

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

“...The Scripture Cannot Be Broken.” — John 10:35

Jesus,

Thy blood and righteousness

My *beauty* are, my *glorious* dress;

Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,

With *joy* shall I lift up my head.

TLH #371:1

ABRAHAM OFFERS UP THE SON HE LOVES : GENESIS 22:1-19

Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then He said, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.” So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” Then he said, “Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” And Abraham said, “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” So the two of them went together.

Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” So he said, “Here I am.” And He said, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, “In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”

Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: “By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.

Where Is the Lamb?

Pastor Paul Krause • Markesan, Wisconsin

Isaac was old enough to carry all the wood that he and his father would need for worshiping the LORD with a burnt offering on Mount Moriah. He was also old enough to realize very quickly that something was missing as he and Abraham made their pilgrimage up the mountain. *“My father,” he said, “Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”*

In these unfolding weeks of Lent, we join Isaac in realizing that we daily need a suitable sacrificial Lamb as atonement for our sins. As we again follow Jesus from the Upper Room to Calvary, we see that it is our sins, our iniquities, our faults that are the cause, the reason, for which Jesus endured His Passion. It is painfully clear to us that there is nothing we can bring before God that would even begin to atone for our sins—not a lamb, not our works, not anything—for the price that was needed for our redemption is not something within our ability to pay.

Abraham told his curious son: *“God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.”* That was enough for Isaac; the two of them continued on together. And the words Abraham spoke proved to be true. Isaac did not have to die. God provided a ram, caught by its horns in a thicket nearby, for use as the burnt offering.

God be thanked that the same is true for us. You and I do not have to pay the penalty for our own sins. Redemption has been made. There is a Lamb which has been offered on the altar of the cross in our place. Death with all its ways of bringing separation

has been defeated. As the apostle Paul says, "[Nothing] shall separate us from the love of God..." (see Romans 8:35-39).

Yes, the Lamb we need is one that God Himself has provided—it is His own Son, "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29)

God had a goal in mind when He sent Abraham up Mount Moriah with his son, his only son, the son whom he loved. It was a test to see if Abraham loved God more than he loved his own son.

God the Father also had a goal in mind when He sent His own Son to that very same mountainous area (see 2 Chronicles 3:1). His goal was to show the love He has for you and me and all people in His Son.

"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10).

There was no other way! Jesus had to shoulder the whole burden! There was no other lamb to be offered as a substitute for Christ. The Father's silence upon His Son's request in the Garden of Gethsemane showed that Jesus was the only One—that He was the lamb to be sacrificed.

And it is in Him, the One who was the Seed of Abraham through Isaac, that "*all the nations of the earth are blessed*" (Genesis 22:18).

Where is the Lamb? He is even now at the right hand of God, in that place where we together with all the saints will forever proclaim: "*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!*" (Revelation 5:12)

God had a goal in mind when He sent Abraham up Mount Moriah with his son, his only son, the son whom he loved. It was a test to see if Abraham loved God more than he loved his own son.

[Please have Psalm 22 open before you; the verses are from that psalm.]

REMEMBER?— REMEMBER WHAT?

Pastor Andrew Schaller · Watertown, South Dakota

MEMORY IS A FUNNY THING.

Very often we remember what we'd like to forget and forget what we'd like to remember. I can clearly remember specific events in my childhood... yet I'm unable to remember a single event from an entire year.

THE 22ND PSALM CONCLUDES WITH THESE WORDS:

“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You” (v. 27).

WHAT IS IT THAT ALL THE ENDS OF THE WORLD SHALL REMEMBER?

If we review the 22nd Psalm, it will become evident. Almost everyone can remember how the 23rd Psalm begins... but how about the 22nd Psalm? The words are familiar: *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”* (v. 1a)

Those words are familiar because our Lord Jesus repeated them as He hung nailed to the cross on Good Friday. They express the ultimate loneliness felt by the Son of God when He was left alone, burdened with our sins. Those aren't the last memorable words in Psalm 22 either.

AFTER DESCRIBING HIMSELF AS A ‘WORM’ AND A MAN ‘SCORNB BY MANKIND’ AND ‘DESPISED BY THE PEOPLE,’

the Suffering Servant—our Savior Jesus Christ—quotes the mockery of His enemies: *“He trusted in the LORD; let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, Since He delights in Him!”* (v. 8)

THOSE WORDS ARE FAMILIAR BECAUSE THEY WERE HURLED AT JESUS BY THE CHIEF PRIESTS, SCRIBES AND ELDERS OF THE PEOPLE (see Matthew 27:42-43). We might think these words are a coincidence until the Suffering Servant describes Himself like this: *“For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots...”* (vv. 16-18).

AGAIN, THOSE WORDS SOUND FAMILIAR.

In fact, it sounds like these words were taken from the New Testament rather than the Old! The 22nd Psalm doesn't only describe the indignities endured by the Servant of God...it also expresses His unwavering confidence in God to deliver Him. He is so sure that God will deliver Him that He promises beforehand to tell others about it: *"I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You...For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard"* (vv. 22,24).

IT'S THEN THAT THE SUFFERER LOOKS TO THE FUTURE AND FORETELLS:

*"All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations shall worship before You"* (v. 27).

WHAT IS IT THAT ALL THE ENDS OF THE WORLD SHALL REMEMBER?

It's this—that the Suffering Servant of God cried out
to the LORD and He was delivered.

HE WAS DELIVERED? He died!



TRUE! HE DID DIE...BUT WAS ALSO RAISED AGAIN
FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION
(see Romans 4:25).

Jesus did suffer mockery and death...but God
delivered Him by raising Him from the dead (Acts 2:24, 3:15).

It's the resurrection of Jesus that serves as our receipt, the proof that
our sins have been paid for in full. We stand justified by faith, declared
'not guilty' by God Himself in His Word.

I AM SURE YOU'VE HEARD THIS MESSAGE BEFORE.

Good thing...because the Lord wants YOU to share it with others. He wants
people from all the ends of the Earth to hear and remember what God has
done through the cross and be turned to Him. The Lord wants the entire
world to understand that in accepting Jesus' sacrifice and delivering Him
from death...He was delivering all sinners. He was delivering us all.



THE THEORIES OF SCIENCE CHANGE – THE FACTS OF THE BIBLE DO NOT

Pastor Paul Naumann • Tacoma, Washington

“...All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, But the word of the LORD endures forever” (I Peter 1:24-25).

A geology professor at the University of Wisconsin once made a stunningly frank admission to an auditorium filled with undergraduates. “I know that some of you are Christians,” he said, “and may disagree with the theory of the Earth’s origins that I will be teaching you this semester. Well, my advice to you is simple: *be patient*. Because the views of science concerning the Earth’s origins change completely every forty to fifty years!”

A case in point is the theory concerning the formation of the Columbia River Gorge. This massive canyon cuts through central Washington to join the Pacific Ocean at Portland, Oregon. Rivaling the Grand Canyon for beauty, its sheer rock walls rise to over 4000 feet in places. Until the last twenty years or so, scientific consensus held that its deep canyon was carved out by slow, uniform water and wind erosion over the course of millions of years.

This was considered “settled science,” and to contest it was to be labeled a crank or a religious fanatic. In recent decades, however, a new consensus has emerged: most scientists now concede that the immense erosion seen along the Columbia Gorge likely took place not over the course of millions of years but rather over the course of *just days, or even hours!* It happened, they say, when a large ice dam collapsed in western Montana, releasing a reservoir of water equal in volume to Lake Michigan, either all at once or in pulses.

When was all this supposed to have occurred? Not millions of years

ago, it now transpires, but sometime around the end of the last ice age, a scant few thousand years ago!

These constant revisions—and often wholesale changes—of scientific theories can be observed in every branch of the physical sciences. One wonders why we are expected to accept their theories as fact (and endure ridicule if we do not) when the theories themselves are constantly changing!

Christians, as it turns out, are way ahead of the scientists on the origin of the Columbia Gorge. Believers have known for centuries that an enormous release of water did in fact cause massive erosion, not just in central Washington but around the globe. We refer to it as “The Great Flood,” and it is not a theory. Rather, we know it to be a settled fact established by God in the pages of His Holy Scripture (Genesis chapter seven).

The testimony of God’s Word is far more certain and reliable than the mutable and constantly-shifting theories of modern science. Trusting God’s Word is, in fact, the only way to properly understand the origin of the universe. The writer to the Hebrews says, *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible”* (Hebrews 11:1-3).

Unbelievers may heap their scorn and derision upon us. They may ridicule Christians (as one celebrated scientist recently did) for being “... people who believe in fairy tales based on dusty ancient manuscripts.” It is only fair to admit, however, that we Christians do have this advantage: our view of the world’s origin has stayed the same for centuries, and will stay the same as long as the word of the LORD endures.

Or, as Peter puts it, *“forever”!*

When was all this supposed to have occurred?

Not millions of years ago, it now transpires, but sometime around the end of the last ice age, a scant few thousand years ago!

THE EPISTLE OF PHILEMON

17 *If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. 18 But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account. 19 I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay—not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides. 20 Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord. 21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. 22 But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you. 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers. 25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*

(Philemon vv. 17-25; studies of Philemon vv. 1-7 and 8-16 appeared in previous issues)

The Beauty of Reconciliation

Pastor Em. Daniel Fleischer • Oakdale, Minnesota

Adam and Eve separated themselves from the Lord God in the Garden of Eden. They acknowledged the separation when out of fear they hid themselves from God whom they had offended. Such is the circumstance of each of us—born in sin and estranged from God.

Yet out of the abundance of His heart, He promised the Savior who would bear the sins of the world; consequently we read, “*God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself...*” (2 Corinthians 5:19). Reconciled unto God, we may be at peace, for the Father has forgiven us in Christ Jesus. Each time we look upon the face of the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel-word, we see the smiling face of a loving Father!

In relation to our study of the Epistle to Philemon, the apostle did not approve of Onesimus’ action in running away from or stealing from his master. Under the circumstances these were punishable crimes. Nevertheless, the counsel in the Apostle Paul’s very personal letter to Philemon strikes the tone of reconciliation.

Both Philemon and Onesimus—converted through the gospel which Paul had shared with them—were dear to Paul. It grieved him to see

strife and possible division between two brothers in the faith. In his new life under the sway of the gospel, Onesimus had been helpful to Paul. If Paul had kept Onesimus in his service, he might at least have kept a semblance of peace in the hope that time would heal the wounds between the two converts. Paul chose another route.

Laying his own reputation on the line, Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon. *“If then you [Philemon] count me as a partner, receive him [Onesimus] as you would me”* (v. 17). Shades of Jesus’ prayer in John 17, *“...and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are one”* (John 17:11). The Heavenly Father counts us as His own and keeps us in His embrace for the sake of Jesus, who by His atonement has reconciled us to the Father!

Paul offered to make good in Onesimus’ behalf whatever he had stolen from his master. *“But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account”* (v. 18). Shades of Isaiah 53:6, *“And the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”*

Martin Franzmann quotes Luther as saying: *“...even as Christ did for us with God the Father, thus also does St. Paul for Onesimus, with Philemon. For Christ also has put Himself out of His rights and with humility has prevailed with His Father that He should lay aside His wrath and His rights and receive us to grace, for Christ’s sake... For we are all His Onesimi, if we believe it”* (Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows*, p. 128).

Within Christian congregations personal disagreements which delight Satan frequently arise between members. We can go one of two ways under such circumstances. We can let the problem fester and go on estranged or we can address it head-on, speaking (and hearing) the truth in love, recognizing that resolution of a difficulty between two reconciled children of God is a reflection of the love of God toward each. If necessary, we will welcome the assistance of the pastor who by the application of the gospel can facilitate such reconciliation. He will do so with fervent prayer, and with the expectation expressed by “Pastor” Paul to Philemon, *“Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord”* (v. 20).

The apostle was confident in the power of the gospel to bring about

**Both Philemon and
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reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus (v. 21).

The world hates us because we are Christ's. But we are not starved for love. Our craving for meaningful love is satisfied in our Lord's promise that He loves us with an everlasting love. The command of our Lord is not burdensome. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). It is no burden as we remember that in love Jesus laid down His life for us (John 15:13) and reconciled us to the Father.

There is joy in heaven over each sinner that repents. We are confident that heaven also rejoices when those reconciled unto the Father live in the confidence of that reconciliation, and further live the reconciliation life toward one another as Paul counseled in his heartfelt letter to Philemon.



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

"As the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to those of his household."

(Martin Luther)

THE NINTH & TENTH COMMANDMENTS:

YOU SHALL NOT COVET

Professor Joseph Lau · Eau Claire, Wisconsin

We have reached the final two commandments in our study, the Ninth and Tenth. Since they involve the same topic, covetousness, they will be taken together. In fact, within the realm of Christendom, Lutherans and Catholics appear to be the only ones who keep these commandments separate. Others divide the First Commandment into two in order to end up with ten.

The numbers identifying the commandments are not a matter of

The Ninth Commandment

You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not sinfully desire to get our neighbor's inheritance or house by a trick or in a way that appears to be right; but we should do everything we can to help him keep what is his.

The Tenth Commandment

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his workers, nor his animals, nor anything that is your neighbor's.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not sinfully desire to use tricks or force, or do anything that might cause our neighbor to lose his wife, workers, or animals; but we should urge them to stay and do their duty.

doctrine, just as Bible chapter and verse notations are of human devising. The numbering is for convenient reference; the content is what matters.

One of the benefits of having this commandment divided in two is the emphasis it places on the sin of covetousness. Since one of the purposes of the God's law is to condemn us as unworthy sinners, commandments dealing with the inner workings of an evil heart serve as a fitting conclusion. It is almost as if God is saying, "You aren't quite convinced of your guilt yet? Take a look at these commandments!" The sinner is left to respond, "What? Even our every thought has to be pure?" Or as Luther states in his *Large Catechism*, "For He would especially have the heart pure, although we shall never attain to that as long as we live here; so that this commandment will remain, like all the rest, one that will constantly accuse us and show how godly we are in the sight of God!" (Part I, para. 310).

“What? Even our every thought has to be pure?”

There is certainly no shortage of Bible examples demonstrating the sins of covetousness and greed and the resulting harm. Satan himself coveted what God had, and in turn convinced Eve to do the same. The list of other covetous offenders includes Cain, Lot, Esau, Joseph's brothers, Achan, Ahab and Jezebel, Gehazi, Saul, David, Absalom, Solomon, and Judas.

Because of the seriousness of this sin, God issues many warnings to His people. *“Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids. For by means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread; and an adulteress will prey upon his precious life”* (Proverbs 6:25-26). *“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition”* (1 Timothy 6:9). *“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death”* (James 1:14-15; see also James 3:14-16).

As you can see, covetousness alone is a sin, but it is also a snowflake that can cause an avalanche to the Christian soul. It is in the heart

where covetousness is conceived, often in the form of lust and greed.

Most of our sins are those of thought—fewer become words, and fewer yet become deeds.

Since we humans cannot see into the heart, we judge others only by their words and actions. Because of this, it is easier to become complacent with our sins of thought because we don't receive a negative reaction from society (sad to say, this is becoming the case with sins of word and deed as well). Let us not become like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, pious in their outward ways yet fostering pride and all other evil in their hearts.

Luther wrote, “This last commandment, therefore, is given not for cheaters in the eyes of the world. It is for the most pious, who want to be praised and to be called honest and upright people” (*Large Catechism*, Part I, para. 300).

Permit the following analogy. Scientists tell us that the Earth contains between three million to thirty million different species, with 10,000 new ones discovered annually. The overwhelming majority are insects, very few seen by most people. Other species are larger and easy to see but fewer in number.

So it is with sin. The “large” sins—murder, rape, robbery, drunkdriving—are easily seen and often punished by society. We might say they are “the hippos and the bears.” The sins of the heart are hidden and “tiny” by comparison, and are not punished by society—but they are present by the millions in both believers and unbelievers, and are fully known only to God. These insidious “insects” are just as damnable.

We pray:

Dear Father, we confess our sins of the heart, too many to number.

By Your grace, make our hearts content and eager to serve You.

Thank You for the redemptive sacrifice of Your Son
to forgive all sins, both “small” and “large.”

Amen.



“...The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me.”

(JOHN 10:25)

Victorious with Jesus— Spread the Word!

Pastor Wayne Eichstadt • Mankato, Minnesota

When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. And suddenly they cried out, saying, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?” Now a good way off from them there was a herd of many swine feeding. So the demons begged Him, saying, “If You cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine.” And He said to them, “Go.” So when they had come out, they went into the herd of swine. And suddenly the whole herd of swine ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and perished in the water. Then those who kept them fled; and they went away into the city and told everything, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged Him to depart from their region.

(MATTHEW 8:28–34)

Jesus had been teaching and doing miracles in Capernaum for a number of days when He entered a boat and sailed with His disciples across the Sea of Galilee. It was on this journey that the winds and waves reared up until Jesus calmed them with an almighty word—a miracle which had the disciples wondering, “*Who can this be?*” (Matthew 8:27)

Jesus and His disciples reached land along the southeast coast on the east side of the Sea of Galilee—the Gentile side. Upon landing, they were met with an extraordinary welcoming party: “*...immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit...*” (Mark 8:28). Matthew informs us that there was also a second demon-possessed man with him (Matthew 8:28).

Demon possession demonstrated itself in many ways. In this case, the two men lived naked and among the tombs. They were “*exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way*” (Matthew 8:28). The one of whom Mark speaks was fierce and incredibly strong: “*...no one could bind him, not even*

with chains...the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him” (Mark 5:3ff). There were so many demons that they referred to themselves as “Legion” (Mark 5:9).

We might expect such a demon-possessed man to flee from the presence of the Son of God, but instead, “When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. And he cried out with a loud voice and said, ‘What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me’” (Mark 5:6-7). The demons were well aware of who Jesus was and what He could do to them. As James tells us, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 2:19)

Anticipating what was going to happen, “The demons begged [Jesus], saying, ‘If You cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine.’” And He said to them, “Go.” (Matthew 8:31) With demons possessing them, about 2,000 pigs (Mark 5:13) ran headlong over a cliff, plunged into the sea, and drowned.

Imagine what must have gone through the disciples’ minds. Hours earlier they had seen Jesus command the forces of nature. Now they witnessed Him command the powers of hell. “Who can this be?” The demons knew. The disciples were being led to know. You know. This powerful Jesus is the Son of God, your Savior.

Is demon possession still possible today? Nothing in Scripture suggests that it could not happen. However, in this account we have the benefit of knowing that these men were demon-possessed because God tells us so. We have no such affirmative word from God regarding anything today.

It is not merely physical possession by demons with which we should be concerned. The Apostle Paul reminds us, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

The sobering reality is that the powers of Hell are doing everything they can to bring you to destruction. But fear not! The Son of God at whose feet the demons tremble and to whose word they must submit is your Savior—your brother. For that reason, “I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers...shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38f).

The keepers of the pigs quickly spread the word. “And behold! The whole city came out to meet Jesus” (Matthew 8:34). Like all of Jesus’ miracles, this

miracle was an “attention-grabber” intended to demonstrate who Jesus is, and to pique interest so that people then listen to His life-giving preaching.

The people of the city were afraid and begged Jesus to leave. There was one exception—one of the men who had been possessed by the demons wasn’t afraid. The townspeople saw Him clothed, in his right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus, and learning from Him.

The healed man wanted to leave with Jesus, “*However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, ‘Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.’ And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled*” (Mark 5:19). So many were fearful of Jesus and rejected Him, but it took only one man to have a missionary in Gentile lands.

A long stormy trip across the Sea of Galilee and a brief stay before returning. Was it worth it?

Oh, yes! In that journey is proof that our Savior “seeks and saves,” for He traveled a great distance for the benefit of one man and what would be accomplished through him. In the brief time Jesus spent in Gadara we have evidence that He is the Son of God who has authority over our spiritual enemies.

And in the afterglow of the miracle we see the fear that is so often the world’s response to Jesus. We also see the powerful Word of God take root in a sinner’s heart, moving him to tell others of who Jesus is and what He has done.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, take courage in your daily struggle against spiritual enemies. Put on the armor of God (cf. Ephesians 6), walk with your Savior-Brother, and spread the word about all that Jesus has done for you.

*Satan, hear this proclamation:
I am baptized into Christ!
Drop your ugly accusation,
I am not so soon enticed.
Now that to the font I’ve traveled,
All your might has come unraveled,
And, against your tyranny,
God, my Lord, unites with me!*
(WS 2000 #751:3)

GOD'S OBSCURE SAINTS

(Fifth in a Series)

This edifying series of chapel talks comes from the archives of our *Spokesman* Assistant Editor, Prof. Em. Paul R. Koch • Eau Claire, Wis.

And he [Saul] was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

(ACTS 9:9-18)

In our on-going study of less-renowned saints, we have faced the question: "Why are these people even mentioned in the Bible? What does God thereby wish us to know or learn?"

It's a fair deduction that God would have us see ourselves as replicas of these brothers and sisters of centuries past; they are skin-of-our-skin and flesh-of-our-flesh, our ancestors. What they experienced, so may we.

Are we learning to see ourselves reflected in the siblings of Jesus or as Matthias or Joseph Barsabbas, as one of the helpers in the food services in Jerusalem, or as Dorcas the seamstress? In our hearts the Holy

Spirit incubates the desire to be like them—good examples of godly Christians.

Today we meet Ananias, whose name itself tells a story: “Jehovah has been gracious.” God had been gracious to this fine gentleman, and Jesus used him to deliver God’s grace to the most awful blasphemer anyone could ever meet.

In brief: on Damascus Road, fanatic Saul had been knocked flat by Jesus, blinded, and led by the hand into the city. He was put into a back room, where for three days he waited to learn what God was going to do to him for his blasphemy. We are not told what was going through his mind during those long hours, but we read that he was on his knees in prayer; and since his insides were in turmoil, he had no stomach for food or drink.

Meanwhile, God was preparing an obscure saint to confront the Jewish storm-trooper Saul, blinded and broken and in a torment of anguish over his big sin. This chosen saint was a Jew and likely had once been on Saul’s side of the fence, for it’s entirely normal that sinners trust in their own deeds to square things with God. But when Ananias was introduced to Jesus, the Spirit of God did the super-miracle of turning his heart inside out, so he could repent of his sins and cling to Jesus as his Savior. Ananias was a convert, too!

The Scripture introduces us to this obscure saint: *“There was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias, and to him the Lord spoke in a vision.”* The fact that Ananias was receptive and responsive to this unusual communication speaks volumes for this child of God. He recognized God’s voice and was ready to say, *“Yes, here I am, Lord. What do You want me to do?”*

Jesus directed him like this: *“Go down Straight Street to the house of Judas, and you will find Saul waiting for you; I want to send My healing through you to give him back his sight.”* After one puzzled moment as to why Jesus would want that vicious man to be blessed, Ananias is told that Jesus has chosen Saul for a special purpose—he is to carry in his hands and heart the name of Jesus to the Gentiles, to kings, and to the children of Israel.

God was indeed awesomely gracious! Gracious not only to Saul but also to Ananias; two people had their eyes opened that day. Ananias had the eyes of his understanding opened too, for when Jesus told him that He has chosen vessels to bear His name on their lips to humans

everywhere—Ananias was thus assured that God had chosen him to do His saving work; so he went gladly, bearing on his lips the name of Jesus as Savior.

Now, what was the first word from the mouth of Ananias—the word that would be of crucial importance for Saul, waiting for God to speak to him? Ananias spoke the word “brother,” and that’s when Saul discovered that he was not facing God’s fist, but God’s helping hand. How wonderful God was to him! How wonderful to have a Christian come to him, touch him gently, and call him “Brother in Christ.”

That act of Christian compassion reflects the love of God for sinners, and so it is our guideline also. Indeed, God has put His finger on every Christian—and has set your feet (and mine) on a pathway through childhood and adolescence to adulthood—so that we can be steered by God’s hand to that confrontation with some individual who needs to hear from our lips what Jesus means.

Such meetings do not happen by sheer coincidence! You may be sure you are here today in preparation for tomorrow’s opportunity. Though God could send angels to do His preaching for Him, He chooses His children for that blessed work: Jesus chooses obscure saints like Ananias, a man not trained to be a pastor, but a saved soul who was ready to testify for his Savior.

We ask ourselves, “Am I as receptive and responsive—as attuned to the voice of our Lord Jesus—as positive and agreeable as Ananias was?”

May God grant us spiritual eyes and ears open to the opportunity that Jesus steers into our pathway, the opportunity for which He has been preparing us—so that any one of us, a humble and obscure saint, can serve as God’s mouthpiece to a sinner who needs the eyes of his understanding opened to Jesus in heaven!

In my heart and on my lips—and on yours—Jesus puts His holy name, the name of wondrous love, to deliver that name and that love to some troubled soul we will find crossing our path someday on a street we recognize, and perhaps even in the home of somebody we know by name. “Here am I, Lord,” says the Christian heart, “I am willing and ready to serve. Speak to me and through me, so that I may be the obscure saint that brings Your blessings to others.” Amen!



The Hammer Blows of Matthew Chapter 10

Pastor Paul Fleischer • Cheyenne, Wyoming

Not long ago we read of a recently published book which claims that reports of Christian martyrdom under the Roman Empire were all fabricated. According to a review of *The Myth of Persecution* in *WORLD* magazine (June 1, 2013), the book's author, a Notre Dame professor, theorizes that "the ancient narrative of Christians tortured and killed for their faith was all a gag to make a profit: 'Martyrs were like the action heroes of the ancient world...'"

There is more, but you get the point. After rejecting the myth charge and calling attention to the fact that "at least 100 million Christians are being persecuted today," the *WORLD* book reviewer concludes: "Historical texts aside, today's Christian persecution helps to confirm yesterday's Christian persecution."

Let's have a look at the "historical text" of the Gospel of Matthew in the divinely inspired Holy Scriptures. Throughout His Sermon on the Mount (chapters five through seven) the Lord Jesus had been molding His disciples' will for the difficult challenges that lay ahead of them (including the Beatitude which is a precursor for what is to follow, namely, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake...*", 5:10-12). In the next section (chapters eight through ten) the Lord zeroes in on what one Bible commentator labels "three Messianic hammer blows which [were intended to] temper and toughen the apostles for their mission" as fishers of men.*

HAMMER BLOW #1 "*Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves*" (10:16).

Far from being a myth, persecution even to the point of death, says the Savior, comes with the territory of being one of His sheep. Yes, persecution is as much the norm and standard for His followers as it is for sheep venturing into a pack of wolves.

Whether witnessing before "*governors and kings*" or within the family circle (!), Jesus wanted His disciples to know that the unbelieving simply cannot be tolerant of the Christian faith. Behind that intolerance is the

* *FOLLOW ME—Discipleship according to Saint Matthew*, Martin Franzmann, Conc. Publ. House, St. Louis, MO, 1961, page 94

fact that they just cannot tolerate the Christ of God, His Word and His ways.

While recognizing these truths, let disciples of Jesus pray to be “wise” and “harmless,” so that they do not unnecessarily stir up persecution.

In connection with each hammer blow the Savior attaches a word of promise, encouragement, and comfort. In this case He adds: “*You will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he that endures to the end will be saved*” (v. 22). Take heart, confessing Christians, for the Church of believers is truly “an anvil that has worn out many hammers.”

HAMMER BLOW #2) “*A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household*” (10:24-25).

We use colloquial expressions such as “like father, like son; like mother, like daughter.” Here, on a higher level, it is “like Master, like disciple.” As their Master was unjustly and cruelly treated, so will they be treated who belong to Him. John the Baptist was beheaded for his standing up to Herod. The historical (!) book of the Acts of the Apostles reveals various forms of persecution of Christians. Stephen was the first Christian martyr. James was executed. Apostles like Paul and Peter experienced imprisonment and other persecution.

And far from being a fabrication, verifiable history supports the facts that 1) most of the apostles died a martyr’s death; and 2) confessing Christians died in second and third century persecutions under the Roman governors Nero and Domitian.

In connection with this hammer blow the Savior attaches a comforting and encouraging three-fold “fear not”: “*Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known....and do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell....Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows...*” (vv. 26, 28, 31).

Undergirding these “fear nots” lies the Master’s own triumph through the path of suffering and death He Himself walked in order to redeem us—and rising again for our justification.

HAMMER BLOW #3) “*Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword*” (10:34).

The Christmas angels announced the arrival of peace on Earth with the birth of the Christchild. To the Romans St. Paul proclaimed:

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:1).

Jesus came to be the Prince of Peace, but “He brings no cheap peace, no half peace, no peace by compromise. He can create peace only by destroying evil; and since men love evil and cling to that which excludes them from the whole peace of God, His coming forces a decision between good and evil and proves to be, for all its peaceful intent, the sundering sword.” (*FOLLOW ME...*, p. 96)

Following this third hammer blow, Jesus calls on His own to take up their cross and follow Him, adding that “*he who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it*” (10:38-39).

Take heart, confessing Christians, for “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

Lord Jesus, in the face of any and every form of persecution for Your name’s sake, keep Your believing children in such faith unto eternal life.

Amen!

• PERSECUTION AMONG OUR FOREIGN BRETHREN:

Our old-fashioned hard-copy file on the subject of persecutions is two inches thick with accounts of Christian persecution today. With so much violent persecution going on around the world, one observer has termed the 21st century ‘a new age of martyrs.’

And it strikes close to home—a ten-page e-mail dated March 29, 2012, provided by our CLC Board of Missions, detailed “persecution among our [CLC] foreign brethren” in the various states in Africa and India where we are co-workers with the gospel. Tales are told of pastors beaten (one killed a year or two ago), of women abused and/or raped, of property (including church buildings) damaged/burned/destroyed—and just a general, widespread, open animosity against our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Yet far from being negative, the reports are generally positive. One of the reporters for our India brethren writes: “We try to favor all men: We avoid using militant language in gospel preaching. We don’t shout, ‘India for Christ!’ but say ‘Christ for India!’; as we know Christ has not called us to Christianize the world but evangelize it....” Frequently the foreign reporters ask for our prayers, and they speak of how our fellow believers “glory in persecutions” as they find strength from such words of God as: “...but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:3ff).

Dear readers, as the familiar mission hymn puts it:

If you cannot be a watchman, Standing high on Zion’s wall,

Pointing out the path to heaven, Off’ring life and peace to all,

With your prayers and with your bounties You can do what God demands;

You can be like faithful Aaron, Holding up the prophet’s hands. (TLH #496:3)

• “The Principle of Limited Tears”

As we have proffered, there is much persecution of Christians today and comparatively little publicity, especially when the persecution involves Christians. While that is troubling, even more troubling is the remark of one Christian observer who says: “Even when persecution is known, Christians often don’t seem to be overly concerned.”

Then in answer to his own question as to why there is so much apathy among believers on an issue of such significance, reference is made to Ecclesiastes 4:1 which says: “*Then I...considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: And look! The tears of the oppressed, but they have no comforter—on the side of their oppressors there is power, but they have no comforter.*”

This extrapolation follows: “Sociologists call it ‘the principle of limited tears.’ Since we do not have the capacity to ‘cry’ about all the tragedies of the world, we narrow our focus and weep for those things that touch us personally. Then we close our eyes to the suffering that is farther from us.”

In conclusion, this is said: “Jesus’ words of warning still ring true today. Persecution is real. While we may have limited ability to physically help those who are suffering for the faith, don’t forget the power of prayer. Brothers and sisters in Christ, ‘remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering’ (Hebrews 13:3).” (*Forward In Christ*, July 2012, p. 28f)



ANNOUNCEMENTS

ILC REGENTS CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The Board of Regents invites nominations for the office of President of Immanuel Lutheran College. The current term of Professor Steve Sippert expires June 30, 2014. All pastors, professors, male teachers, and voting members of the CLC are entitled to nominate a man from the faculty of Immanuel Lutheran College to serve a two-year term beginning July 1, 2014. Nominations must be written or E-mailed no later than midnight February 12, 2014 to:

Mr. Craig Ryan
499 Country Lane
Fulda, MN 56131
E-Mail: cryan@page1printers.com

ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Faith Lutheran Church and School, Markesan, Wisconsin, is planning to mark its 50th anniversary with a special celebration on Sunday, April 6, 2014. Guest speakers for the 10:00 a.m. worship service will be Michael Schierenbeck and Bruce Naumann (former pastors) and James Albrecht and Rick Grams (“sons” of the congregation). A noon potluck meal will be followed by an afternoon program beginning at 2:00 p.m. – Pastor Paul Krause, reporting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS CONTINUED

INSTALLATION

In accord with our usage and order, Pastor Norman Greve, who was called as pastor of St. Peter's Ev. Lutheran Church, Stambaugh, Michigan, was installed on Sunday, January 19, 2014. Assisting in the installation were Philip Matzke and Pastor Paul Tiefel Jr.

--Pastor Joel Fleischer, Vacancy Pastor, Calvary Lutheran Church, Marquette, Michigan.

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“FOREVER WITH THE LORD!”

This Month's Cover design
is in dedication to
Professor Roland A. Gurgel
1920-2014.

Cover Designed by:
Nate Ude (Roland's grandson)
Cover design also used on his
funeral and victory service
bulletins, February 15 & 16, 2014.

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

“... THE SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN.” — JOHN 10 : 35

Postmaster: Periodicals postage paid at St. Paul, MN 55113 and additional offices (825-580). ISSN#0024-7537. Send address corrections (Form 3579) to Lutheran Spokesman, 2750 Oxford Street North, Roseville MN 55113
The Lutheran Spokesman is published monthly by the Church of the Lutheran Confession, 2750 Oxford St. N., Roseville, MN 55113, and is an official organ of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). Website address: www.clclutheran.org. Editor: Paul Fleischer, 1741 E. 22nd Street, Cheyenne, WY 82001-4138, E-Mail to paulgf@qwestoffice.net; Assistant Editor: Paul R. Koch; Art Director/Designer: Matthew Schaser, Staff: Theodore Barthels, David Bernthal, Wayne Eichstadt, Warren Fanning, Daniel Fleischer, David Fuerstenau, Mark Gullerud, Jay Hartmann, John Klatt, Paul Krause, Joseph Lau, Paul Naumann, Nathan Pfeiffer, David Reim, Andrew Schaller, Thomas Schuetze. Material submitted for publication should be sent to Editor Paul Fleischer six weeks before date of publication. Announcements and other short notices should also be sent to Editor Fleischer. Business Manager: Benno Sydow, 2750 Oxford St. N., Roseville, MN 55113. E-Mail to BennoSydow@yahoo.com. Individual subscriptions {foreign-U.S. currency only}: \$18.00 {\$22.00} for one year; \$34.00 {\$42.00} for two years; \$50.00 {\$62.00} for three years; sent in bulk to congregations: \$15.00. • Spokesman Online Version at: www.lutheranspokesman.org Printed in U.S.A.

