

The Festival of Good Friday

2 April 2010

Concordia Lutheran Mission

Terrebonne, Oregon

“God Suffered a Truly Human Death on the Cross in Order to Atone for the Sins of Men, Vanquish Death, and Save.”

“When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.”

St. John 19:30

Introduction

What does St. John describe here? St. John the Apostle describes a human death. For the separation of body and soul is the definition of human death.¹

But this is a most extraordinary death. For this is the death of the Man who is also the Almighty God. For Jesus is God come in the flesh.²

But why would God die a human death?³ Clearly, God does not do it for Himself, for He is God and has no need of such human experience, but rather for us, for all men because we are

¹“**DEATH.** a. Temporal, bodily death: separation of soul from body at the end of life.” *The Small Catechism*. “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” **Ecclesiastes 12:7**.

²“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” **St. Matthew 1:23**.

³“*We Christians must know that if God is not also in the balance, and gives the weight, we sink to the bottom with our scale. by this I mean: If it were not to be said [if these things were not true], God has died for us, but only a man, we would be lost. But if ‘God’s death’ and ‘God died’ lie in the scale of the balance, then He sinks down, and we rise up as a light, empty scale. but indeed He can also rise again or leap out of the scale; yet He could not sit in the scale unless He became a man like us, so that it could be said: ‘God died,’ ‘God’s passion,’ ‘God’s blood,’ ‘God’s death.’ For in His nature God cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is correctly called God’s death, when the man dies who is one thing or one person with God.*” *The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ*.⁴⁴, underscore added.

subject to death. By God bearing death for us, He burst the bands of death⁴ as a man and, thereby, liberates all men from death.⁵

And this liberation from sin and death Christ has won for us comes to us through Holy Baptism, i.e. the Gospel. For through Holy Baptism we are buried with Christ into death and raised unto the newness of life and the resurrection of the body through faith.⁶

God, therefore, became man and died a truly human death in order to atone for the sins of men, vanquish, and save men through the Gospel.⁷

I. Human Death Comes About because of Sin.

A. Death comes about because of sin.

But what brings about death? What brings about this horrible human condition of the tearing asunder of body and soul? Sin brings about the separation of body and soul. St. Paul writes:

For the wages of sin *is* death;⁸

⁴“Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.” **Acts 2:24.**

⁵“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” **St. John 8:36.** “For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” **Romans 6:23.**

⁶**Romans 6:3-6.**

⁷In Holy Baptism we see the Passion of Christ. For Christ gave Himself on the Cross in order to save us through the Blessed Waters of Holy Baptism: “...Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word....” **Ephesians 5:26, 27.**

Luther: “[H]oly baptism was purchased for us through this same blood, which was shed for us and with which he paid for sin. This blood and its merit and power he put into baptism, in order that in baptism we might receive it. For whenever a person receives baptism in faith this is the same as if he were visibly washed and cleansed with the blood of Christ. For we do not attain the forgiveness of sins through our work, but rather through the death and the shedding of the blood of the Son of God. *But he takes this forgiveness of sin and tucks it into baptism.*” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 51, p. 325.

⁸**Romans 6:23.**

This terrible end for men originated in the Garden of Eden when Adam disobeyed God's Word. Sin is the transgression of God's Word⁹ and the severing, thereby, of man from the Source of Life, God's Word, namely, God Himself¹⁰. As a result, man suffered death, the separation of body and soul, the body returning to the dust of the ground from whence it came. Moses writes:

And unto Adam he said, Because thou has 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, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.¹¹

And because Adam is the father of all men, such is the fate of 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

Solomon writes that the fate of all men is the separation of body and soul in death:

because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.¹³

The separation of body and soul, or human death, comes about because of sin.

B. The sting of death is the settling in of God's abiding wrath.

⁹“Sin is the transgression of the law.” **I John 3:4.**

¹⁰“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. And the light shineth in darkness” **St. John 1:1-3, 4.**

¹¹**Genesis 3:17-19.**

¹²**Romans 5:12.**

¹³**Ecclesiastes 12:5, 6-7.**

The moment of expiration, however, is not the worst of it. The worst part of death is the settling in of the abiding wrath of God because of our sin, the eternal death¹⁴. St. Paul, therefore, writes:

The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law.¹⁵

The Lutheran Church confesses this truth:

And death itself serves this purpose, namely, to abolish this flesh of sin, that we may rise absolutely new. Neither is there now in the death of the believer, since by faith he has overcome the terrors of death, that sting and sense of wrath of which Paul speaks 1 Cor. 15, 56: *The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the Law*. This strength of sin, this sense of wrath, is truly punishment as long as it is present; without this sense of wrath, death is not properly a punishment.¹⁶

The true terror and pain of death is not the moment of expiration, the tearing asunder of body and soul, but the settling in of God's abiding wrath over sin.

II. God Himself Vanquishes Death for All Men by Atoning for Men's Sins on the Cross and Suffering a Truly Human Death for All Men.

A. God suffers a truly human death to atone for the sins of men.

And God Himself likewise suffered a truly human death. St. John the Apostle writes:

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.¹⁷

Christ's death, however, differs from human death. At the moment of expiration of fallen man, the abiding wrath of God settles in. For Christ, however, the abiding wrath of God terminates before body and soul separate and He dies. For Jesus said:

¹⁴“B. The *unbelievers* will rise to *eternal death*, that is, to everlasting shame, contempt, and torment in hell. ... Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both *soul and body in hell*. *Matt. 10:28.*” *The Small Catechism*, p. 142.

¹⁵**I Corinthians 15:56.**

¹⁶*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article VI: Of Confession and Satisfaction.* 56, 57, *Triglotta*, pp. 299.

¹⁷**St. John 19:30.**

It is finished ...¹⁸

What's finished? What's finished is the suffering the abiding and eternal wrath of God for our sins. Christ suffered the deep agony of body and soul for our transgressions. The prophet Isaiah writes:

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.¹⁹

Christ, therefore, removed the sting of death because He Himself suffered for us the sting of death: God's wrath over sin. The Lutheran Church confesses:

Neither is there now in the death of the believer, since by faith he has overcome the terrors of death, that sting and sense of wrath of which Paul speaks 1 Cor. 15, 56: *The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the Law.* This strength of sin, this sense of wrath, is truly punishment as long as it is present; without this sense of wrath, death is not properly a punishment.²⁰

Christians by faith overcome the terrors of death because faith receives Christ's victory of death by His absorbing and extinguishing for us in His Pure and Blessed Soul the sting of death: God's wrath over our sin.

But how could Christ do this? How could God die? God indeed cannot die in and of Himself. But now that God has become man, He can in fact die. The Lutheran Church confesses:

We Christians must know that if God is not also in the balance, and gives the weight, we sink to the bottom with our scale. By this I mean: If it were not to be said [if these things were not true], God has died for us, but only a man, we would be lost. But if 'God's death' and 'God died' lie in the scale of the balance, then He sinks down, and we rise up as a light, empty scale. But indeed He can also rise again or leap out of the scale; yet He could not sit in the scale unless He became a man like us, so that it could be said: 'God died,' 'God's passion,' 'God's blood,' 'God's death.' For in His nature God cannot die; but now that

¹⁸**St. John 19:30.**

¹⁹**Isaiah 53:10.**

²⁰*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article VI: Of Confession and Satisfaction.* 56, 57, Triglotta, p. 299.

*God and man are united in one person, it is correctly called God's death, when the man dies who is one thing or one person with God.*²¹

Christ, therefore, because He is True Man and also the Infinite and Almighty God could plunge the sting of death, i.e. God's eternal wrath over sin, into His infinite Person and flood it with and immerse it in God's vast, infinite, and eternal mercy of Himself bearing the stroke of God's justice for us and, thereby, atone for our sins, drown it, and forever extinguish and vanquish the sting of death.

By removing the sting of death before He died, Christ changes death into mere sleep, for Christ awakened from death and rose from the dead on the third day. And because He did this for us, for all men, then death for those in Christ is no longer death but sleep. For this reason, Scripture calls the death of a Christian not death, but sleep. St. Paul, for example, writes:

But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept.²²

God, therefore, suffered and died a truly human death in order that He Himself vanquish death for us, for all men.

B. Christians gain this victory over death through Holy Baptism, the Gospel.

And Christians gain this victory over death through the Gospel. St. Paul writes of Holy Baptism:

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 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.²³

And this blessing of overcoming death and newness of life by faith is the Gospel, for the Gospel saves. St. Paul writes of the Gospel:

²¹*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ.*⁴⁴, underscore added.

²²**I Corinthians 15:20.**

²³**Romans 6:3-5.**

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The Just shall live by faith.²⁴

And St. Peter writes that Holy Baptism saves:

The like figure whereunto *even* baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:²⁵

Holy Baptism is the Gospel because the Gospel saves.

Christ fashioned the Blessed Salvation of Holy Baptism in the midst of His Passion in order to convey to men the fruits of His suffering death for us. St. Paul writes:

... Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word ...²⁶

Luther writes of Christ's Passion forming for us the Blessed Waters of Holy Baptism, the Gospel:

[H]oly baptism was purchased for us through this same blood, which was shed for us and with which he paid for sin. This blood and its merit and power he put into baptism, in order that in baptism we might receive it. For whenever a person receives baptism in faith this is the same as if he were visibly washed and cleansed with the blood of Christ. For we do not attain the forgiveness of sins through our work, but rather through the death and the shedding of the blood of the Son of God. *But he takes this forgiveness of sin and tucks it into baptism.*²⁷

By the Gospel, then, Christians gain the victory Christ gained for us over death and look forward to rising from the sleep of death unto everlasting life and glory with our God and Savior.

²⁴**Romans 1:16-17.**

²⁵**I Peter 3:21.**

²⁶**Ephesians 5:25, 26.**

²⁷*Luther's Works*, Vol. 51, p. 325.

Conclusion.

On Good Friday, God Himself suffered a human death in order that we would not have to. For human death means the separation of body and soul *and* the settling in of abiding wrath God. But Christ bore the eternal wrath of God over sin, sank it into His infinite person, bore the stroke of God's justice, and extinguished and vanquished death and the sting of death forever for all men.

This victory over death Christ gives to men through the Gospel. For through the Gospel we are buried with Christ into His death so that now we escape the wrath of God and will rise from the sleep of death unto life everlasting and the resurrection of the body in His eternal Kingdom.

Amen.