

Vespers, Lent II
15 March 2009
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

"Christ's Obedience to God Provides Christians with a Rich and Eternal Inheritance."

"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant *places*; yea, I have a goodly heritage..."
Psalm 16:6

Introduction

What does Christ's obedience to God mean for us? Well, in the first place, obedience to God means great reward. For just as the world rewards those who perform what they desire, so much more our Heavenly Father rewards those who obey His desire and commandments.¹

¹"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." **St. Matthew 5:12.** This reward is the reward of grace. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes: "The world hates and persecutes Christians just because of their very best works. ... But our gracious God makes up for that. He is so pleased with our good works that He rewards us richly for doing them. But this reward, so Scripture further instructs us, must be regarded strictly as a reward of grace." *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 52.

Martin Chemnitz writes: "Afterward, however, the good works in the reconciled, since they are acceptable through faith for the sake of the Mediator, have spiritual and bodily rewards in this life and after this life; they have these rewards through the gratuitous divine promise; not that God owes this because of the perfection and worthiness of our works, but because He, out of fatherly mercy and liberality, for the sake of Christ, has promised that He would honor with rewards the obedience of His children in this life, even though it is only begun and is weak, imperfect, and unclean. These promises should arouse in the regenerate a zeal for doing good works. For from this we understand how pleasing to the heavenly Father is that obedience of His children which they begin under the leading of the Holy Spirit in this life, while they are under this corruptible burden of the flesh, that He wants to adorn it out of grace and mercy for His Son's sake with spiritual and temporal rewards which it does not merit by its own worthiness. ... For the rewards are promised by grace and mercy; nevertheless, they are not given to the idle or to those who do evil but to those who labor in the vineyard of the Lord." *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part I, p. 653.

"But what do we say of the reward which Scripture mentions?] If the adversaries will concede that we are accounted righteous by faith because of Christ, and that good works please God because of faith, we will not afterwards contend much concerning the term *reward*. We

Christ obeyed God perfectly all His life, at birth, in life, suffering, death, and resurrection. Consequently, Christ has fashioned goodly heritage because His obedience to God has established from God a great reward.

But this heritage is not for Christ in and of Himself, for Christ is God and has no need of a human heritage. Rather Christ suffered these things to win *for us* His goodly heritage in God's eternal kingdom. Now because of what Christ has done for us, the lines are fallen in pleasant places for all men, for there is nothing more pleasant than life everlasting in God's paradisaic and blissful eternal Kingdom.

I. Adam Chased After False Gods and Bequeathed an Inheritance Unpleasant, namely, Eternal Death and Damnation.

A. Adam fashions a lethal heritage by his disobedience to God.

Last week we saw how Christ's Active Obedience even in the midst of His Passive Obedience, namely, His suffering, created for all men an invincible faith and salvation. For if Christ were obeying God even in the midst of His Passion, i.e. suffering the torments of the absence of God's blessed presence, which is the torments of hell², then how could anything, including the gates of hell, prevail against the Church and our faith? It cannot. Our salvation is magnificently great and certain because of the Bedrock of our Savior and His obedience – even in the midst of His incomprehensible suffering and torment – throughout His entire life for men.

Adam, however, in the midst of Paradise did not obey God but departed from Him at Satan's temptation and bidding. 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.³

Here is the source of Adam's heritage, i.e. fruits of his labors he would bequeath

confess that eternal life is a reward, because it is something due on account of the promise, not on account of our merits. ... Therefore it is a sufficient reason why eternal life is called a reward, because thereby the tribulations which we suffer, and the works of love which we do, are compensated, although we have not deserved it. ... Thus God does not owe us eternal life, still, when He grants it to believers for Christ's sake, that is a compensation for our sufferings and works." *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article III.244 ff, Triglotta*, p. 219.

²"Christ did not descend into hell to suffer for our sins; *He suffered hell torment on the Cross when He was forsaken of God*, and our redemption was finished when He died." *The Small Catechism*, Annotated by Edward W. A. Koehler, p. 164, emphasis added.

³**Genesis 3:6.**

to all his children, i.e. to all men, disobedience to and departure from God's Word. God's Word is the foundation of all things, including Adam's life and existence⁴. *To disobey and depart from God's Word is to render everything unsound at the foundation.* Luther writes:

Therefore one should not listen to those who maintain that it is cruel for this nature to be so pitiably 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.⁵

Again, Luther writes:

The source of all sin truly is unbelief and doubt and abandonment of the Word. Because the world is full of these, it remains in idolatry, denies the truth of God, and invents a new god.⁶

And this idolatry ends in ruin. Jesus says in Psalm 16:

⁴“Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power” **Hebrews 1:3.**

⁵*Luther's Works*, Vol. 1, p. 162, emphasis added.

⁶*Luther's Works*, Vol. 1, p. 149.

Their sorrows shall be multiplied *that* hasten after another *god*: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips.⁷

And so, the results of Adam entering into idolatry and the unsoundness of departing from God's Word ended in His own destruction. Moses writes:

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed *is* the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat *of* it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.⁸

This disobedience and idolatry is the lethal substance of the heritage Adam has fashioned for us and for all men.

B. Adam bequeaths a heritage of death to all men.

And Adam bequeathed this heritage of death to us and to all men. St. Paul says:

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....⁹

The unsoundness and infirmity, then, of the human race has its source in Adam rejecting and departing from the source of all existence, God's Word.

And this disobedience of Adam is also the source of all idolatry in men, as Luther notes:

The source of all sin truly is unbelief and doubt and abandonment of the Word. Because the world is full of these, it remains in idolatry, denies the truth of God, and invents a new god.¹⁰

And this idolatry includes the blasphemy of offering the blood of someone or something other than the Precious Blood of the Son of God. From the beginning, it was evident that God must become man and die for the sins of men. Luther writes:

⁷**Psalm 16:4.**

⁸**Psalm 16:17-19.**

⁹**Romans 5:12.**

¹⁰*Luther's Works*, Vol. 1, p. 149.

You see, therefore, that what we call the mass is a promise of the forgiveness of sins made to us by God, and such a promise as has been confirmed by the death of the Son of God. For the only difference between a promise and a testament is that the testament involves the death of the one who makes it. A testator is a promiser who is about to die, while a promiser (if I may put it thus) is a testator who is not about to die. This testament of Christ is foreshadowed in all the promises of God from the beginning of the world; indeed, whatever value those ancient promises possessed was altogether derived from this new promise that was to come in Christ. Hence the words “compact,” “covenant,” and “testament of the Lord” occur so frequently in the Scriptures. These words signified that God would one day die. “For where there is a testament, the death of the testator must of necessity occur” (Heb. 9[:16]). Now God made a testament; therefore, it was necessary that he should die. But God could not die unless he became man. *Thus the incarnation and the death of Christ are both comprehended most concisely in this one word, “testament.”*¹¹

But fallen men have the audacity of offering blood other than Christ’s to pay God for sin. Jesus speaks of these false atonements when He says in Psalm 16:

Their sorrows shall be multiplied *that* hasten *after* another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, or take up their names into my lips.¹²

This blasphemy is particularly revolting. This idolatry of which Jesus speaks is particularly offensive because it speaks of an atoning blood equal to or better than that of the Son of God’s. Nothing more unspeakable could be spoken than to set up an equal atonement with that of the Infinitely Precious Son of God. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

Regarding the sufficiency of the satisfaction rendered by Christ the question has been ventilated whether one drop of the blood of Christ would have sufficed for the expiation of the sins of the world. ... Lutherans say that the blood of Christ, the blood of the Son of God, has *infinite value in even its smallest amount* – not the quantity, but the quality of the blood shed by the Son of God endows it with infinite redemptive worth – but that, on the other hand, since Christ poured out His blood according to the will and counsel of God, we may not say that He shed one drop of His blood superfluously.¹³

¹¹*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 36, p. 38, emphasis added.

¹²**Psalm 16:4.**

¹³*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 381, emphasis added.

And, moreover, Christ here reminds us there is no other Gospel, no other Blood or Name under heaven by which men may be saved¹⁴. The consequences, then, are eternally lethal not only for such great blasphemy but also for relying on the atonement of false gods that do not exist and, therefore, cannot save.

Adam's heritage, then, is not goodly but lethal, and lands men not in pleasant places but drops them in the most unpleasant place of the arid wilderness beneath the withering blast of God's eternal wrath forever.

II. Christ Establishes a Goodly Heritage for All Men by His Suffering and Death for the Sins of the All Men that Ensconces Men in the Eternally Pleasant Place of God's Kingdom.

A. Christ obeys God under the difficult circumstances of suffering the torments of hell for the sins of all men.

Unlike Adam, however, Christ was tempted to seek after other gods not in the optimal conditions of Paradise, but under the incomprehensible burden of suffering the boundless and eternal wrath of God for the sins of all men. Remember, in the beginning of Psalm 16, in the midst of His Passion, i.e. in the midst of His supreme torment and suffering, He prays:

Preserve me, God: for in thee do I put my trust.¹⁵

Under exceedingly difficult circumstances and temptations, Christ put His trust in God. In this midst of suffering the torments of hell, which certainly is not paradise, Christ kept the First Commandment and had no other gods before Him.

And in addition, Christ was tempted to forsake God by the devilish taunts coming from the very people for whom He was suffering. St. Matthew the Apostle writes:

And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest *it* in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priest mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said, he saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will

¹⁴“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” **Acts 4:12**. “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” **Acts 20:28**.

¹⁵**Psalm 16:1**.

believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.¹⁶

And Christ did continue to trust in God for us in the midst of His suffering and by this steadfastness in suffering created for us Paradise. Jesus, therefore, could welcome the criminal on the Cross into Paradise because those very blessed Words, a most beautiful absolution, were being fashioned at that moment by His suffering for that criminal and for all men. St. Luke the Evangelist writes:

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.¹⁷

And so here Christ is fulfilling the promise of a goodly heritage, for the lines have fallen unto that criminal and to us in Paradise, which is certainly a pleasant place.

B. Christ bequeaths His good heritage in the Gospel.

And this paradise, pleasant places, and goodly heritage we gain and have through the Gospel. In Psalm 23 David teaches us that Jesus leads us into the pleasant places of green pastures. These green pastures are the Gospel, i.e. the Word and the Sacraments. Luther writes:

The prophet, however, calls God's people and the Holy Christian Church a "green pasture," for it is God's pleasure ground, decorated and adorned with all kinds of spiritual gifts. The pasture, however, or the grass in it, is God's Word, with which our consciences are strengthened and restored. Into this green pasture our Lord God gathers His sheep, feeds them in it with precious grass, and restores them with fresh water. That is, He commits to the Holy Christian Church the office of shepherd, entrusts and gives to it the holy Gospel and the Sacraments, so that by means of these it may care for and watch over His sheep and so that these sheep may be richly provided with instruction, comfort, strength, and protection against all evil. ... By means of the allegory of the green pasture, however, the prophet wants to indicate the great abundance and the riches of the holy Gospel and of the knowledge of Christ among the believers. For just as the grass in a green pasture stands very thick and full and grows more and more, so it is with the believers: they not only have God's Word richly, but the more they use and apply it, the more it increases and grows among them. Therefore the psalmist expresses himself very plainly. He does not say, "He leads me once, or often, in green pasture," but: "He leads me in them without ceasing. so that amid the grass

¹⁶St. Matthew 27:39-43.

¹⁷St. Luke 23:42-43.

and in the pasture I may lie, rest, and dwell securely and never suffer hunger or any other want.” ... David shows that he is speaking of the Gospel also in this psalm when he says later: “He restores my soul” and “Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.”¹⁸

Christ, then, bequeaths to us this goodly heritage through the Gospel. Jesus says of the Gospel:

For this cup is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.¹⁹

The Sacrament is the Last Will and Testament of the Son of God. Remember what Luther, following St. Paul, says: A testament requires the death of the testator:

These words signified that God would one day die. “For where there is a testament, the death of the testator must of necessity occur” (Heb. 9[:16]). Now God made a testament; therefore, it was necessary that he should die. But God could not die unless he became man. *Thus the incarnation and the death of Christ are both comprehended most concisely in this one word, “testament.”*²⁰

And Christ bequeaths to us in His Last Will and Testament the remission of sins, which reverses the wages of death, and gives to us life everlasting. In Catechism we learned:

What is the benefit of such eating and drinking? That is shown us by these words, “Given and shed for you for the remission of sins”; namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.²¹

And of course this goodly heritage and pleasant place extends from here into eternity in Christ’s Kingdom of Glory. Jesus says:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if *it were* not *so*, I would have told you. I go

¹⁸*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 12, p. 162.

¹⁹**St. Matthew 26:28.**

²⁰*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 36, p. 38, emphasis added.

²¹*The Small Catechism*, p. 21.

to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also.²²

And to dwell with Christ in eternal glory is certainly to have the lines fall unto us in pleasant places and to enjoy a goodly heritage, just as He promised and worked out for us by His obedience:

The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant *places*; yea, I have a goodly heritage.²³

Conclusion

We, then, enjoy a goodly heritage not by our own works, for, as we've seen, Adam bequeathed to us not good works, but sin and the resulting eternal punishment.

Christ, however, bequeaths to us a goodly heritage, namely, the remission of sins. Through the remission of sins come saving faith, and immediate life and communion with God. To enjoy fellowship with God is certainly to have the lines fall unto us in pleasant places.

And our dwelling in these pleasant places with God do not come to end but continue when Christ returns again in glory to raise our bodies from death to enjoy everlasting life with Him in the pleasant place of God's glorious and eternal Kingdom.

Amen.

²²**St. John 14:1-3.**

²³**Psalm 16:6.**