

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN



h, give thanks to the LORD!
Call upon His name;
Make known His deeds among the peoples!
Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him;
Talk of all His wondrous works!
Glory in His holy name;
Let the hearts of those rejoice
who seek the LORD!
Seek the LORD and His strength;
Seek His face evermore!
Remember His marvelous works
which He has done,
His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth,
O seed of Abraham His servant,
You children of Jacob, His chosen ones!
Praise the LORD!

PSALM 105 — VERSES 1-6
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In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

“What Do You Say?”

A friendly cashier at a grocery store gave a boy a piece of candy. After the boy accepted the candy, the boy’s mother hesitated, hoping the child would respond appropriately on his own. When he didn’t, she said, “What do you say?” Slightly above a whisper, the boy replied, “Thank you.”

If you have a child, no doubt you have had similar experiences. When it comes to acknowledging a gift and making the fitting response, children often need reminding and habit-training. As children mature they often become better not only at saying the right words but also meaning what they say.

Or do they? This Thanksgiving season let us take a moment to evaluate the “why” and the “how” of our thanksgiving.

As Christians we know the “why.”

Above all, we are thankful to God for His precious gift of a Savior. This Savior suffered and died for our sins and guaranteed our eternal life through His resurrection.

Our God has also provided us with His Holy Spirit to strengthen and preserve us in this faith through on-going access to the means of grace.

God has also provided for our physical welfare by showering upon us gifts which make our earthly lives more comfortable and enjoyable—sunny days, friends, family, food, shelter, and so on. These are gifts that we can readily see, which we often acknowledge, and for which we often give thanks. Yet they are also gifts which we can easily take for granted. Sometimes those new to the faith seem much more appreciative of the gifts God daily grants. Let us not take for granted these

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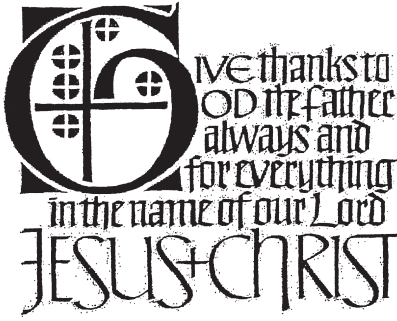
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precious gifts that God gives!

“In everything...”?

Perhaps you noticed in our text from Thessalonians that the words “in everything” are used. It is God’s will that we be thankful in everything.

Does this really mean “everything”? Shall we be thankful for a job lost? For a pay cut? A child’s poor health? A poor test grade? A failing body? A gas price hike? A break-up? Or consider the example of the child in the grocery store. Instead of offering a piece of candy, the cashier might make a disparaging remark about the child’s clothes or his mother’s hair. Is that something for which to be thankful?

A familiar passage comes to mind, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Yes, we should even be thankful

for “bad” things that happen because we know our God is in control and He knows what will result in the best spiritual outcome for us.

Lord, grant us a faith that makes us thankful “in everything.”

And what about the “how” of giving thanks?

As children we might learn to say the appropriate words out of habit, but our hearts may sometimes be silent. There are many advantages to using common prayers, including the common table prayers and bedtime prayers. These can often be spoken in unison, everyone knows the words, and the message is a good one.

Perhaps this Thanksgiving, however, you could try writing your own prayer of thanks for specific things with which God has blessed you over the past year. Maybe the process of thinking about it and writing it down will help it to be spoken from the heart.

I also believe that thanks is also best expressed in action. Our thanks to our heavenly Father is shown by the reflection of God’s love for us in our lives.

Not only at Thanksgiving but throughout the year, let all of us use our gifts in helping others as a response of thanksgiving to our God.

“What do you say?”

—Prof. Joseph Lau



A devotional study of Psalm 145

Praise and Thanksgiving from A to Z

Somewhere I read that the Pilgrims—after the first hard years—had a custom of placing five kernels of corn on

each Thanksgiving dinner plate. Each person would then be asked to make mention of five things for which

he/she was thankful. Those five kernels reminded them that at one time five kernels were their daily allotment of corn.

David had a similar idea. He authored Psalm 145 (an alphabetic ‘acrostic’ psalm, which means that the beginning letter of each succeeding verse starts with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet). It’s almost as though David was giving praise and thanks to God “from A to Z” everyday.

“Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable...I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works...Men shall...sing of Your righteousness” (vv. 3,5,7).

There are no limits to the praise owed God. He is not our Lord and King just on Sunday morning or while we are reading His Word. Neither can we permit our praise to be inspired only by a mountain’s grandeur, a radiant sunset over prairie or ocean, or the miracle of birth. God is *always* Lord and *forever* great in His being and works. He spans all of space and time. He fills His creation and preserves it. His glory defies our understanding. Just when man thinks he has deciphered the meaning of this or explained the mechanism of that, a whole new layer of God’s wisdom, awesome acts, and stunning greatness is unfolded.

Someone once said, “The more a soul knows the greatness of God’s mercy, the more it will be stirred up to praise Him.” Praise and thanksgiving are truly the theme of faith. (Does Islam even have a hymnal? and atheism can only praise itself.) So the psalmist declared: “The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to

anger and great in mercy...” (v. 8).

Demonstrated In Christ!

God’s amazing love for us has been clearly demonstrated in Christ Jesus. God did not remain aloof and distant in His heavenly headquarters, unaffected by the anguish and hopelessness of a sin-torn world. He had compassion. He acted. He graciously sent His own Son to face and defeat our three great enemies—sin, death, and the devil. He and He alone paid for all sin with His life’s blood, overcame death with His resurrection, and crushed Satan’s head and power.

Who of God’s children can thank Him enough for our redemption and reconciliation, our life and hope? Truly, “the Lord preserves all who love Him” (v. 20). Surely His “saints shall bless Him” (v. 10).

The noted Bible commentator Matthew Henry gives an example of praising God from A through Z. One day he was robbed—after which he wrote in his diary: “Let me be thankful to God. First, I was never robbed before. Second, because although they took my wallet, they did not take my life. Third, because although they took my all (wallet), it was not much. Fourth, because it was I who was robbed, and by the grace of God not I who had robbed.”

So also Carrie ten Boom was persuaded to give thanks to God for all things—even for the many fleas she and her companions suffered in the barracks of their Nazi prison compound. The fleas, you see, kept the guards at bay and away!

“My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord...forever and ever” (v. 21). Perhaps this Thanksgiving you might

follow the pattern of David, thereby praising and thanking God from A to Z. And instead of putting five or fifty kernels of corn on your dinner plate, perhaps the members of your family could take turns listing blessings that begin with the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet!

Surely big blessings and little ones

will be mentioned—spiritual and physical, serious and not so (though I hope none has occasion to speak of fleas!).

Whatever your blessings, you saints of the Lord, praise and thank God from A to Z, and through all the days and years to come.

—*Pastor David Fuerstenau*



A “Second Coming” Devotion—

“What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3)

Keeping Focus!

Where do we begin in consideration of the “end times”? There seems to be so much to cover, so much to discuss.

We might deal with the scoffers who look at history and say, “What has changed? God isn’t coming.”

We might turn our attention to some spokesmen for the Reformed churches who take a major disaster and cry “The Great Tribulation! The 1,000 year rule of Christ and the believers on Earth is coming!”

We could turn our attention to most any chapter in Revelation and speak of those things, including the thousand-year rule spoken of in Revelation 20. We might turn our attention to Matthew 24 and refute those who speak of a rapture.

So that we do not become blown around and carried about by every wind of doctrine which comes along, all these things are well worth looking into in order to come to an understanding of what our Lord and God is saying.

A member of a congregation had

been diagnosed with terminal cancer. For several months before his death, he and his pastor discussed again and again the meaning of many passages in Revelation and particularly chapter twenty. The man wanted to know and understand, and during those months wrestled in his mind over the matter. Not long before the man passed away, he looked at his pastor and said, “You know, pastor, it has occurred to me that, in the end, what is important is that my Jesus lived and died for my sins, redeemed me, and is coming again to take me home.”

Reminders...

We can so easily become caught up in end-time matters that we lose focus on why Jesus first came and is coming again.

We know that our Lord Jesus is coming again with power and great glory, with all His holy angels on the clouds of heaven. We know that the



events which take place in the world—both man-made and natural disasters—are a tribulation and point to the Return of our Lord Jesus.

When Jesus took up the question which the disciples had asked Him, He told them and us that these things would take place (read carefully, for example, Matthew chapter 24). Therefore, they ought not surprise us nor cause us alarm or fear.

Various disasters and tribulations are a constant reminder of sin and the need for what our Lord Jesus has done—namely, removed the curse of sin by His innocent suffering and death for us. They are a reminder that even creation groans, waiting expectantly and long-

ingly for the revelation of the sons of God. They serve to focus our attention on the joy of salvation and move us to long for that eternal rest promised by our Lord Jesus—which perfect rest He will usher in when He returns.

The place to begin a consideration of the end-times is in the Garden of Eden and the entry of sin into the world through man's disobedience.

We continue to the manger where our Savior was born.

We proceed step by step through His obedience for our righteousness...

From there to the cross where He took upon Himself our sins.

We hasten eagerly to the empty tomb...

From there to the Mount of Olives where we see Him ascend to be seated on the right hand of the Father, for through this we know that our salvation is secured and certain.

Believing this, what else really matters?

We in robes of glory dressed,
Join th'assembly of the blest,
Gathered to eternal rest,
In the fold with You.
(*Worship Supplement 2000, #783:5*).

“Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”
(Rev. 22:20)

—Pastor Roland Gurgel



“KWITCHERBELLYACHIN”

As a young man, I once spent the weekend at the home of a good friend. It was a rather unusual home. The family had seven children, but the house had only three bedrooms—it seemed like only a shoebox for all those people! A plaque on the kitchen/dining

room wall spelled out the mom's philosophy for running the household. It was only one word: “KWITCHERBELLYACHIN.”

Now, this was a caring Christian household, and you can be sure that when one of the children was hurting

or really needed attention, the parents were right there for them. But when it came to your average, everyday complaining and grumbling, there simply wasn't any time for that. Whenever someone started to whine, the mom simply pointed to that word on the wall, "KWITCHERBELLYACHIN," and that said it all.

Did you know that the Lord has a similar message for us? Boy, do we need it! It sometimes seems like complaining is our national pastime. We complain about our health, our lack of money, our jobs, and the weather. We complain about our politicians, our neighbors, our co-workers, and even (sometimes especially) our spouses or family members.

Do we have a good reason to be concerned about these things? Of course—and our gracious God wants to hear from us about them. "Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you," the Bible says.

But I think we can all tell the difference between appealing to God for help with a problem and simply complaining about it. This kind of grumbling dishonors God, first of all because we're really blaming Him for how bad things are; and secondly, because we fail to give Him thanks for the many blessings He gives us that we

take for granted.

The Christian, in particular, has no excuse for a complaining heart. Isn't it true that we would have been lost and condemned in our sins if God had not sent Jesus to die for us? Didn't Jesus give Himself up to death on the cross to give us forgiveness and life, as a free gift of grace? Hasn't He promised to call us from the grave and take us home to heaven? Hasn't God consistently provided for all our needs through the years? Hasn't He promised to be with us, to see us through every heartache and problem?

Given all this, is there any sense at all in having a grumbling and complaining heart? To put it simply, it's time to "KWITCHERBELLYACHIN!" Instead, follow St. Paul's advice in Philippians chapter 4: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

—Pastor Bruce Naumann (from the pastor's column of a local newspaper)



**Ladies Group,
Calvary Lutheran,
Marquette, Michigan last
Thanksgiving season**

Studies in First Thessalonians—

“...(We) wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10).

Chapter 5:1-11

Sober! — not Sleeping!

The constant turmoil in the Middle East has provided fertile ground for preachers and teachers who are quick to see it all prophesied in Scripture.

Those who do so are typically “dispensationalists” who see our era as part of a larger progression of stages in human history, moving toward a “millennium” which will occur when Christ comes down to establish an earthly dominion. A terrestrial Israel lies at the center of this whole approach, and every shift of power or change in conditions in that part of the world is seen as a catalyst for pieces of the end-times puzzle to fall together.

Also typical among such folks is a belief in a ‘rapture’—a supposed invisible deliverance of believers, who will be secretly snatched out of this world, leaving the ‘unraptured’ with the uncomfortable prospect of driverless cars, trains, and airplanes. This view is often read into a passage from our last section: “We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17).

Millennialistic hopes and expectations for a secret rapture fall flat in light of a ‘sober’ or careful reading of our section. What remains, instead—for the child of God who really listens

to the words of Scripture—is a clear picture of what really is to come for planet Earth.

Paul’s message to those who occupy themselves with timetables about the Lord’s Second Coming is clear: “don’t bother.” In fact, for Paul and his fellow believers in the early church, the impossibility of predicting these things was common knowledge: “for you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.” Thieves aren’t known for giving advance notice of their visits. They tend to prefer that their victims not go to great lengths to welcome them at the door.

The Father also keeps the timing of Jesus’ return close to the vest, so to speak. Those who do not honor Him need not put on any artificial airs, which won’t impress the Lord, and those who do love Him don’t need to know any more about His coming than that He has promised it to be so; and we have plenty to keep us busy until He appears. (“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” —Eph. 5:15-16.)

Alert To His Coming!

When the Lord comes, it will not

be secretly. It will be an event that involves believer and unbeliever alike. Unbelievers will ignorantly assume everything is fine (“peace and safety”), but the Lord’s appearance will remind them of the irreversible pangs of childbirth, as they will find themselves swept into the maelstrom of the judgment.

Christian believers, on the other hand, will be kept alert to the coming of this event by the very nature of their faith. Believing that the coming Lord is our Redeemer, we turn from sin, we delight in Him by faith, and we anticipate His coming. When He comes, we’ll know what’s going on and welcome it with joy.

Paul boils all of this down to the figurative terms of “light” and “darkness.” We who come to know and believe that God has visited us through Jesus Christ to deliver us from the curse of our own sins are “sons of light.” Light points figuratively to the pure and holy nature of God. It points to the goodness of God in sending Jesus, the “Light of the world,” into the world. It points to the Spirit-worked change that takes place in our hearts through conversion. We have been “brought out of the darkness” of sin, ignorance, and corruption, into the light of God’s grace.

Light contrasts with darkness; Paul associates the realm of darkness with a realm where people are blind in their ignorance of God and intoxicated with this world: “for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.”

In such ‘black and white’ terms, the apostle impresses on us the gracious effect of our faith, as we view this world careening toward its end: we are



not like them—those who have denied and rejected our Savior; those who choose darkness rather than light; those who walk in worldly lusts rather than the purity of grace.

He reminds us that we are in a church militant and uses military imagery for the arms we bear: as good and sober soldiers, let us put on the breastplate of faith and love.

These are qualities the Spirit instills in us through the Word that resides in the heart where the deeper aspects of our consciousness are. They are the Kevlar vest that cannot be pierced by the bullets of Satan: despair, hatred, greed, coldness.

Faith and love flowing from faith in a living Savior-God will prevail in that day. The helmet of hope protects our mindset, our worldview, our grasp of the events of this world. This hope sees everything in the light of the crucified and living Jesus Christ, our triumphant Savior. Through such faith, hope, and love, we will not be deceived by the turmoil of this world or by the predictions of those who are infatuated with Christless interpretations of Scripture.

Whether we “wake”—that is, live on and labor in faith from day to day, or “sleep”—not in the sense used earlier in this section, but in the sense of “died in Christ” (see the last section, 1 Thess. 4:13ff), we live in the steady gospel peace produced by a sober interpretation of God’s Word.

—Pastor Peter Reim

INTRODUCING the Books of the Prophets

Habakkuk

“There is no other way to live, be it here on Earth or in eternity. There is no life through works (as God led Martin Luther to discover). It is by Spirit-worked faith that we sinners live, and it is alone by faith that we are righteous in God’s sight.”

How fitting to start the month of November with a study of the book of the prophet Habakkuk! With those words of the Reformation still ringing in our ears, we turn to the book where they were first penned: “The just shall live by his faith.”

We do not know much about several of the minor prophets, whose writings cover but a few pages each in the Old Testament. That is especially true of Habakkuk. We know absolutely nothing about him. He is never mentioned in the rest of the Bible, and in this book that bears his name no specifics of him are revealed. Even the meaning of his name is elusive—some suggest it comes from the Hebrew root word for “embrace,” while others think that it is derived from an Assyrian name for a garden plant that was cultivated at that time.

On the other hand, the book itself gives us a general idea of when Habakkuk lived and prophesied. In the first two chapters we find him questioning God, based on what he was witnessing in the land of Judah around him. “Plundering and violence are

before me; there is strife, and contention arises” (1:3). Everywhere the prophet looked, there was wickedness.

And his words echo what Bible history reveals of the kingdom of Judah in that last century before the Babylonian captivity. Of King Manasseh it is written: “He has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols” (2 Kgs. 21:11). Of Manasseh’s successor, Amon, much the same was written: “He walked in all the ways that his father had walked;...he forsook the Lord God of his fathers” (2 Kgs. 21:21-22).

As for the people, they willingly went along with their kings: “They paid no attention [to God’s warnings]” and did “more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel” (2 Kgs. 21:9).

The sight of all this got to Habakkuk: “O Lord, how long shall I cry, and you will not hear?...Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble?” (1:2-3) It seemed that God was completely oblivious to the rampant wickedness multiplying

Outline of HABAKKUK

I. Judgment upon Judah and the Chaldeans (Chaps. 1-2).

II. A psalm of praise to the justice of God (Chap. 3)

(Outline adapted from *Introduction to the Books of the Bible*, Drewes, Concordia Pub. House, St. Louis, Mo., 1965)

among His own people.

But that was not the case. God was well aware and was putting His plans into motion: “For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans...They are terrible and dreadful;...They all come for violence” (1:6,7,9). Through the hands of this heathen power, God would bring judgment upon the unbelief and disobedience of the kingdom of Judah.

All Is In God’s Hands!

Habakkuk heard the Lord, yet questioned Him again: “Why do you look on those who deal treacherously [that is, the Babylonians], and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person [the Jews] more righteous than he?” (1:13) It didn’t seem right that a people so bent on destruction—and who ascribed all their own power to their own gods (see 1:15-16)—would be given the upper hand over God’s own people.

In response, through Habakkuk’s pen the Lord spoke a five-fold “Woe!” on these Chaldeans, revealing that they too would face their own downfall for their refusal to give all glory to God (see 2:6-20)

It would be years before this happened. As God was speaking to Habakkuk, the idea of those Babylonians doing this was unthinkable. As the Lord says, “Look among the nations and watch; be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not

believe, though it were told you. For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans...” (1:5-6). What a grim picture this painted for the Jews! Because of their wickedness their future was to be one of destruction and captivity. And yes, those Jews who still believed would face the same torment and pain.

We today have not had our Lord give a detailed insight into what our future holds. But we do know that it may well be difficult. Jesus says, “You will be hated by all for My name’s sake” (Mt. 10:22). “If they persecuted Me they will also persecute you” (Jn. 15:20).

How shall we look ahead to such a potentially grim future? Well, in the same way that Habakkuk did!

God said, “The just shall live by his faith.” The only way those who are righteous in God’s sight can approach the future is to trust in the One who holds the future and who promises, “No one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand” (Jn. 10:29).

There is no other way to live, be it here on Earth or in eternity. There is no life through works (as God led Martin Luther to discover). It is by Spirit-worked faith that we sinners live, and it is alone by faith that we are righteous in God’s sight.

This is how it was possible for Habakkuk to end his brief prophecy with a chapter of praise and thanks to God. “The just shall live by faith” was his theme of life, including through

times of despair. Habakkuk here leads us to cling tightly by faith to the Lord who is the God of our salvation, thus to face the future with words of praise to God, no matter what might come.

“Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though

the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herds in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (3:17-18).

—*Pastor Paul Krause*



Our God Is Faithful To His Promises!

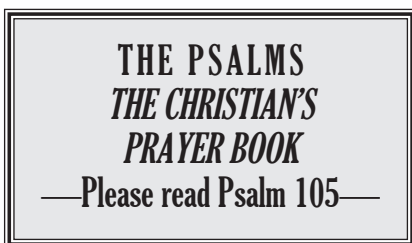
Thanksgiving Day has long been a national observance established by our government.

A day of thanksgiving is certainly in keeping with our Christian faith. We are inclined to observe it not simply because of a government enactment, but because the Word of our Lord reminds us and exhorts us to give thanks to Him; and because the Spirit of God has also worked a grateful spirit in our hearts to cheerfully give thanks to God in response to His countless blessings.

This month's psalm is one of a number of thanksgiving psalms which invite us to return thanks to God in words of praise and songs of thanksgiving for His tender mercies and lovingkindnesses.

While the psalm was initially addressed to the God's chosen people, the Jews, we are included among those addressed when the psalmist refers to “the seed of Abraham His servant, you children of Jacob, His chosen ones!” (v. 6), for we are all the spiritual descendants of Abraham through faith in our Savior Jesus Christ.

The psalm begins with a listing of important elements we are encouraged



to put into practice in giving thanks to God. The list includes

- rejoicing with joy and gladness over the great things the Lord has done for us;
- glorying in or boasting of the wondrous ways of God;
- calling upon the name of God in prayer to express our heartfelt gratitude;
- voicing songs of praise and adoration;
- making known to others the reasons for giving thanks to the LORD.

An important element which the psalmist encourages us to keep in mind is to “remember His marvelous works which He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth” (v. 6). When and where there is heartfelt remembrance of what God has done for us and revealed to us in His holy Word, our spirits respond with words,

songs, and prayers of thanksgiving. What do you remember about the many mercies of God in your life that prompt you to express your gratitude to God?

The psalmist reminds us that God Himself remembers His covenant to His people forever (v. 8) and has been faithful in fulfilling His many promises (v. 42). That covenant—which God has never forgotten but has perfectly and completely kept—is the one He gave to Abraham and his descendants (see Gen. 12:1-7; 26:4).

The Promise of a Savior!

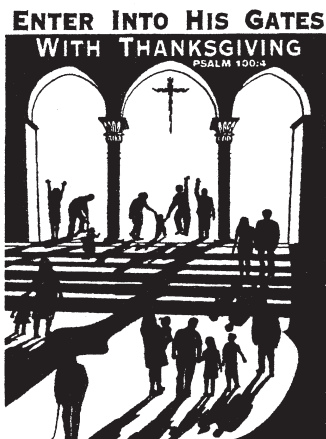
The most important element of God's covenant—which has bearing on our eternal fate, for which we are surely thankful!—is the promise that He would send a Savior from Abraham's descendants who would spiritually and eternally bless all the nations of the Earth.

The psalmist then recounts a long list of loving, merciful, and powerful acts God performed in fulfilling His covenant. In reading this long list, don't imagine that it applies only to the Jews of the Old Testament. Because of the promise God made to "all nations" through Abraham (see Gen. 28:14), it also applies to Gentile believers.

In verses 12-44 the psalmist takes the reader down memory lane—from the early days of the Jews when they were few in number, to the days when as a vast multitude they took possession of the promised land of Canaan.

The psalmist calls to mind how God was faithful...

- in protecting the patriarchs when they were threatened by enemy kings in foreign lands (vv. 12-15);



- in providing for the family of Jacob during the time of famine in Egypt by making Joseph their royal care-provider (vv. 16-22);

- in making them flourish in number and finally delivering them from their captivity in Egypt through His mighty plagues (vv. 23-38);

- leading and supplying them with all their needs during the wilderness sojourn (vv. 39-41);

- and finally, in handing over the land of Canaan to His chosen people (vv. 43,44).

Doesn't this brief recap remind you of the many mercies God has shown to you and me in our daily lives? Praise and thanks to God for faithfully, mightily, and mercifully keeping His covenant to Israel, for thereby our Savior came to give us priceless, even eternal blessings.

It is interesting to note that when King David ceremoniously brought the ark of the covenant to the tabernacle in Jerusalem (1 Chron. 16), he used the opening verses of this psalm as a portion of the song of thanksgiving that day. How fitting those words of praise were for the LORD who is a faithful God of promise!

The final verse of our psalm should not be overlooked, for it reminds us of our purpose as redeemed children of God through Jesus Christ; it is also a fitting thankful response to God for His faithful keeping of His promises of grace and mercy. The psalmist writes,

“That they might observe His statutes and keep His laws. Praise the LORD!” (v. 45)

Praise and thanks to the LORD our God for faithfully keeping His wonderful promises!

—Pastor Mark Gullerud



Editor’s note: When (now retired) ILC professor Paul Koch took his turn delivering chapel addresses at Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wis., he prepared an intriguing, edifying eight-part series on the divinely recorded life of Samson. The plan is to run this series in coming months in the Lutheran Spokesman.



First in a series on the life of

Samson

Be strong in the Lord

When I was a youngster, I admired Samson. Did you, too? I thought it wonderful that he had such muscular strength (and courage) to tear a young lion to pieces, pull the fortress gates of Gaza out of their moorings (bar and all, and carry them half a mile up the mountain), and push down the pillars of the temple of Dagon.

I suppose my father did a good job of telling those Bible stories to the Sunday School and instruction class, but while I was fantasizing myself being strong like Samson, I missed what my father said about Samson’s sins, his vices, his immoral liaisons with a whole list of females, one of whom finally did him in—so he lost his eyes, his freedom, and his life.

Perhaps you might also miss those serious parts of his life-story if you suffer from the common afflictions of puberty—being constantly aware of

new and unfamiliar things going on in your body, and challenged by every encounter of life.

Yet teenagers today are bombarded a thousand times more by the sex-oriented world that Samson never saw: the glossy magazines, movies, advertisements, TV sit-coms and popular entertainers; so it would be a miracle of grace if you guys were not preoccupied with body-building as a symbol of male sexuality and you girls with beauty regimens and seduction techniques.

I do not know how to put into words or to register adequately with you my fears for your souls’ safety, my dismay at the worldliness in which you find yourselves at home, and my anger at Satan for seducing immortal souls with temptations such as you are facing!

Samson had it all and did it all! And today’s Samsons (with bulging triceps,

biceps, pectorals, and six-pack) cavorting with gorgeous females are appealing to today's adolescents. Today's Samsons can do anything they want and get away with it EXCEPT they can't be decent in word and deed; they can't be clean in heart and soul. They can be ever so superhuman, but they can't be godly.

Samson would become superhuman in strength, but he could not be a good son to his parents, a good example to the teenagers who idolized how he lived—and he could not be a good child of God. You need not be as stupid. You need not be ignorant of how this superman went wrong.

Let's get to know him and his blessings, his problems and his mistakes—in order to reflect upon ourselves, of course, and God's business with us as we are growing up into maturity. During these years a good share of God's business is in process of being transferred from old shoulders to younger. Is a fourteen-year old person still too close to childhood to understand God's claim on him? Are you too green to realize that God has a plan for you that will bring you blessings as you serve Him?

Samson was chosen by God before he was born, chosen to be a warrior for God, a one-man army against the heathen who had bullied God's people into a corner. God programmed Samson to be special, as an angel told his parents how their boy's future was laid out: "He shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (Judges 13:5). His mother was cautioned to not drink anything alcoholic during her pregnancy, and Samson apparently also was to be kept clean of liquor, and his hair was not to

be cut as a symbol of his being different from the other boys, for he was a God-chosen person with a special calling in life.

"So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him" (Judges 13:24). What a wonderful beginning! How his parents must have thrilled over their baby boy, so handsome and so masculine and so favored in mental and physical abilities! We need only a bit of imagination to picture him as he went through his childhood years into adolescence, discovering as teenagers do how scary and thrilling life can be.

The job before you, as with Samson, is to avoid the dangers to your soul as you carry out your life's calling as a saint, one of God's children who can serve Him in tasks that call not for super-human strength but for godly concern about His business in your life. Perhaps we are ready now for the prayer:

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my will and make it Thine,
It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart, it is Thine own,
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure-store;
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all, for Thee.
(TLH #400:1,5,6)

Amen!

—Paul R. Koch





CROSS PURPOSES



THE CHURCH OF AMBIGUITY

“To root out the strain of ambiguity that lurks within the heart and which leads to a desire and satisfaction to be little more than religious, ultimately each member of the church and the fellowship has to look at self. . .”

There is more than one “Church of Ambiguity” found in every community of our country.

The Scriptures (God’s Word), the source of Christian teaching, are not ambiguous (uncertain, unclear, doubtful, subject to private interpretation).

Teaching drawn from the Bible acknowledges God as the Creator of all things. It recognizes that man corrupted God’s creation through sin and brought death and condemnation into the world. Since the fall all people are born in sin and under the wrath of God. The gracious God in His mercy promised a Savior, and in the fullness of time sent the Lord Jesus Christ into the world, “conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary.” The coming of Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The Messiah, the Anointed One of God, offered His life upon the cross for the sins of the world, fully satisfying the unpayable debt man owed to God. Christ Jesus is the only Savior from sin. Whoever believes in Him shall be saved.

In one brief paragraph we have encapsulated the law and the gospel, the two chief doctrines of the Bible. As

they say, you can look it up.

Though the Bible has not changed since God Himself moved the writers to write His inspired Word, acceptance of and respect for the Bible has deteriorated. The heathen have always rejected the Bible, and Christian churches have increasingly followed suit while giving lip service to Christ.

From inspiration to the incarnation of Christ, from creation to the teaching of the end times, from justification to sanctification, from the fall into sin to the teaching of forgiveness—everything in the Bible has become the playground of small minds that think themselves wiser than God.

Ambiguity merchants have succeeded in making the Scriptures—and thus Christianity itself—ambiguous to many. The Pilate question is in vogue: “What is truth?” Or, “How can anyone claim to have the truth?” Or, “Truth is whatever one wants it to be and whatever provides the answers we want.” To such there is no such thing as right and wrong, truth and error, salvation or condemnation.

A sad consequence of the ambiguity promoted within Christianity is the abysmal ignorance of Holy Scripture



that characterizes the majority. Consequently, for those to whom the Bible and Christianity have become ambiguous it makes no difference if they attend church or which church they attend. People flit from church to church—if they go at all—like hummingbirds looking for something sweet—something that satisfies their curiosity, tickles their fancy, and entertains their mind.

The idea that doctrine is important is foreign—and that false doctrine is wrong and to be avoided seems even more so. Obviously, if doctrine is not important, there is no false doctrine.

As Christian teaching is watered down to the least common denominator and “Christian” churches play loosely with God’s Word, people are without foundation or anchor. If they are at all concerned about sin and its consequence, they live and die without hope!

The Importance of Hearing the Word!

Consequently, the church is becoming more and more irrelevant, which is obvious from the low percentage of worshipers on any given Sunday. Because the contemporary church has set forth an ambiguous message—and the whole Word of God is no longer the foundational teaching of the modern church—the Christian religion has

become less and less influential in people’s lives. That which now influences for the most part is music, philosophy, pleasures, activities, and allurements of the world.

Unfortunately and sadly, as the worldly influences become stronger, we find that even within a fellowship such as ours the church seems to be less a factor. Our challenge as a church is to impress upon one another the importance of hearing and studying the Word, as well as standing firm against the rampant and prevalent theological ambiguities. Preach the Word!

To root out the strain of ambiguity that lurks within the heart and which leads to a desire and satisfaction to be little more than religious, ultimately each member of the church and the fellowship has to look at self.

We speak unambiguously: Man is a sinner. He cannot save himself by his works or good intent! Being religious does not save a soul! Only Jesus saves, and only faith in Jesus Christ saves the soul! Calling oneself a Christian does not make one a Christian! Following God’s Word makes a disciple of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 8:31,32). Christianity is not a system of ethics. “Christianity...is a religion of faith, of trust in Christ” (*What is Christianity*, F. Pieper, CPH 1933, p. 5).

The Lord God is not ambiguous about sin and its consequence, “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

He is not ambiguous about the judgment day. “He that does not believe shall be damned” (Mk. 16:16).

He is not ambiguous about His desire for all to be saved. “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Cor. 5:19).

He is not ambiguous about how the

sinner is saved. “To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:5).

He is not ambiguous about how one comes to faith. “He called you by our gospel” (2 Thess. 2:14).

He is not ambiguous about the place of good works in the life of the Christian. “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works...” (Eph. 2:10).

He is not ambiguous about the church’s mission. “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Mt. 28:19-20).

He is not ambiguous about what our action is to be over against practiced ambiguity (false doctrine). “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them

which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:17-18).

The Lord is not ambiguous about the future of those who trust in Him and believe His Word. “My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life...” (Jn. 10:27).

One concerned about his soul now and hereafter will reject today’s ambiguous Christianity! Rather he will say with Paul, “I know whom I have believed...” (2 Tim. 1:12). Jesus says to the majority of today’s society, “Ye worship, ye know not what...” (Jn. 4:22). No faithful Christian will choose membership in the “Church of Ambiguity”!

—*Pastor Daniel Fleischer*

**Messiah Lutheran Church,
Eau Claire, hosted a “CLC
Women’s Luncheon” in
connection with the
June Synod Convention**



FELLOWSHIP

Why so many different denominations? Why aren't all churches united in one happy family? Wouldn't that be the best way? When you think about it, it most certainly would be the best way if we were all united in what really matters, that is, what Scripture says. But sad to say, that is not the case.

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There are reasons why we choose a church body to belong to, and sadly enough, for many people the reasons may have nothing at all to do with Scripture.

Often in our day Scripture is not the driving force behind a person's choosing a church home. Many people join a church not because they have studied Scripture and compared a particular church's doctrines to the Bible; rather, many join a church because their parents belonged to it, or because of social programs, or as a mere matter of convenience.

Whether or not people are ready to acknowledge it, there remain signifi-

cant doctrinal differences between the various denominations, and a Christian will certainly want to know just what his church body teaches, for membership in a church says, "I believe and wholeheartedly support what this church (body) teaches."

How many in our day are even aware of what their church teaches on all points of Scripture? Do we think that's impossible for the "average" church member to know? Let's hope not, for their souls' sake. It is incumbent upon each and every Christian to seek out where the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and to worship there.

What basis is there for church fellowship if not complete agreement in what Scripture teaches? Our Lord tells us, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined togeth-



The Women's Luncheon choir preparing for its program

er in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). We are also told, “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:17-18).

Various arguments have been presented against these Scriptural principles. For example, human reason argues that certain errors are “not so bad” or that the difference between churches is “minor” and/or “non-divisive.”

Yet where does the Lord ask us to determine the relative seriousness of false teaching? Speaking of doctrinal error, He directs that we “beware”... “withdraw”... “come out”... “be separate”... “touch not”... “avoid.” Every false doctrine is a leaven that will spread and grow. “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Gal. 5:9).

Those who feel that religious separation hinders the cause of the gospel ought to consider: 1) The LORD knows better than we do what will hinder or help the gospel; 2) To give the impression of unity where there is none cannot help the cause of the gospel; 3) To comfort a person in his error cannot help his soul.

In our day liberalism and self-indulgence reign. Many are willing to “agree to disagree” for the sake of outward unity. This is called religious unionism. Even a casual reading of Scripture will point us away from such unionism.

It’s also been charged that to separate from false teachers is loveless. Actually, it is something God com-

mands to be done out of love!

Let’s consider this point under two categories:

1) God’s love for our souls—False doctrine has the ability to deceive us into spiritual weakness and even spiritual death. Thus God wants us to avoid false teaching for the sake of our own soul.

One reason false teachers are so dangerous is that they teach things which appeal to the sinful nature. Our sinful flesh likes and agrees with false doctrine. It is only by the grace of God that He has caused us to believe and follow the truth found in Scripture, while avoiding the error that appeals to the flesh.

2) Love for the Truth—False teaching always has the effect of contradicting the truth. False doctrine destroys the blessed effect of God’s Word.

That is the true danger of false doctrine; it covers up and detracts from the gospel, which is designed to save all people—from cradle to grave—freely and entirely by the grace of God. Every time false doctrine is tolerated, the gospel suffers loss, because part of the gospel is replaced by a human teaching that either preaches work-righteousness, denies what God says, or tolerates sin.

For God’s truth to be preserved in our own midst, we will want to follow His command and avoid every kind of false teaching!

Fellowship is a great gift created by the Holy Spirit, who shows us what the truth is and causes us to believe it. The same Spirit brings us together in doctrinal unity. However, if that unity is broken by false teaching, God has given us a defense mechanism to protect ourselves and to protect the truth

—The Bread of Life—

Daily Bible readings for home devotions

December, 2006

We have learned the theological significance of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection through the Spirit's inspired message to the Romans and Galatians. He also strengthened other Christian congregations to live under God's grace in Christ. May the Spirit likewise bless our devotion to His Word!

<u>Date</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Thought gleaned from the text</u>	<u>Hymn</u>
1	Advent 1Jn. 1:1-10	If we walk in the light as He is. . .	545
2	1Jn. 2:1-11	The blood-payment for all sinners	165
3	1Jn. 2:12-23	Love not the world nor the world's things	430
4	1Jn. 2:24-29	As we abide in Him, He abides with us	552
5	1Jn. 3:1-9	We practice righteousness, not sinning	392
6	1Jn. 3:10-24	An old message: love one another!	655
7	1Jn. 4:1-11	Preachers must face the test of the Word	100
8	1Jn. 4:12-21	The Father has sent His Son as our Savior	70
9	1Jn. 5:1-13	Who is he that overcomes the world...?	25:1-3
10	1Jn. 5:14-21	Sinning is not a Christian option	25:4-6
11	2Jn.1-13	False doctrine dishonors God's love	264
12	3John	I hear that my children walk in truth	353
13	Jude 1:1-11	Contend earnestly for the faith!	472
14	Jude 1:12-25	Forewarned . . . is forearmed	264
15	Rev. 1:1-9	Alpha and Omega sets the world stage—	64
16	Rev. 1:10-20	Who was dead and lives forevermore	199
17	Rev. 2:1-17	Losing our first love is a tragic loss	470
18	Rev. 2:18-29	Hold fast what you have till He returns	479
19	Rev. 3:1-13	Strengthen the things that remain	297
20	Rev. 3:14-22	I wish you were hot or cold, not lukewarm	650
21	Rev. ch. 4	You are worthy, Lord, to receive glory, etc.	246
22	Rev. ch. 5	Worthy is the Lamb!	476
23	Rev. ch. 6	How long until You avenge us?	98
24	Rev. ch. 7	Salvation belongs to our Lord, the Lamb	476
25	Christmas Rev.14:1-13	Blessed are we in the Lord	273
26	Rev. ch. 15	All nations shall come and worship ... You	498
27	Rev. 19:1-10	The marriage of the Lamb has come	609
28	Rev. 19:11-21	King of kings and Lord of lords	341
29	Rev. ch. 20	(The first resurrection is conversion)	72
30	Rev. ch. 21	The former things have passed away	592
31	Rev. ch. 22	The end of all things is at hand	613

of His Word. Obeying God's command to "mark and avoid" may not be the easiest thing to do. But in the long run it is the only thing that can be done.

May our prayer ever be that God

grant us Christian fellowship based on complete agreement in matters of scriptural truth, and also that He grant us strength to stand against error whenever it arises.

—Pastor Jay Hartmann



The Word From Immanuel!

*Chapel Talks to the student body of
Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire,
Wisconsin*

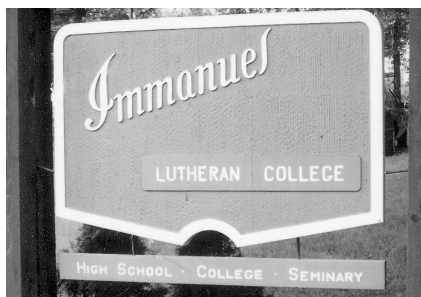
To our young readers - This is for you!

"As Christians growing in the knowledge of your Savior, you are learning to think of your life on a much higher level—based on a much higher value, a priceless worth which no amount of money or personal sacrifice could obtain. It's a gift that is already yours."

Life with a capital "L"

It was in the 1990's when I first heard people say, "I need to get a life." Or they would tell others to "get a life" if those people were so fixated on a certain activity that it became an obsession. Or they were so wrapped up in their work and trying to pay the bills that they had little or no time to do anything else.

There are certain careers, certain workloads and major responsibilities that, if people assume them, they are said to "put their own life on hold." Sometimes people say, "My children are my life," or "my business is my life." You have probably said, "I have a



life, you know." I think my daughter told me that last week, implying that she had better things to do than what I was suggesting.

These expressions make us realize that people estimate their human exis-

tence based on what matters to them, what's valuable and most important to them.

Let's apply a similar test to ourselves. If you could keep only one thing—and I don't necessarily mean an object—if you could keep only one aspect of who you are and what you do and let everything else go, what would it be? What would you claim as the essence of your life?

As Christians growing in the knowledge of your Savior, you are learning to think of your life on a much higher level—based on a much higher value, a priceless worth which no amount of money or personal sacrifice could obtain. It's a gift that is already yours.

Hear what the apostle Paul says in Colossians 3: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

Have you ever heard it said like that before: "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God"? If you have, do you know what it means?

The apostle is not talking about the time when we entered this world as unbelievers, dead in sins and completely dead to God. He's talking about our change of status—a change in which God sees us as tied to Christ and regards what Jesus did as exactly the same as what we have done.

By faith we claim the perfect life of Christ as our own. Even though we have not lived up to God's holy standards, God sees it as though we have. Trusting in the sacrifice of Christ, we

have His death on the cross as our own death, our own payment of all our sins, our own suffering of hell. Jesus rising from the dead not only guaranteed that God accepted what His Son did; it also meant that in God's eyes we are risen from the grave, completely acceptable and alive to Him.

That "you were raised [past tense] with Christ" not only means a change of status; it also indicates your new identity as a believer. When God gave you your faith in Christ, He performed a spiritual resurrection—based on the physical resurrection of Christ as the foundation and linked to your baptism. That's when your new man took up residence in your heart. That was your spiritual birthday—the day when you truly "got a Life" like no other!

Your life "hidden with Christ in God" means, in a sense, that people can't see it. Your spiritual life of faith takes place in the heart, where no one can look. Your relationship with God happens mainly in the heart whenever you pray, repent of your sins, and think about the truths of His Word.

So also, people can't see the final destination of where this life is going. They can't see the angels at work and Jesus always present with us. But we have the promise: "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

In all that Jesus did to reclaim His glory, He was truly paving our way. He rose from the dead with a glorified body, never to die again. So will we (if we die before Judgment Day). He ascended to heaven to be with His heavenly Father. So will we be in the presence of the Father—face to face in our risen bodies. It's as good as done, because Christ has conquered for us

and God has promised it.

It's also our incentive to "seek those things which are above" and "set your mind on things above."

Let's go back to the test of life mentioned before—what one thing, what group of things, what valuable aspect of life is each of us going to keep as most important, as that which defines who we are?

Shouldn't it be the permanent things that last beyond Judgment Day? Shouldn't it be the sure things of God—things like the forgiveness of our sins declared to us freely in the gospel?

And having the gospel as the power source of our faith, having God's promise that He will be with us through thick and thin, making all things work out for our good—and knowing that death is nothing more than moving one day from trouble here to glory there—these are the "things above"! They originate in heaven, are guaranteed in heaven, and ultimately lead to heaven.

"I have a life, you know." When we hear or use that expression, let's think

big —think life with a capital L, the only Life that will matter in the end, the only Life that is going to survive into eternity!

I have that Life, you know. And so do you.

—Prof. Steven Sippert

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Scenic view of ILC's softball (front) and baseball (back) fields.