

Lutheran Vespers, Sometime during 1947-1948
Recording #4
KVNU, 610, Logan, Utah
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As a message from Thy holy Word is again sent out on this broadcast period to the hearts and souls of all who are listening in, we pray Thee, dear Lord, bless it and make it prosper in the things whereto it is sent. By Thy Holy Spirit show the hearers the way of repentance that they may turn to Thee for grace and strive more and more to do Thy holy will. We ask it for the sake of Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

The selection from God's holy Word upon which we shall base our today's message and meditation is recorded in the Gospel according to St. Luke where we read in chapter 3 from verses 7 through 14, as follows:

Then said he (namely John the Baptist) to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, Oh, generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come. Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father. For I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham, and now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees, every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said under them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

Dear friends of the listening audience. Many people are of the opinion that when the Bible demands sorrow over sin and offers forgiveness to the penitent sinner, it thereby discourages godly living and encourages the sinner to continue in his evil ways, after being assured that through Jesus Christ there is forgiveness for every transgression. That Jesus Christ by his holy life and innocent suffering and death has made atonement for every sin, the Bible emphatically declares when it says, for example, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." But the conclusion that since there is forgiveness for all sins, the sinner can do as he pleases and be as bad as he can is all wrong. The Bible says if any man be in Christ he is a new creature. A truly penitent sinner will not only rejoice that there is pardon for his sins, he will also want to please the God who has been so gracious to him. He will want to improve his life to bring it more in harmony with God's will. This is plainly illustrated by John the Baptist preaching of repentance. John was a stern preacher of God's law. By it he led many people to see their sinfulness and to seek the assurance of forgiveness through his baptism.

Still those who were sincere in their repentance asked anxiously: “What shall we do then?” In other words, they wanted to know how they could show forth the fruits of repentance. In reply to their anxious question, John did not tell them to change occupations or to seek an entirely different profession from that in which they had been engaged. He simply applied to each group that came to him the same principle. That principle was this: Change your way of conducting your present occupation, so that it harmonizes with the law of love.

This principle he applied to several groups. With the people in general, he said: “He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.” In other words, the repentant people were told to share what they had with those less fortunate than themselves. Those that had more clothing than they needed were told to share it with those who had none. And those who have more than enough food, were instructed to do the same. This, the law of love, demands of all of us.

Yet how often don't we find ourselves unwilling to share what we have. Yes, if we have something for which we see no immediate personal use, we will perhaps be ready to share that with the needy. For if we are asked to remember the hungry and share our food with them, we may give a little, but no more than we can give without causing a change in our own eating habits. But isn't that kind of giving rather selfish? Is that really sharing with those who are in need? Isn't it rather giving them left overs? How loveless and selfish we have been, if all we have been ready to share is what we did not need for ourselves. If that has been the case with us and we are truly repentant, then the Bible demands that we change for the better, that we be ready to share even if it causes us inconvenience, that we be ready to do unto others as we would have them do to us in the same situation.

This same principle John the Baptist applied to the publicans who came to him asking, “Master, what shall we do?” The publicans were tax collectors for the Roman government. They were hated by the common people, not merely because they were working for the ruling powers, but also because they generally took advantage of the people. The Roman authorities told them that in a certain district they were to collect a certain amount of taxes and the local tax gatherer was at liberty to collect all he could get from the individuals so long as the Romans received their due. This was a powerful temptation for the Jewish tax collector. And because of the contempt in which the publicans were held, only those who saw in this occupation an opportunity to enrich themselves as a rule applied for the position. Because of this reputation John the Baptist told this group, “Exact no more than that which is appointed you.” If they were sincere in their repentance, they should conduct their business honestly. They should not collect any more than was fair on the basis of the Roman requirement. This too, was demanded by the law of love.

The Bible does not demand a change of occupation. It merely demands that each person conducted his business according to God's standard of honesty and in keeping with the principle of love thy neighbor as thyself. We need more of that in our country today. Too many people permit themselves to be guided by the principle: Get all the profits you can

while you can get them, instead of by the principal: Live and let live.

Those of us who are sincere in our repentance and appreciate the forgiveness which God offers to us in his Word and forthright faith must change our method of conducting our life and profession to bring us more in keeping with the law of love for the fellow man.

In our text for this meditation, John the Baptist applies this same rule to another group. We are told: "And the soldiers likewise demanded of him saying, and what shall we do?" To them John gave this answer: "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages." These soldiers were very likely working for the Roman government. It seemed that they were here either out of curiosity or were sent by the authorities in anticipation of trouble. When John's preaching struck them, they were told to discontinue some of their former practices in connection with their occupation. In their position the temptations to bully the people and to receive bribes and hush money was very great. In the case of the poor, they would perhaps use threats to make them give something extra. In the case of the rich they may have obtained money by threatening to tell either some of their secrets or by making false charges against them. This practice, John told them, would have to stop. And they would have to be satisfied with their regular wages if they were sincere in their repentance.

From these applications we see that a sincere and repentant Christian not only does not want to, but is not permitted to continue in his old evil ways and habits. He must and will make serious efforts to change his manner of living in whatever occupation he may be engaged. So far from giving him license to sin, the Bible demands fruits meet for repentance of the person who has received the forgiveness and grace of God. There must be evidence of a true appreciation of God's grace in the life of a Christian. And if you are truly repentant, you too will want to change your living to bring it more in harmony with God's will in applying the law of love. May God give us more true repentance. Then all our other problems will solve themselves.

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ who hast redeemed us with Thy holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death, we pray Thee, fill our hearts with such a deep appreciation and thankfulness for Thy love and grace, that we will gladly, with Thy Spirit's help, make those changes in our manner of living which are necessary to bring our lives in closer harmony with Thy Word and will. Help us to overcome our inclination to evil and to do that which is good in Thy sight. We ask it for the sake of Thy love and grace, Oh Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.