

Vespers, Lent I
8 March 2009

"Christ Trusted in the Lord in All Circumstances in order to Save and Preserve Mankind."

"Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust."
Psalm 16:1.

Introduction

Why does Jesus here in Psalm 16 pray for God to preserve Him? Christ prays for God to preserve Him not for His sake, Jesus after all is God, but rather is carrying out His work as Savior and Redeemer of mankind. *Jesus is praying for the preservation of mankind through His work to atone for the sins of men.*

The basis of Christ's prayer is His trust in God. Jesus trusts in God and, therefore, fully expects and prays for God to preserve Him. And Christ does this to redeem men from their sins.

Man's sin was not to trust in God. In the beginning in the midst of Paradise, Adam did not trust God's Word and on the contrary violated it. This failure to trust God ended in man's death.

Christ, however, does the opposite. Even in the midst of suffering, He continues to trust in God. And because Jesus continued to trust in God, He was delivered.

And because Jesus did this work for us, then His deliverance is our deliverance. Through His obedience in suffering and prayer for preservation, He preserved the entire human race and gave unto us life everlasting.

I. Adam did not trust in God in the Garden of Eden and perished.

A. Psalm 16 is a Messianic Psalm.

During this season of Lent, we will meditate on Psalm 16. Psalm 16 is a Messianic Psalm.¹ A Messianic Psalm teaches us about the Person and Work of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, to save men from their sins.

¹Luther captions Psalm 16 in his German translation of the Bible:
"Prophecy Concerning Christ's Suffering and Resurrection."

There are different kinds of psalms². There are psalms that teach (didactic psalms), psalms of comfort and psalms of petition (supplicatory). The Fountainhead of all psalms is Messianic psalms. The Messianic psalms teach and sing about the Person and Work of Christ for the salvation of sinners.³ And because the psalms are the church's hymn book, they have to flow from the Psalms about Christ, the Gospel, for only the Gospel teaches us to praise God aright.⁴

¹Of the general contents of the psalter, Luther writes: "It should be noted that the entire Psalter deals with five subjects; therefore we divide it into five parts. In the first place, some psalms prophesy of Christ and of the Church, or the saints, what would happen to them, etc.; and to this class belong all the psalms in which there are promises given to the pious and threats to the ungodly. In the second place, there is a number of doctrinal psalms, which teach us what we should do and what omit according to the Law of God; and to this class belong all the psalms which condemn the doctrine of men and extol the Word of God. In the third place, there are several psalms of consolation, which comfort the sorrowing and suffering saints, and, on the other hand, condemn and terrify the tyrants. .. In the fourth place, there are a few psalms of prayer, in which we pray to God and cry in all distress; and to this class belong all psalms which laments and mourn and cry over the enemies. In the fifth place, we have psalms of thanksgiving, in which we laud and praise God for His various benefits and His assistance; and to this class belong all psalms which praise God in His works, these being the finest and principle psalms. ... But we must know that the psalms cannot be just exactly and even divided into such part and verses, for sometimes two, three, and even all five divisions, as noted above, are found in one psalm, so that prophecy, doctrine, consolation, prayer, and thanksgiving are found together. But this division serves for the better understanding of the psalms and that we may the more easily learn and remember them." P.E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible: The Old Testament: The Poetical and the Prophetical Books, Vol. II*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1924, pp. 59-60.

¹"Of special interest to us are the Messianic psalms, including Ps. 2, 8, 16, 22, 24, 40, 45, 47, 68, 72, 89, 93, 97, 110, 118; they refer to the Messiah, the promised Redeemer of the world, portraying more or less vividly and completely His person and work, His birth, betrayal, agony, and death, His triumph over death, His ascension into heaven and enthronement at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." *ibid.* p. 59.

¹Our Lutheran Confessions declare that seeking the remission of

B. Psalm 16 reminds us vividly of Christ's Active Obedience.

Psalm 16 brings into stark relief Christ's *Active Obedience*. All too often we don't remind ourselves of Christ's *Active Obedience*. Rather, we focus on Christ's *Passive Obedience*, i.e. His suffering and death for our sins. Focusing on Christ's *Passive Obedience* doesn't exclude Christ's *Active Obedience*, but rather intensifies our appreciation of His *Active Obedience*. The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

Although in many passages of Scripture the work of redemption is ascribed to Christ's death and the shedding of His blood, yet this must by no means be understood *exclusive*, as if by it the holy life of Christ were excluded from the work of redemption. But it is done for the reason that nowhere does the fact that the Lord has loved and redeemed us shine forth more clearly than in His Passion, death, and wounds as the devout old teachers say; the death of Christ is, as it were, the last line and completion, ... the end and perfection, of the entire obedience, as the Apostle says in Phil. 2:8.⁵

In the first verse, then, we have again Christ's *Active Obedience* for us. Jesus says:

sins from Christ is the highest worship: "Nothing greater could she ascribe to Christ. To seek from Him the *remission of sins* was truly to acknowledge the Messiah. This worship is the *highest worship* of Christ. Nothing greater could she ascribe to Christ." *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, **Article III.33**, emphasis added.

As for the word "hymn", the English word hymn comes from the Greek word "hymnos". "Hymnos" is a song of praise to a god or hero. ("*hymn, ode, in praise of gods or heroes ...*." *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Compiled by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, Revised and Augmented Throughout By Sir Henry Stuart With The Assistance of Roderick McKenzie, *With Supplement* 1968, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, p. 1849, **s.v. "hymnos"**.) The God and Hero of the Christian faith is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Thus Christian hymnody sings the Praises of our God and Savior Jesus Christ for His Work to Redeem us from our sins.

⁵*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 376, footnote 81.

Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust.⁶

To trust in God is to fulfill the First Commandment and, thereby, all the commandments. In Catechism we learned:

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. *What does this mean?* We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.⁷

Christ, therefore, when He prays God to preserve Him because He trusts in Him, is fulfilling the First Commandment and, therefore, all the commandments. And because Christ is God, He, then, is fulfilling the commandments not for Himself, but rather for us. This we learned in catechism is His *Active Obedience*:

As my *Priest*, Christ *fulfilled the Law* in my stead perfectly (active obedience), *sacrificed Himself* for me (passive obedience), and still *intercedes* (pleads) for me with His heavenly Father.⁸

B. Adam did not trust in God and so he and the entire human race perished.

Adam, however, was quite different than Christ. Whereas Christ did trust in God, Adam clearly did not trust in God, for Adam disobeyed God. Adam, perversely, trusted in God *not to keep His Word when he disobeyed it*. In other words, Adam fully expected God not to follow through on His Word when Adam transgressed it. Moses writes:

And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat it....⁹

And this was eating from the tree God had said “thou shalt not eat of it ...”¹⁰ Adam,

⁶Psalm 16:1.

⁷The *Small Catechism*, p. 5.

⁸The *Small Catechism*, question 132 B, p. 108.

⁹Genesis 3:6.

¹⁰Genesis 2:17

therefore, mocked and blasphemed God by openly confessing and acting upon his belief God would not or perhaps could not keep His Word. Now, that certainly is not to fear, love, and trust in God above all things, but quite the opposite.

And this lack of trust in God's Word led to man's demise. St. Paul writes:

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners....¹¹

And through Adam's sin comes death to all men. St. Paul writes:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned....¹²

Luther writes of this calamity:

Therefore one should not listen to those who maintain that it is cruel for this nature to be so pitifully corrupted and plunged into death and the rest of the disasters simply on account of a bite of fruit. When the Epicureans hear this, they laugh at it as a fairy tale. But to the careful reader it readily becomes clear that the bite of the apple is not the reason. The reason is sin, through which Eve sinned against both tables of the Law and against God Himself and His Word; moreover, she sins in this way that she cast aside the Word of God and offers her whole self to Satan as his pupil.

These actions dare not be regarded lightly; for they are, as the saying is, causes pregnant with punishments which we endure, such an awful condition of sin and such an awful antipathy to God. We ought to look at and think about these, instead of confining ourselves to the fruit that was plucked and swallowed. Those who look only at the action and not at the sin from which this action followed cannot do otherwise than charge God with cruelty that because of so small a sin He has inflicted such great punishment on the entire human race. Therefore they hate God and despair; or, like the Epicureans, they laugh at this as a fairy tale.

Thus we must pay attention to the Word. Moreover, this is God's Word. And so, just as important as the Word is, so important also is the sin which is committed against the Word. To this sin our entire nature has succumbed, How could it overcome this sin, since its magnitude is inexhaustible? To overcome this sin, we need Him who brings with Him inexhaustible righteousness, that is, the Son of God.

11Romans 5:19.

12Romans 5:12.

And this also reveals Satan's cunning. He does not immediately try to allure Eve by means of the loveliness of the fruit. He first attacks man's greatest strength, faith in the Word. Therefore the root and source of sin is unbelief and turning away from God, just as, on the other hand, the source and root of righteousness is faith.¹³

And really, what should one expect if he put his trust where God hasn't promised to be to support and to help? What should a man expect if he set his foot where God has placed no footing? He can do nothing except plunge headlong into the eternal darkness of the absence of God's blessed presence. Jesus, therefore, also describes hell as the outer darkness:

But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.¹⁴

II. Christ Trusts in God in His Life and in His Passion and Deeds this Trusting in God to Men to Save Them.

A. Christ trusted in God in the midst of His Passion.

We get a glimpse of this darkness in the Passion of Christ. In Psalm 69, in the midst of His Passion, Jesus describes the torments He is suffering and gives us a glimpse of the outer darkness:

Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto *my* soul. I sink in deep mire, where *there is* no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.¹⁵

In Christ's description, we get a glimpse of hell, i.e. the lack of God's blissful presence. Christ has nowhere to set His foot and He sinks in the eternal and infinite quicksand-like mire. That is because He bears the guilt for Adam's sins. And having no footing is the fruit of Adam's sin because Adam chose to step where God said He would provide no footing. Here, in the Passion of Christ, we get a glimpse, a vivid glimpse, of the results of unbelief in God's Word and not trusting in God.

So, Christ, Our Savior, endures this suffocating darkness of the lack of God's blessed presence for Adam and indeed for all men, for all of us. But even in the midst of this enormous and incomprehensible suffering, Christ continues to obey God.

¹³Luther's Works, Vol. 1, p. 162.

¹⁴St. Matthew 8:12.

¹⁵Psalm 69:1-2.

In the first place, Christ willingly went to the Cross at His Father's behest.¹⁶

Finally, even in the deepest agonies of His Passion, Christ continued to "fear, love, and trust in God above all things." In Psalm 22, therefore, Christ says:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsake me? *why art thou* so far from helping me, *and from* the word of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season and am not silent. But thou *art* holy, O *thou* that inhabitest the praises of Israel.¹⁷

Notice that Christ calls upon God and calls Him "My God". In other words, God is the one in whom Christ trusts for all things even in the midst of God forsaking Him and even calls Him holy. So, remarkably, in the midst of Christ's *Passive Obedience*, i.e. His suffering for our sins, we see Christ's *Active Obedience*, i.e. His fulfilling God's commandments for us, for all men.

And now we see why the gates of hell cannot prevail against the Church. For hell is the lack of God's blessed presence and the wrath of God. But here, Christ our Substitute, loves God and fulfills the commandments even in and from the very bottom of hell. Thus Christ, by His *Active Obedience* throughout His life and even in the midst of His *Passive Obedience*, destroyed forever the powers of hell. Jesus, therefore, says:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.¹⁸

What Rock is this? The Rock is, of course, Gospel¹⁹, which delivers to us Christ's work of

16"O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." **St. Matthew 26:39.**

17**Psalm 22:1-3.**

18**St. Matthew 16:18.**

19"However, as to the declaration: *Upon this rock I will build My Church*, certainly the Church has not been built upon the authority of man, but upon the ministry of the confession which Peter made, in which he proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He accordingly addresses him as a minister: *Upon this rock, i.e., upon this ministry.* [Therefore he addresses him as a minister of this office in which this confession and doctrine is to be in operation, and says: *Upon this rock, i.e., this preaching and ministry.*] Furthermore, the ministry of the New Testament is not bound to places and person as the Levitical ministry, but it is dispersed through the whole

overcoming the unsound footing of the deep mire produced by Adam's sin, and establishing solid footing and also, by this work, overcoming the gates of hell.

This same great work of Christ's *Active Obedience* we hear reiterated by Christ in Psalm 16:

Preserve me, God: for in thee do I put my trust.²⁰

Here, again, Christ reiterates His trust in God, i.e. Jesus is keeping the commandments and keeping them, again, for us. And here He makes clear it is for the preservation of the human race, for He is trusting in God to preserve Him in His work of redemption and through Him and His Work preserve the entire human race. Christ's *Active Obedience* throughout His life and in the midst of His Passion preserved the human race. Jesus says:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.²¹

St. Paul writes:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.²²

world, and is there where God gives His gifts, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers; neither does this ministry avail on account of the authority of any person, but on account of the Word given by Christ. [Nor does the person of a teacher add anything to this word and office; it matters not who is preaching and teaching it; if there are hearts who receive and cling to it, to them it is done as they hear and believe.] And in this way, not as referring to the person of Peter, most of the holy Fathers, as Origen, Cyprian, Augustine, Hilary, and Bede, interpret his passage: *Upon this rock*. Chrysostom says thus: '*Upon this rock,*' not upon Peter. *For He built His Church not upon man, but upon the faith of Peter. But what was his faith? 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'* And Hilary says: *To Peter the Father revealed that he should say, 'Thou art the Son of the living God.'* Therefore the building of the Church is upon this rock of confession; this faith is the foundation of the Church." *The Smalcald Articles: Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope.* 25-29, *Triglotta*, pp. 511, 513.

20Psalm 16:1.

21St. Matthew 5:17.

22Galatians 4:4-5.

For the sake of the preservation of the human race, Christ was sent into the world. Jesus says:

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.²³

And both Jesus and St. Paul make it plain that the entire Holy Trinity is active in Christ's preservation of the human race because St. Paul says God sent His Son and Christ says in Psalm 16 that He trusts in God for His preservation. The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes of the entire Holy Trinity's activity in Christ-Crucified to preserve the human race:

The reason why this Child, this Son, is also called **Counselor** is that He, in counsel with [the other Persons of] the Holy Trinity, helped reach the conclusion of how fallen mankind could be helped again. The unending righteousness of God was offended by the Fall of Adam. Now then, there was only an unending payment required, which neither angel nor man could provide. Therefore there was no counsel either in heaven or upon earth. Thus, the Son of God, the eternal Wisdom, came up with the counsel that He would volunteer Himself as Mediator and Redeemer, that He especially in the fullness of time wanted to take into Himself human nature and within it make payment for us men.²⁴

B. Christ gives us the benefits of His *Active Obedience* and *Passive Obedience* in the Gospel and, thereby, preserves us unto life eternal.

And it is through the Gospel that Christ delivers the benefits of His *Active* and *Passive Obedience* to men. St. Paul writes:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also

23St. John 3:17.

²⁴*Seven Christmas Sermons*, pp. 75, 75. "Johann Gerhard (1582-1637) has rightly been classified the 'third preeminent Lutheran theologian after Luther and Chemnitz.' ... However, while Gerhard is best remembered for his great dogmatics, the *Loci Theologici*, Gerhard produced a number of devotional volumes and preach [sic] many sermons to the 'common man.' The sermons in this volume were apparently preached when Gerhard was 31 years old and already superintendent at Heldburg and a Doctor of Divinity." **Foreword.**

should walk in newness of life. for if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of *his* resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.²⁵

And it is through this Gospel that God preserves all who believe in Him unto life eternal. St. Paul says:

Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.²⁶

And it is through this Gospel that we are taken up by God in Christ and placed upon the eternal firming footing in His Kingdom, giving us solid trust in God and everlasting life. This preservation of the human race through the Gospel we learned in Catechism:

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. *What does this mean?* The good and gracious will of God is done indeed without our prayer; but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also. *How is this done?* When God breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will which would not let us hallow God's name nor let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh; but strengthens and preserves us steadfast in His Word and faith unto our end. This is His gracious and good will.²⁷

Conclusion

Christ, then, obeys God in all circumstances, even in this midst of His suffering and being forsaken of God for the sins of the world.

And Christ obeyed God for our sakes in order that we be delivered from the consequences of Adam's disobedience.

Finally, Christ makes His immaculate obedience ours by the Gospel through faith and, thereby, preserves the human race unto the life everlasting.

Amen.

²⁵Romans 6:3-7.

²⁶Romans 6:8.

²⁷The Small Catechism, The Third Chief Part, The Third Petition, p. 13.