely. If punishment were altogether omitted and mercy took the place of office, the country would be full of rogues, and the world become a mere den of murderers. Then one would say to another: If you steal from me, I will rob you; if you go with my wife, I will go with yours. No, this would never do; therefore the executioner is a very beneficial and even a merciful man, for he prevents the rogue from repeating his crime, and restrains others from committing crimes. He executes the one and thus threatens others that would do the like, that they may fear the sword and keep the peace. This is a magnificent grace and pure mercy.

22. Again, it is a great sin against mercy, yes a horrible murder, when a father allows his child to go unpunished; for this is just the same as though he killed it with his own hands; hence Solomon says, Prov. 23:13, 14: "Withhold not correction from the child; for if thou beat him with the rod, he will not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell." That is, he will not die of your beating, but with the rod you cause him to live, and deliver his soul from death; for if you do not punish him, the executioner will, even unto death, by taking away his life. As Solomon would say: If you do not beat your son with the rod of life, in order that he may live, then you are a murderer; because you assist your child to become a rogue, so that the executioner must strike him with the rod of death. Therefore take in your hand the rod of life, and freely punish when necessary, that he may escape the rod of death. Then you will perform a noble work of mercy to him, whereas if you let him have his own will, you become his murderer.

23. Therefore it is senseless for the Papists to cry: We of course teach others not to judge, nor condemn, but we ourselves do the contrary, punish, judge and condemn everyone. For as I said, what we do in this, we do by virtue of our office. Therefore our judging and punishing is of such a nature, that it only makes one better and harms no one. And we are obliged to do it on account of the command of Christ our Lord, Luke 24:47, that repentance and forgiveness of sins be preached in his name among all nations on earth; and John 16:8: "The Holy Spirit will reprove the world of sin."

24. According to this command all the Apostles have first judged and reprov'd the world, and proclaimed God's wrath against it; afterwards they preached forgiveness of sins in Christ's name, as St. Paul does, Rom. 1:3, and St. Peter, Acts 2:3-10, and Christ himself when he says, John 9:39: "For judgment came I into this world." Those who have accepted this preaching and permit themselves to be judged and reprov'd by it, have received the comfort of the Gospel, that without merit, by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus they are justified and saved, Rom. 3:24.

This judgment and reproof of Christ and the Apostles is not harmful, but beneficial, comfortable and wholesome. Moreover, those who have not allowed themselves to be reprov'd by these have remained in their sins, and have died and perished forever; and also, in time, have their cities, lands and kingdoms in which they have lived, been most woefully devastated and destroyed.

25. As therefore the Apostles have preached according to the command of Christ, so too must we do, and say that all men are conceived and born in sin and are by nature children of wrath, and on this account condemned, and can neither by their own or any other creature's help, advice, work or merit, receive forgiveness of sins and be saved. This is to reprove, judge and condemn everybody,

and yet we do this, not out of our own wantonness, or that we take pleasure in crying down men as sinners and godless; but out of Christ's order and command. With this however we do not cease, but we again encourage and comfort those whom we have rebuked, and say that Jesus Christ has come into the world to save sinners, so that all who believe in him, should not perish, but receive everlasting life.

26. Therefore God-fearing people accuse us of no fault in this; for they observe that we do not preach human nonsense like monks in their hoods, but proclaim the Gospel of Christ; they are glad therefore, and heartily thank God that they have lived to see the time when they can know the precious truth, and thereby obtain comfort for their consciences, and accept this our reproof and judgment as a great mercy. Again, the great and godless crowd scold and condemn us on account of this our reproof, as heretics and traitors, who disturb both the old faith and worship and also the worldly government and peace. We must bear this; yet our conscience gives us the testimony that they wrongfully accuse us, and besides we are comforted to know that we are not the first ones who have been thus slandered. St. Paul also had to hear from Jews and Gentiles, that he was a blasphemer and traitor. Yea, Christ himself was accused before Pilate for misleading the people and making them disobedient to the emperor, for which also he was crucified. With them we are glad to be cried down as heretics and traitors, until the time when our innocence shall come to light.

27. If now the wretched, hardened Papists were not such bitter enemies of the truth, and of us on account of the truth, they could observe by our life that we hold firmly to this admonition of Christ, be merciful; for God be praised, we have not thus far avenged ourselves against any man who has done us injury, we have not driven anyone from house and home, wife and child, we have cast no one into prison on account of his faith, much less have we beheaded, burnt at the stake or hung anyone for their faith, as the Papists have done, the tender saints, who have for the last few years shed much innocent blood, and still do not cease. But we have complied with this doctrine and admonition of Christ, and have honoured their order and government and confirmed it with our doctrine as far as they are right, we have prayed and pleaded for them, privately and publicly, and have faithfully also admonished them in writings by virtue of our office which God has committed to our charge.

And for this our mercy we have received from them the reward, that they have put us under the ban, cursed and persecuted us, and driven many of our brethren from their possessions and murdered them. What more shall we do? Yet we must bear the name of being impatient, angry, spiteful, and revengeful people, who judge and condemn all the world. Well, we must bear this disgrace before the world, until our dear Lord Jesus Christ, the just Judge, shall examine us and decide the matter; in the meantime we permit them evermore to lie, slander and persecute us; but they shall learn by experience when God's time comes, whom they have slandered and persecuted in us.

28. This much is said of the chief meaning of this Gospel, how we are to be merciful also toward our enemies. Now we should also apply it to our own lives, we who want to be Christians and brethren should practice this among ourselves; for it is very necessary also that this admonition be preached to us. Although we are all called Evangelical, I fear that the most of us are heathen under the Christian name. Well, what shall we do about it? We must allow the name to all, although few there be who bear it in truth. For St. Paul in 2 Thess. 3:2 says: "For all have not faith"; and Christ

himself complains, Mat. 22:14, that many are called but few are chosen. Now, those who are true Christians should with all diligence take this admonition of Christ to heart, that they may not only be friendly toward enemies, but also much more toward those called Christians.

29. Therefore let everyone who goes to the sacrament and pretends to be a Christian take heed to himself that he deceive not himself. For one can now well see what a scraping, grabbing and scratching there is even among those who want to be Christians, from the lowest to the highest stage of society. It is a sin and a shame to hear it. Nearly everyone falls into this shameful greed, and such a state may well be called a swine's life, for as the swine in the trough, whichever one is the strongest pushes the rest away, as though she wanted to devour all herself, just so it goes in the world today, and everyone goes securely forth, gives nothing whatever and takes all he can get, whether he gets it rightfully or wrongfully, so that the word give, which stands here in the Gospel, has almost disappeared, and instead robbery and theft in homes and in the market have everywhere come to take its place. What unfaithfulness prevails even among day labourers and house servants, how shamefully they earn their bread with malicious unfaithfulness, cheating and overcharging. They do not look upon it as stealing, and yet it is just as much stealing when they labour unfaithfully, as when they steal it out of our purse. This is the way servants and labourers do, and it matters not by what they are called.

30. But how will such people stand in that day when Christ shall ask them, whether they have done according to his admonition? For if Christians are to be merciful to their enemies as Christ here teaches, much more will it become them to show all love and friendship toward their brethren and Christian people; and as they are not to curse their enemies, much less should they curse their friends. Again, if they are not to avenge themselves on unbelievers, but give to them and do them good, much more should they show this kindness to the household of faith. Yes, turn the thing around to rob, to covet, and to take advantage of another wherever one can; this goes on yet in the world with violence. But the holy Gospel says: Give, and it shall be given unto you; if we do not hold ourselves to this rule, we shall hear the opposite: Steal and rob, and you shall be robbed and stolen from again.

31. But our Lord God is so full of resources that he can send misfortune upon a city or a country so that even after they have gathered and hoarded for a long time, some tramp brother or fellow pilgrim comes along, to whom one must give or he will take it himself by force. For it must surely come to this that if we willfully forget that word "give," our Lord God will make out of it "take." After such misfortune we strive with all diligence, for wherever the Lord says "give" there we only wish to make out of it "take." Well then take, steal and rob as long as you will, what will it avail you; things will take a turn some day so that it will be taken from you again.

32. All history teaches us, that when a kingdom, a principality, or a city, has been exalted to the highest pitch and becomes rich, then comes a war, or some other misfortune, so that it again becomes poor. Thus it happens also to individual families and persons; when they rise suddenly and become powerful, they also immediately fall again. I have already observed several who sat amid great possessions, and yet in a short time were thoroughly ruined. Why is this? Because they did not want to give as Christ here admonishes, but much rather took from others, for this reason a change

took place with them, that it was again taken from them; as also teaches experience, and the common proverb runs: Goods unjustly won, will not last to the third son, that he may enjoy it. Such things we see daily in all ranks of life; and if it does endure for a time and descends from father to son, yet it sinks with the third heir, for it is a cursed wealth, which has either been obtained by theft or greed.

33. By such daily experience the children of the world ought to become wise and think: Why scratch and scrape so long, you cannot rightfully possess goods obtained by stinginess after all, nor will it prosper in your hands, as you have time and again experienced from one or another.

34. But we Christians should be more influenced by what the Holy Scriptures teach about it. Thus David says, Ps. 37:16–18: "Better is a little that the righteous hath, than the abundance of many wicked," and the reason immediately follows: "For the arm of the wicked shall be broken, and the Lord upholdeth the righteous. The Lord knoweth the days of the perfect; and their inheritance shall be forever." As though he would say: Although a good man may have but little, if he only has it with God and honour, it will be dearer to him than all the treasures of the ungodly. For our Lord God will shower his blessings upon that little, so that it will last to children's children to the thousandth generation. This is also apparent; for at the present time we find many old and honourable families in the cities, whose possessions have reached to several hundred generations, whereas with others it has disappeared with the third.

We should learn from this and similar passages, and hold to it because it is the truth, that it is better to have thirty dollars with God and honour, than three thousand won without God and with dishonour. For God blesses the little which the righteous have (says Ps. 37:16), so that he may not only possess it with a good conscience, but will also be to his benefit and he will use it so that God may be pleased with it. But the wealth that has been unjustly obtained, may be enjoyed for a time; yet because God's blessing does not rest upon it, it wears away and loses it-self, so that we cannot tell what has become of it; for it has been won by greed and wrong, and as they did not regard it as stealing. For one to scrape all together and give nothing away, the rust is entered into it and eats it up, so that it cannot be seen that there ever was a penny there. As also the heathen have learned from experience and said: "By evil acquired, by evil it goes," "As it is won, so it is gone."

35. But why say more? One will not grow wise except by his own losses; we let our Lord God promise and threat in vain, but who asks about it? Though we preach ever so much, Prov. 11:4: "Riches profit not in the day of wrath; but righteousness delivereth from death," and v. 28: "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall; but the righteous shall flourish as the green leaf;" everyone thinks the while: "Dear Sir, say what you will, if I had money and goods, I would be free from all distress;" they simply make our Lord God a liar. But they will experience sooner than they wish, that they are deceived.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us fear and trust in God, and hereafter be merciful and kind, not only toward enemies as this Gospel teaches, but still more toward our friends and brethren; especially because we hear that our Lord is such an enemy to shameful covetousness, that he will blow upon such ill-gotten gain, so that it will vanish and fly away as the dust before the wind. The prophet Haggai 1:6, says of the miser, that he gathers into a bag with holes; as though he would say: Well, they may gather, but it will do them no good, because they want to get rich by greed even to the

injury of others. And Solomon says: The godless man, when he has for a long time gathered wealth in heaps, has such a curse in his house, that he not only does not become better by his wealth, but it also disappears under his hands, as though the rust had devoured it.

36. Now dear friends, do not despise such a warning, but take it to yourselves, and if you have already been ensnared by this covetousness, turn again and reform. Formerly when one served the devil in popedom, everyone was merciful and kind, then they gave with both hands joyfully and with great devotion, to support the false worship of God. Now, when one should justly be kind and give, and show his thankfulness to God for the holy Gospel, everyone is about to perish with hunger, no one will give anything, but will only receive. Formerly every city according to its size, liberally supported several cloisters, not to mention mass-priests and rich monasteries. Now, when only two or three persons, who preach God's Word, administer the sacraments, visit and comfort the sick in an honest and Christian manner and instruct the youth, are to be supported in one city, and that too not from their own but from property that came to us from the papacy, it is hard for everybody to give.

37. But thus it must be, that Jesus with Mary and Joseph should have no room in the inn at Bethlehem, but after all he finds a crib, and Mary and Joseph a stall, in which they miserably help themselves as best they may. And as they are not at home in Nazareth but in a strange place at an inconvenient time, in the midst of winter, and altogether forgotten in the stall by the people of Bethlehem, yet after all they do not perish with hunger. But before they should suffer hunger among their blood relations who care nothing for them, even the heathen must come from rich Arabia and present the little child Jesus gold, frankincense and myrrh. Christians understand well enough what is meant.

38. Therefore let everyone be diligent to comply with this admonition, that he willingly give, if he desires that it shall be given unto him again. If he will not do this, Christ will most certainly keep his Word, that it shall not be given unto him again. And though he already has something, there shall not be given him grace enough to enjoy it, as has already been shown from Scripture passages. Now God does not only show us by his Word that our covetousness is displeasing to him, and that usurers shall not enjoy their goods, but proves it also by daily examples. I will relate one as a warning which has recently occurred, although some may be offended at it: It is not far from here to Wittenberg, as has been reported to me and have also myself made proper inquiries, there was a farmer, who all his life cheated and took advantage of the people in the market, as at present nearly all are accustomed to do, he went into his barn to look after his grain; then the devil set such a ghost before his eyes, that he found his barn empty, and could see no corn there. What happened? The miserable, stingy man becomes frightened, and thinks the corn was secretly stolen from his barn. He goes down to his wife and servants with great cries and lamentations and says all his grain has been stolen out of his barn. As the wife and servants go in to look after it, in the meantime the wretched man hangs himself for grief, and dies in the rope before they return again to him. And yet it was but the deception of the devil. For all the corn was still lying untouched on the floor. The devil by the decree of God had thus infatuated him, that he could not see even a single grain.

39. This I say, has taken place before our very doors, to frighten and warn us. What benefit did the

poor man reap from it? What help are now his goods to him, which he had scraped together so long with care and labour? The devil wanted to kill him, therefore he so blindfolded him that he could not see his own corn, and thus he gave him a cause, to hang himself for grief. This is I think a curse, which came upon ill-gotten goods, that he should not only not enjoy it, but even not behold it, and thereby lose both body and soul. More similar histories have appeared, as you at other times have heard from me; and it is good not to forget them, there may yet be some who will be re-formed by them. The wretched man who so miserably hung himself will find his sentence. But we tell it you as a warning. If you will not receive it, but despise it, you do not despise me who told it you, but the Lord Christ, who tells it to you through me. But if you receive it and do better, I will give you no reward, for I cannot reward the works of a Christian. But he who here says: Give and it shall be given to you, will richly reward it. Whoever will, let him accept, and whoever will not, can let it alone. This text will not become false on that account. For although not all are punished like this man, yet everyone who despises this admonition of Christ, will find his condemnation on the last day. And it is indeed to be wondered at, that we willingly and with great care, weariness and labour, for the stingy man's stinginess becomes very hard, 1 Tim. 6:10, should bring into our own house first our own injury and curse, whereas with lighter labour and a more joyful courage, if we according to the doctrine of Christ would give and help our neighbour, could well be rich. For he who said, Give, and it will be given you, will certainly keep his Word, and give again to those who obey his admonition, and that abundantly; for he says: A full, pressed down, shaken together, and overrunning measure shall be given to you again.

40. Were it not better, you had but little with God and honour, and give and help the needy according to your ability, and have thereby a good conscience and the glorious comfort that God will bless and increase your humble store, than that you should, with care and restlessness and with an evil conscience, have great possessions, which you not only cannot enjoy, but cannot even be master of, for a miser is mammon's servant and a captive. And yet, you do not only know from God's Word, although you will not believe it, but also from daily experience, that it will do your children or heirs no good, but by the very consumption of it they shall become poor.

41. What have you of it at last, O wretched man, when you have so long scraped and scratched together, except that you have made your life very toilsome in sins, and the devil, when your last hour comes, will drag you into the abyss of hell, and so you will not only shamefully lose your money and goods, which in this life you never could enjoy, but besides you also wretchedly lose both body and soul, and upon all this with your condemned treasures you bring down God's displeasure and curse upon your children and heirs, who have become no better than yourself, but fall into poverty and into all distress and misfortune. Very well, he that will hear, let him hear. For everyone must bear his own burden, as St. Paul says, Gal. 6:5: I believe it also. Therefore you who will not hear, answer for yourselves. This is enough of this Gospel for a small admonition. God grant, that in some of you it may bring forth fruit! Amen.

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