

Vespers IV
21 March 2010
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

“Eternal Life Comes by Knowing Christ through the Gospel.”

“He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many”

Isaiah 53:11

Introduction

How hard is it to gain life eternal? It’s not hard at all. Eternal life is as easy as knowing Jesus through the Gospel.¹

Isaiah writes that by the knowledge of Jesus, Jesus shall justify many. The knowledge is the Gospel.² The Gospel creates faith.³ Men are justified by faith.⁴ And where men are justified, there is life eternal.⁵

¹“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” **St. John 17:3.**

²“And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sin,” **St. Luke 1:77.**

³“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” **Romans 10:17.**

⁴“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” **Romans 3:28.**

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 to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” **Romans 1:16-17**

While eternal life is easy for us, it was exceedingly difficult and painful for Christ to gain for us, as we have seen in going over Chapter 53 of Isaiah and Christ's Great Passion.⁶ For Isaiah writes that in order to give us this justifying and saving knowledge through the Gospel, Christ saw the travail of His soul, i.e. God pierced His soul with His wrath for our sins. The Precious Knowledge of Life Eternal came at the expense of the life of the Son of God. Such is the value of the Gospel, the same Gospel we hear today, every Sunday, and read at home.

This Knowledge of Eternal Life, then, came at great cost and labor to Christ so that eternal life for fallen men would be as easy as knowing Christ through the Gospel.

I. Christ Labored by the Travail of His Soul to Fashion the Saving and Justifying Knowledge of God.

A. Christ labored mightily to save man from sin.

The all too common response of people to the Gospel – indeed, it is nearly unanimous – is that eternal life according to the Gospel is just too simple and easy. That eternal life constitutes merely knowing Christ and what He has done for us is far and away too simple and too easy.

Easy? Easy for whom? Easy for men? Yes! Easy for Christ? No! Christ labored mightily in order that eternal life might come to us freely and easily. 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 see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.⁷

Here the prophet Isaiah points out that the Lord bruised Christ, put Christ to grief, and made His soul an offering for our sin. Christ's soul was pierced for our sins and the sins of the whole world with the wrath of God. Isaiah writes:

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he *was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.⁸

⁶Luther: "This is the foremost passage on the suffering and resurrection of Christ, and there is hardly another like it." *Luther's Works*, Vol. 17, p. 215.

⁷**Isaiah 53:10.**

⁸**Isaiah 53:4-5.**

What does it mean to have one's soul pierced by the wrath of God? To have one's soul pierced by the wrath of God means to suffer the eternal wrath of God over sin⁹ and the eternal torment of that wrath and also, negatively, to be forsaken of God. Jesus says:

Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour.¹⁰

Christ's soul is troubled because the anguish of the Cross of God's wrath and of God forsaking Him lies ahead. We see this anguish settle further upon Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. St. Matthew the Apostle writes:

Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.¹¹

St. Luke writes of Christ's torment of soul:

And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were drops of blood falling down to the ground.¹²

On the Cross Christ says He suffers God's abandonment:

⁹“The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law.” **I Corinthians 15:56.** “The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law.” 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 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 a punishment.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article V. Of Confession and Satisfaction.* 56, 57, Triglotta, p. 299.

¹⁰**St. John 12:27.**

¹¹**St. Matthew 26:38-39.**

¹²**St. Luke 22:41-44**

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? *why art thou so* far from helping me, *and from* the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.¹³

On the Cross Christ suffers for our sins and the sins of all men¹⁴:

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. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. ... O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee.

Luther writes:

This is what David talks about here¹⁵, as though he wanted to say: “Sin and death are conquered, the enemy is destroyed, the kingdom of heaven is won. It happened in this way, that the Lord, our Ruler, true Man and Son of Man, travailed with body and soul in His tender humanity. He underwent such need and anguish that He sweat blood and felt nothing so much as that He was forsaken of God. In His soul He had to quench and extinguish the temptation of being forsaken by God, the devil’s flaming darts (Eph. 6:16), hellish fire, anguish, and everything that we had deserved by our sins.” By this the kingdom of heaven, eternal life, and salvation were secured for us, as Isaiah also says (53:11): “He shall see the fruit of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.” His body and soul, he says, travail in deep and difficult suffering. But He does this for our great

¹³**Psalm 22:1-2.**

¹⁴Luther: “Thus much more anxious you should be, when you consider Christ’s sufferings. For the evil doers, the Jews, although they have now judged and banished God, they have still been the servants of your sins, and you are truly the one who strangled and crucified the Son of God through your sins, as has been said.” *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol. 1.2, p. 187.

¹⁵**Psalm 8:5. Psalm 8** is a Messianic Psalm. “The 8th Psalm treats of Christ, the Son of man, who through His humiliation and exaltation has raised up fallen men and brought back to them their lost honor and dominion.” The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on Select Psalms*, p. 34.

benefit and for His own great joy. For He conquers His enemies and triumphs, and by His knowledge He makes many righteous.¹⁶

And all this painful toil, arduous labor, and travail of soul Christ undertook, as noted before, in order to save us from our sins. For Christ, then, salvation was not easy but exceedingly difficult and painful.

B. Christ Fashions the Saving Knowledge of God, the Gospel, by the travail of His soul.

By this travail of His soul, Christ fashioned the good news of His atonement for sins.¹⁷ For Isaiah writes that by “His knowledge” He shall justify many. This knowledge is the Gospel of Christ-Crucified for the sins of men. St. Luke the Evangelist writes of this Knowledge of God through the Gospel preached by St. John the Baptist:

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins....¹⁸

St. Paul writes:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.¹⁹

This blessed knowledge of Christ’s Passion, as St. Paul notes, justifies. And where a man is justified by faith, there, as St. Paul says, a man is saved and lives.

¹⁶*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 12, p. 127.

¹⁷The Gospel was purchased for us at a very high price, the suffering and death of the Son of God. “The Gospel has been purchased by Christ at a great price through His *satisfactio vicaria* [vicarious satisfaction]; at His command it is being proclaimed in the world; and ‘it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.’” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 518.

¹⁸**St. Luke 1:76-77.**

¹⁹**Romans 1:16-17.**

Jesus says of this blessed knowledge:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.²⁰

Luther writes:

Concerning this knowledge and its power the prophets have spoken gloriously and clearly prophesied, as in Isaiah 53 [:11]: “By knowledge of Him shall He (My Servant, the Righteous One) make many just or righteous.” This means: “He will redeem them from sins and snatch them from the devil’s jaws solely through this: that they know Him and who He is.” ... Likewise, Jeremiah 9[:23-24] says: “Let no one boast of his wisdom nor of his might nor of his riches” – in short, let no one boast at all – “but if anyone wants to boast, let him boast in this, that he knows Me and knows who I am: the Lord, who does good and establishes righteousness and justice on earth.” ... No one believes how necessary this article and knowledge are. ... Now, the only word we hear is that He is to save world and make the Father our friend. And the only work we see Him do is that He goes forth and accomplishes this by preaching, suffering, and, finally, dying on the cross. ... Behold, here the Father’s heart, will, and work lie open for me, and I know Him fully. ... the life and estate of Christians rises and soars so high above all such things that everything remains as far below it as the earth is from heaven, and nothing on earth can be set equal to it. ... For the treasure is too great and lofty – that God the Father and eternal life are to be laid hold of through the man, Christ – so that no human heart is able to comprehend it fully. ... Thus you see how necessary it is to press and beat upon this passage as the right, chief article and foundation of our doctrine, namely, how one becomes a Christian and finds eternal life and does not go astray.²¹

Christ, then, by the unimaginable suffering and travail of His soul fashioned this blessed and saving knowledge of the Gospel for us.²²

²⁰**St. John 17:3.** This blessed and saving knowledge of God was suppressed by the papacy: “This is our quarrel with the pope’s doctrine: he has taken all this away and will not allow us to retain the pure and bare knowledge [of Christ].” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 69, p. 41.

²¹*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 69, pp. 36, 37, 40, 42, 44

²²The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes: “Thus the fruit of the Lord’s ascension into heaven is the establishment and preservation of the ministry. Therefore as He ascended into heaven according to His human nature, so also He instituted and preserves the ministry according to the human nature. Here we should place the prophecies of the Old Testament. Ps. 22: [22]: ‘I shall tell Your name to my brothers; in the midst of the Church I shall praise You.’ That is, ‘Freed

II. Eternal Life Comes through the Blessed Knowledge of God in the Word and Sacraments, which are the Gospel.

A. The Blessed and Saving Knowledge of God is found in Christ's Word and the Sacraments because they are the Gospel.

Where, then, do we go to find this blessed and saving knowledge of God? We go to Christ's Word and Sacraments, for they are the Gospel. In Holy Baptism, for example, we learn who God is and that He forgives our sins for Christ's sake. Jesus says:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost²³

Here in the Blessed Waters of Baptism we have knowledge of the True God, the Holy Trinity, and also the Blessed and Saving Knowledge of the remission of sins. St. Peter states:

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.²⁴

Likewise in the Lord's Supper we have the knowledge of the Lord, namely, that it is His, the Lord's, Supper, and the blessed and saving knowledge of the Lord because it offers the remission of sins. Jesus says:

For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.²⁵

from suffering and death, I shall establish and preserve the ministry of the Word, through which the benefits from My suffering and death are distributed in the Church.' Isa. 53:10: 'When He sets down His soul for sin, He will see His long-lived seed, and the will of the Lord will be directed in His hand.'" *Theological Commonplaces, Exegesis, or A More Copious Explanation of Certain Articles of the Christian Religion (1625)* ... *On the Person and Office of Christ*, pp. 246, 247. "Johann Gerhard (1582-1637) has rightly been classified the 'third preeminent 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 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** from *Seven Christmas Sermons*.

²³**St. Matthew 28:19.**

²⁴**Acts 2:38.**

The Lutheran Church confesses:

Moreover, the power of the keys administers and presents the Gospel through absolution, which [proclaims peace to me and] is the true voice of the Gospel. {German: The word of absolution speaks peace to me and is the Gospel itself.} Thus we also comprise absolution when we speak of faith, because *faith cometh by hearing*, as Paul says Rom. 10, 17. For when the Gospel is heard, and the absolution [*i.e.*, the promise of divine grace] is heard, the conscience is encouraged and receives consolation. And because God truly quickens through the Word, the keys truly remit sins before God [here on earth sins are truly canceled also before God in heaven] according to Luke 10, 16: *He that heareth you heareth Me*. Wherefore the voice of one absolving must be believed not otherwise than we would believe a voice from heaven. ... Meanwhile this faith is nourished in a manifold way in temptations, through the declarations of the Gospel [the hearing of sermons, reading] and the use of the Sacraments. For these are [seals and] signs of [the covenant and grace in] the New Testament, *i.e.*, signs [of propitiation and] the remission of sins. They offer, therefore, the remission of sins, as the words of the Lord's Supper clearly testify, Matt. 26, 26. 28: *This is My body, which is given for you. This is the cup of the New Testament*, etc. Thus faith is conceived and strengthened through absolution, through the hearing of the Gospel, through of the Sacraments, so that it may not succumb while it struggles with the terrors of sin and death. This method or repentance is plain and clear, and increases the worth of the power of the keys and of the Sacraments, and illumines the benefit of Christ, and teaches us to avail ourselves of Christ as Mediator and Propitiator.²⁶

This blessed and saving of knowledge of God comes through Christ's Word and Sacraments because they are the Gospel.

B. The Word and the Sacraments give life eternal because they are the Gospel.

And through the Word and the Sacraments we gain eternal life because they are the Gospel. St. Paul, for example, writes, therefore, of Holy Baptism:

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,
Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy

²⁵**St. Matthew 26:28.**

²⁶*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XII. (V.).*39-40, 42-43, pp. 261, 263.

he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.²⁷

Eternal life, then, is as easy as being baptized, hearing the Word, and receiving the Sacrament. This blessed ministry of Holy Baptism, the Word, and the Holy Communion, which we enjoy today, and every Sunday, and at home, work, and play, when we read and meditate on the Gospel, Christ purchased with travail and deep anguish of His soul. Christ purchased the blessed ministry of the Gospel at a great price and by His Almighty labors so that we who were helpless and perishing might with the greatest of ease enter the Kingdom of Heaven and gain life eternal. Luther writes:

Therefore, as the dear children and heirs of God, we ought to glory in neither our wisdom, nor strength, nor riches, but in this, that we have the “pearl of great value” (Matt. 13:46), the dear Word, through which we know God, our dear Father, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent (John 17:3). That is our treasure and heritage, and it is sure and eternal and better than all worldly possessions. Whoever has this treasure may let others gather money, live riotously, be proud and haughty. Let him not be troubled by such things, though he be despised and poor in the eyes of the world. But let him thank God for his inexpressible gift (2 Cor. 9:15) and pray that he may abide by it.²⁸

Conclusion

Eternal life, then, is as easy as hearing about Jesus and what He has done for us.

And the ease of this great and eternal gift came about by the travail of Christ’s soul for us in order that through the Ministry of the Gospel we would gain this knowledge and life eternal.

Eternal life, then, is easy for us because Christ labored mightily to give us the Gospel, the Gospel we hear every Sunday, read and meditate upon at home, in order that through this precious gift of the Word and the Sacraments issuing from the travail of His soul, we would gain life everlasting, the resurrection of the body, and eternal bliss and joy in Christ’s everlasting kingdom.

Amen.

²⁷Titus 3:4-7.

²⁸*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 12, p. 161.