

LUTHER'S WORKS

VOLUME 23

SERMONS ON THE GOSPEL
OF ST. JOHN

Chapters 6—8

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General Introduction

THE first editions of Luther's collected works appeared in the sixteenth century, and so did the first efforts to make him "speak English." In America serious attempts in these directions were made for the first time in the nineteenth century. The Saint Louis edition of Luther was the first endeavor on American soil to publish a collected edition of his works, and the Henkel Press in Newmarket, Virginia, was the first to publish some of Luther's writings in an English translation. During the first decade of the twentieth century, J. N. Lenker produced translations of Luther's sermons and commentaries in thirteen volumes. A few years later the first of the six volumes in the Philadelphia (or Holman) edition of the *Works of Martin Luther* appeared. Miscellaneous other works were published at one time or another. But a growing recognition of the need for more of Luther's works in English has resulted in this American edition of Luther's works.

The edition is intended primarily for the reader whose knowledge of late medieval Latin and sixteenth-century German is too small to permit him to work with Luther in the original languages. Those who can, will continue to read Luther in his original words as these have been assembled in the monumental Weimar edition (*D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*; Weimar, 1883 ff.). Its texts and helps have formed a basis for this edition, though in certain places we have felt constrained to depart from its readings and findings. We have tried throughout to translate Luther as he thought translating should be done. That is, we have striven for faithfulness on the basis of the best lexicographical materials available. But where literal accuracy and clarity have conflicted, it is clarity that we have preferred, so that sometimes paraphrase seemed more faithful than literal fidelity. We have proceeded in a similar way in the matter of Bible versions, translating Luther's translations. Where this could be done by the use of an existing English version — King James, Douay, or Revised Standard — we have done so. Where

it could not, we have supplied our own. To indicate this in each specific instance would have been pedantic; to adopt a uniform procedure would have been artificial — especially in view of Luther's own inconsistency in this regard. In each volume the translator will be responsible primarily for matters of text and language, while the responsibility of the editor will extend principally to the historical and theological matters reflected in the introductions and notes.

Although the edition as planned will include fifty-five volumes, Luther's writings are not being translated in their entirety. Nor should they be. As he was the first to insist, much of what he wrote and said was not that important. Thus the edition is a selection of works that have proved their importance for the faith, life, and history of the Christian Church. The first thirty volumes contain Luther's expositions of various Biblical books, while the remaining volumes include what are usually called his "Reformation writings" and other occasional pieces. The final volume of the set will be an index volume; in addition to an index of quotations, proper names, and topics, and a list of corrections and changes, it will contain a glossary of many of the technical terms that recur in Luther's works and that cannot be defined each time they appear. Obviously Luther cannot be forced into any neat set of rubrics. He can provide his reader with bits of autobiography or with political observations as he expounds a psalm, and he can speak tenderly about the meaning of the faith in the midst of polemics against his opponents. It is the hope of publishers, editors, and translators that through this edition the message of Luther's faith will speak more clearly to the modern church.

J. P.
H. L.

Introduction to Volume 23

THIS sermonic commentary on John 6–8 (Weimar, XXIII) dates from the same period during which Luther produced his *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, which appears in Volume 21 of *Luther's Works*. That commentary came out of Luther's preaching at the midweek services held in Wittenberg on Wednesdays, while this commentary is the product of the Saturday services. We owe them both to the forced labor into which Luther was drafted as a result of the absence of Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558) from his pulpit in Wittenberg (see also *Luther's Works*, 21, xix–xx). But while the *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount* has already been worked over by its anonymous editors from the sixteenth century to the extent that its sermonic form has disappeared, we are able to follow Luther from sermon to sermon in the present *Commentary on John 6–8*, thanks to the care of the original editor, Johannes Aurifaber (1519 to 1575). He first published the commentary in Eisleben in 1565, explaining the circumstances of its original composition as well as of its compilation in the following preface:

“In the year 1530 the imperial city of Lübeck accepted the doctrine of the holy Gospel, which was revealed by God to the world in this last time through that beloved man of God, Dr. Martin Luther. During the Diet of Augsburg they requested of the church and the university in Wittenberg that Dr. Johannes Bugenhagen Pomer, the minister there, [be released] to plant the doctrine of the Gospel among them and to reform their churches. When Dr. Martin Luther, Philipp Melancthon, and Dr. Justus Jonas returned to Wittenberg from the diet, and when Elector John of Saxony granted his permission to Dr. Pomer to go to Lübeck, then Luther took over his regular sermons in his absence – the morning sermon on Sundays and the sermons on Wednesdays and Saturdays. On Wednesdays he took up and expounded the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of Matthew; this exposition is in print and can be found in the fifth German volume of the Jena edition [*Luther's Works*, 21]. On Saturdays, however,

he preached on the Gospel of John, which Dr. Pomer had begun to expound. He continued [Pomer's] exposition. On the Saturday after All Saints' Day in 1530 he delivered the first sermon on John 6, and thereafter he preached on John 6, 7, and 8 until 1532. These sermons have never before appeared in print. But I, Johannes Aurifaber, have copied them from the manuscript books of several distinguished and pious men, Master Veit Dietrich of Nürnberg, Master George Rörer, Master Anthony Lauterbach, and Philipp Fabricius, who took down these sermons from Luther's lips. I have carefully edited these sermons [*mit vleis zugericht*] and had them printed in this volume, so that this commentary is not lost."

Aurifaber enumerates four scribes, but all four of their manuscripts have been lost. Alongside the Aurifaber edition the Weimar editors have reprinted a manuscript found in Heidelberg. Apparently the manuscript was compiled from these four sources; indeed, it seems that Aurifaber did at least part of the compiling himself. From Aurifaber's work as a compiler of Luther's later sermons on St. John during another of Bugenhagen's trips (cf. *Luther's Works*, 22, xi) we may reasonably conclude, as we have said about the editors of Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*, that he allowed himself "greater liberties in preparing [these sermons] for publication than the modern conventions of editing and publishing would justify" (*Luther's Works*, 1, x). The manuscript does nevertheless serve a useful function as a check on the printed text, and in several instances (for example, p. 26, note 24) we have been able to correct an error in the latter on the basis of the former.

Among the most striking errors in the printed text are the dates attached to many of the sermons. Sometimes a sermon is assigned to the Saturday after a feast or a saint's day when it was actually preached on the Saturday before that day (see p. 131, note 97; also p. 155, note 113; also p. 185, note 131). Sometimes Aurifaber neglected to note that the saint's day referred to was itself a Saturday (see p. 259, note 33). At other times Aurifaber seems to have forgotten that the sermons were all delivered on Saturdays (see p. 90, note 71; also p. 143, note 103). For the first sermon we have the notice in Aurifaber's preface that it was delivered "on the Saturday after All Saints' Day in 1530," that is, on November 5, 1530. But for the eight following sermons we have no specific dates assigned. Aided by the careful scholarship of the St. Louis edition, we have attempted to conjecture

dates for them on the basis of what can be ascertained about the chronology of Luther's life in those weeks.

Perhaps the chief factor of interest in the chronology of Luther's life during the sixteen months of this sermonic exposition is his almost continuous poor health, aggravated by the strain of his many extra duties. He was even compelled to interrupt his exposition toward the end (see p. 405, note 71). A study of his letters in this period shows him constantly complaining of illness and of overwork. On November 7, 1530, two days after delivering the first of these sermons, he wrote to a friend in Riga: "I have been feeling weak, especially in my head. Pomer has gone to Lübeck and is teaching the Word" (Weimar, *Briefe*, 5, 678). It is no mere coincidence that these two statements should come side by side! For before Pomer returned from teaching the Word in Lübeck, Luther had grown quite sick — sick in body and sick of doing Bugenhagen's work for him (cf. *Luther's Works*, 21, xx; also 22, ix—xi). Over and over he suffered attacks of vertigo, which he attributed sometimes to the devil (thus in his letter of June 26, 1531, to Link, Weimar, *Briefe*, 6, 128), sometimes to spoiled wine (thus in his earlier letter of January 15, 1531, to Link, Weimar, *Briefe*, 6, 17). Melancthon's letter of January 13, 1532, to Joachim Camerarius (*Corpus Reformatorum*, II, 563) shows that Luther's colleagues had begun to despair of his life, as he had himself in this period (see his letter of February 26—27, 1532, Weimar, *Briefe*, 6, 268). The most severe crisis, as Veit Dietrich reports, came on January 22, 1532, after a premonition (Weimar, *Tischreden*, 1, No. 157).

The burden of ill health and of exhaustion bore down on Luther until he wrote to Bugenhagen on November 24, 1531. The letter is in Latin, with one explosion in German: "We are expecting you, my dear Pomeranus, as soon as you can return in comfort after your wife's delivery, for whose success I pray. Enough has been done for the people of Lübeck by your absence [from Wittenberg], which is finally beginning to be difficult for us, since I am overburdened and often ill. . . . I can't stand it much longer! [*Ich kann's nicht warten!*]" (Weimar, *Briefe*, 6, 231.) Yet it was not until April 30, 1532, that Bugenhagen finally returned to Wittenberg. Meanwhile, however, Luther had preached the last of his sermons on John 8 on March 9 (see p. 422, note 81).

J. P.

SERMONS ON THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

Chapters 6–8

Translated by
MARTIN H. BERTRAM

**DR. MARTIN LUTHER'S EXPOSITION OF THE
SIXTH, SEVENTH, AND EIGHTH CHAPTERS
OF THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN**

*These sermons were preached in Wittenberg
from November 5, 1530, to March 9, 1532*

CHAPTER SIX

26. *Jesus answered them: Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.*

IN this text we hear Jesus tell the Jews why they are following Him, namely, not because of His miracles and His teaching but for the sake of their miserable bellies, which they held so dear. For they reasoned: "He is a proper Teacher for us. He will provide us with a physical freedom in which each will be sated and satisfied and enabled to gratify his every wish." The Lord wants to indicate what sort of disciples the teaching of the Gospel attracts. Even today the Gospel finds disciples who imagine that its teaching affords nothing but a gratification of the belly, that it brings all manner of earthly delights, and that it serves solely the wants of this temporal life.

Even today this misconception is so prevalent and pronounced that I have almost grown weary of preaching and teaching. The people come to hear the proclamation of the Gospel as though they were its sincere disciples. But they dissemble, pursuing no other interest than to fill their bellies and to indulge their selfishness. They regard the Gospel as a teaching that is designed for the belly and teaches gluttony and carousing. The concern of nearly all men, from the lowliest to the most exalted, revolves about that idea. Among princes, counts, noblemen and magistrates, town people and country folk, it is quite common to regard the Gospel as a belly sermon.¹ But this teaching was not sent from heaven to fill everyone's paunch and afford him every license. That is not the reason why Christ shed His blood. No, the Gospel is a proclamation about the praise, glory, and honor of God. And it directs us to praise and glorify God as well, for God wants us to praise and laud Him and to do what pleases Him. Thus when we seek first God's honor and His kingdom (Matt. 6:33), He, in turn, offers to grant us not only this temporal life with all its needs but eternal life as well.

¹ Luther's German word here is *Bauchpredigt*.

For God satisfied all the bodily wants of the world long before He issued the Gospel; therefore the preaching of the Gospel would be unnecessary for the sake of the belly. In Gen. 1:28 ff. He gave man all the beasts of the field, the fish in the sea, and the birds in the air. He made him master of all these and subjected the earth to man that it might produce grain, wine, sheep, oxen, and clothing for him. Furthermore, God ordered that man should cultivate the soil to have food that would nourish him. God stocks man's pantry and cellar with abundance to his joy and delight. Finally God also gave man the sun to light him by day and the moon to light him by night, so that man and beast, fatigued by the day's toil, might slumber and rest. God also gave man everything else he might require or desire.

Therefore it was not necessary for Christ to come and preach about matters pertaining to the body. Temporal goods are bestowed also on such as are not interested in Christ but are ungodly. Yes, I suppose that these people possess the greatest amount of earthly riches. We observe, for example, that the Turk is ruler over many kingdoms.² One wonders what inspired the assumption that the Gospel instructs one to scrape and scratch riches to himself, to multiply his wealth, to become a usurer, a miser, and a robber — all in the guise and under the cloak of the Gospel. That is not the purpose of the Gospel. Yet people still cling to this illusion regarding the Gospel. They argue: "Well, Christ proclaims liberty in the Gospel, doesn't He? So let us quit working and gorge ourselves with food and drink!" Everyone scrapes riches into his purse just in order to fill his belly.

Our adversaries, too, are proficient in this skill. They can grab for ecclesiastical property, for cloisters and bishoprics. Every peasant barely able to count to five snatches fields, meadows, and woods away from the cloisters. Under the guise of the Gospel he gives vent to every wantonness, and all the while he claims to be a good Christian.³ This truly vexes me so that I am tempted to say: "If you refuse to be concerned about your salvation and God's glory in God's name, then may you perish with your gluttony and drunkenness in the devil's name!"

² It will be recalled that at this very time the empire was trying to rally its forces against the Turks, who had besieged Vienna during the preceding year.

³ See *Luther's Works*, 22, p. 518, note 14.

CHAPTER SEVEN

After this Jesus went about in Galilee; He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. So His brothers said to Him: Leave here, and go to Judea, that Your disciples may see the works You are doing. For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world. For even His brothers did not believe in Him. Jesus said to them: My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. Go to the feast yourselves; I am not going up to the feast, for My time has not yet fully come. So saying, He remained in Galilee.

But after His brothers had gone up to the feast, then He also went up, not publicly but in private. The Jews were looking for Him at the feast, and saying: Where is He? And there was much muttering about Him among the people. While some said: He is a good man, others said: No, He is leading the people astray. Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of Him.

About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. The Jews marveled at it, saying: How is it that this man knows Scripture, when He has never studied it? So Jesus answered them: My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me; if any man's will is to do His will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on My own authority. He who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him is true, and in Him there is no falsehood. Did not Moses give you the Law? Yet none of you keeps the Law. Why do you seek to kill Me? The people answered: You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill You? Jesus answered them: I did one deed, and you all marvel at it. Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man upon the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the Law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with Me because

THIS chapter does not contain many sermons, teachings, or words of the Lord Christ. In it there are accounts of a number of incidents which show how the Lord Christ fared with His message. For this reason we shall speak briefly and not devote as much time to it as we did to the sixth chapter. St. John intermingles everything, quoting in part the sermons delivered by Christ in the sixth chapter in Capernaum about His flesh and blood, and giving the reaction of His hearers. Then he relates that Jesus stayed in Galilee, wandering from place to place and preaching here and there, but that He avoided Judea and did not want to travel about there, since the Jews were seeking to kill Him.

Judea was the residence of the bigwigs, the rulers and the prelates, Christ's worst enemies and adversaries. Galilee, however, lay far away in Gentile territory, a land governed by Herod, where the Jews had no authority. Thus we, too, have several lands where the bishops do not hold sway — for example, Wittenberg, where the angry nobles dare not harm us, much though they would like to. So we find in the text that Jesus sojourns in the territory where Herod is lord and king, and where the priests and elders lacked the jurisdiction they had in Judea. The fact that the Jews were lying in wait for Christ is cited by the evangelist as the main reason why He shunned Judea.

These events and experiences in Christ's life are recorded for a purpose and as an example for us. You notice here that Christ gives danger a wide berth. He does not boldly court it and thereby tempt God. For I must not go where I have not been ordered to go. Thus several stupid fools among my adversaries say to me: "Why don't you go to Rome? to the Bishop of Mainz? to Dresden? or to Leipzig? We know that you are afraid!"¹ No, I am not motivated by fear. If I had God's command to preach there, I would indeed go with a good conscience and preach there boldly. But I have no command of God to preach there, and so I am not moved by fear; but it is a matter of refusing to put God to the test.

Thus the Anabaptists enjoin people to dispose of all property, to forsake wife and child, house and home; yes, like the monks, they

¹ Mainz was the diocese of Albert (1490—1545), one of Luther's most powerful enemies. Dresden and Leipzig were both cities of Albertine Saxony, ruled by another of Luther's enemies, Duke George (1471—1539); in the former city Duke George had heard Luther preach in 1518, and in the latter he had attended the famous debate of 1519.

forbid men to marry. These confounded rascals and knaves defraud the people of all their possessions. Now it is true that for Christ's sake we must push all else in the background — life and limb, goods, honor, field and vineyard, wife and child, and whatever we own. For Christ declared in Matt. 10:37: "He who loves wife and child, field and body, more than Me is not worthy of Me"; and: "Go, sell what you possess, and come, follow Me" (Matt. 19:21). All this is true, and we are familiar with these verses and well aware that we must sacrifice everything for Christ's sake. But Christ did not say: "Desert your wife forthwith, and let her go begging." This is hypothetical: "If it comes to the point, which do you love more, Me or your wife, life and limb?" It is not a matter of comparison but of choice.² Christ does not say: Plunge yourself into danger in a foolhardy manner; forsake your wife and your family. Rather: If it comes to pass that tyrants persecute you and want to banish you, or try to force you to take the Lord's Supper in one kind, then the time for boldness has come. Then you must prove yourself a man and say: "No, bishop, prince, priest, devil, you will never induce me to do that." And if then they declare that they will deprive you of life, wife, and child, you must say: "All right, go ahead and do it!"

Christ wants to say: "The day will dawn when this is what you will encounter. He who at such a time loves wife, life, and property more than Me will prove himself unworthy of Me. But he who renounces and forsakes these will have them restored a hundredfold, nor will he want so long as he lives here on earth. And if he is ever deprived of everything, he will still have forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit, and he will be a child of God and an heir of eternal life."

This is what Christ means when He says that we must love Him above all else. But in the absence of an emergency everyone must remain in his town, place, and calling, and not forsake his family; all should remain together where they belong. But if the alternative ever confronts us — either to leave our calling and position or to deny Christ — then I declare: "Rather than deny Christ, I will sacrifice life, house, home, etc."

I am directing these words against the Anabaptists, who inflict sufferings on themselves, who forsake all and then boast of being martyrs. They seek their own honor. But do not choose your own affliction. Neither you nor anyone else has been ordered to incur

² Luther's Latin expression is: *Non est comparationem, sed oppositum ponere.*

CHAPTER EIGHT

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning He came again to the temple; all the people came to Him, and He sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to Him: Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do You say about her? This they said to test Him, that they might have some charge to bring against Him. Jesus bent down and wrote with His finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask Him, He stood up and said to them: Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her. And once more He bent down and wrote with His finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before Him. Jesus looked up and said to her: Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? She said: No one, Lord. And Jesus said: Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying: I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. The Pharisees then said to Him: You are bearing witness to Yourself; Your testimony is not true. Jesus answered: Even if I do bear witness to Myself, My testimony is true, for I know whence I have come and whither I am going. You judge according to the flesh, I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for it is not I alone that judge, but I and He who sent Me. In your Law it is written that the testimony of two men is true; I bear witness to Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness to Me. They said to Him therefore: Where is Your Father? Jesus answered: You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also. These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; but no one arrested Him, because His hour had not yet come.

Again He said to them: I go away, and you will seek Me and die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come. Then said the Jews:

HERE another sermon begins. Earlier we heard the account of what took place after the Lord's sermon in the temple at Jerusalem on eating, drinking, and the Spirit. Now, as He sits down before teaching, the Pharisees intervene and bring in a woman caught in adultery. They accuse her and declare that she deserves the death penalty according to the Law of Moses; for this is the punishment Moses had earnestly commanded for that sin (Lev. 20:10).

This story is related to show the clear distinction between the Law and the Gospel, or between the kingdom of Christ and that of the world. The Pharisees had heard that Christ had preached much about the kingdom of God in His sermons, stating that it was a kingdom of grace in which forgiveness of sin held sway. On the other hand, the Jews had Moses' Law, which held nothing but anger, displeasure, and the punishment of God over the heads of those who transgressed His commandments. Thus the civil government is invested with the power and the duty to punish gross vices and sins, and not to forgive them. These two things seem to run counter to each other. In Christ's realm no punishment is to be found, but only mercy and forgiveness of sins, whereas in the realm of Moses and the world there is no forgiveness of sins, but only wrath and punishment; for he who sins is to be stoned and killed.

These rogues now desire to ensnare and trap Christ as they bring to Him a woman who has not been sentenced by a judge. In their malice they suspend their own laws as they lead this woman before Christ to see what He will say. They suppose that they have cut off His escape either way, so that if He says yes or no, He is trapped. If He should say no, they could cite the Law of Moses, which imposes death by stoning. They knew that Christ would not dare contradict Moses, that He would not dare say no and thereby impugn Moses. That would challenge the authority of Moses; it would be rebellion and interference with the rule of Moses, who was the mouthpiece of God. God had commanded Moses to have such a woman killed. They supposed that they had silenced Christ, for He cannot object without revealing Himself as Moses' worst enemy.

On the other hand, if Christ should agree with them that this woman must be stoned and killed according to the Law of Moses, then He would also be trapped, and His mouth would be stopped. Then they could say: "What about His doctrine now?" He Himself had said: "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy-laden with sin,