

The Festival of Good Friday

22 April 2011

Concordia Lutheran Mission

Terrebonne, Oregon

“Christ Obeyed God Even When God Forsook Him on the Cross and, thereby, Burst the Gates of Hell, and Established Eternal Salvation for All Men.”

“Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared....”

Hebrews 5:7

Introduction

What is the worst thing that could happen to the devil’s kingdom? The worst thing that could happen is for a man to love, obey, and worship God in the midst of hell. What could be more galling to the devil and ruinous of his kingdom than a man fear, love, and trust in God above all things even when in the midst of the powers of darkness and the heart of the devil’s kingdom? Why it would not only be galling for the devil and his minions, but it would be frightful beyond imagination because it would utterly overthrow the gates of hell.¹

But that’s exactly what Christ did. While in the midst of hell because God had forsaken Him because He was bearing our sins in order to save us, Christ still calls upon God and calls Him “My God”. And because Christ remained obedient even unto the death of the Cross, God heard Him, delivered, Him, and raised Him from the dead, vanquishing the gates of hell.

And because Christ had no need of such obedience that burst the gates of hell, He obviously did this for men who were under the thumb of the gates of hell and in the thrall of the powers of darkness. Hence, because Christ obeyed God even in the midst of the depths of hell because God had forsaken Him because of our sins, Christ burst the gates of hell and vanquished the powers of darkness for all men, delivers us, thereby, from death and the power of the devil and ushers us into life eternal.

¹“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.” **St. Matthew 16:18.**

I. Christ Obeyed God Perfectly Even When God Forsook Him on the Cross for the Sins of All Men and Burst the Gates of Hell.

A. Christ obeyed God perfectly in the midst of His Passion.

Christ's obedience to His Father is remarkable. St. Paul the Apostle writes in tonight's epistle:

Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared²

Here, in Christ's Passion, we see both Christ's *Passive* and *Active Obedience*. In Catechism we learned of Christ's *Passive* and *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.³

Christ's *Passive Obedience* is that He obeyed His Heavenly Father even unto the death of the Cross. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.⁴

Christ's *Passive Obedience* in the midst of His Passion we easily see; He was obedient unto the death of the Cross. But in the midst of His Passion we also see Christ's *Active Obedience*. Christ's *Active Obedience* means He fulfilled all the commandments for us. Because of the fall of Adam, man would not and now cannot fulfill the commandments of God. To fulfill the commandments of God means to love God and neighbor perfectly in thought, word, and deed, 24/7, 365 days a year forever. Jesus says:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is*

²**Hebrews 5:7.**

³*The Small Catechism*, question 132 B, p. 108.

⁴**Philippians 2:8.**

like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.⁵

This keeping of God's commandments is the whole duty of man. Solomon writes:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man.⁶

Man has failed in his duty. For while we may produce a lame outward appearance of obedience to God's commandments, nevertheless, we know that our hearts and minds are full of evil passions and thoughts constantly. God holds men accountable not just for their outward conduct, but also for their inward conduct, their thoughts and feelings. Hence, God, even in the commandments, judges the heart. In the **Ninth Commandment** God says:

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house⁷

What is coveting but a sin of the heart? God, then, expects pure hearts and minds as well as pure outward conduct and judges accordingly.

For, we are, as Jesus says, to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.⁸ Is God two-faced? Does God outwardly behave in one way toward us while inwardly harboring hatred and plotting perfidies against us? Certainly not. So, just as God is pure and loving in thought, word, and deed, 24/7, 365 days a year from eternity to eternity, so are we to be pure in thought, word, and deed.⁹

⁵**St. Matthew 22:37, 38-40.**

⁶**Ecclesiastes 12:13.**

⁷**Exodus 20:17.**

⁸**St. Matthew 5:48.** "Be ye therefore, perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

⁹"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." **I John 3:18.** Likewise in confession we admit sin in thought, word, and deed. "Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess unto Thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against Thee by thought, word, and deed." *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 6.

But we know from Scripture¹⁰ and our own experience we have not kept God's commandments and loved God and neighbor perfectly. For this reason, because we cannot keep God's commandments and love God and neighbor as we ought, God became man and loved God and neighbor perfectly for us. Christ loved the Lord our God with all of His Righteous Mind, and with all of His Pure Soul, and with all of His Blessed Heart, and with all of His Almighty Power, and He loved His neighbor as Himself. And because Christ is God, He has no need of this fulfilling of God's commandments – or any human experience for that matter¹¹ — so He gives it to us that we might be the righteousness of God and, thereby, gain life eternal. St. Paul writes of Christ's *Active Obedience* for us:

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 son.¹²

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, President of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod from 1899-1911, writes of Christ's *Active Obedience* in our behalf:

This teaching of Scripture is of great practical importance. In his life of faith the Christian continually resorts to Christ's vicarious fulfillment of the Law. Luther: "He satisfied the Law; He fulfilled the Law perfectly, for He loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all His mind, and He loved His neighbor as Himself. Therefore, when the Law comes and accuses you of not having kept it, bid it go to Christ. Say: There is the Man who has kept it; He fulfilled it for me and gave His fulfillment to me. Thus the Law is silenced."¹³

¹⁰"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." **Romans 3:10-11**

¹¹When we consider the life of Christ, we must always remember that He is not only True Man but also True God. And because He is the True God, we know that He has no need for any of these human experiences, whether it be birth, death, or resurrection. So, why does God go through these human experiences when He has no need of them? Obviously, God is not going through these human experiences for His sake but rather for ours. Everything that Christ experiences as a man is done for our sakes in order to give us eternal life. Christ enjoyed a perfect and sinless birth, life, death, and resurrection, for us and gives them to us through the Gospel so that we gain a sinless birth and life and, thereby, life eternal and the resurrection of the body.

¹²**Galatians 4:4-5.**

¹³*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 375.

And Christ, moreover, loved God even when God forsook and rejected Him because He was bearing our sins. For Christ on the Cross cries out:

My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?¹⁴

Notice that Jesus cries out, “My God, My God”, indicating that even though forsaken of God, Jesus still calls upon God because He still expects every good from Him.¹⁵ Jesus does not curse God and die, as say Job’s wife advised her suffering husband¹⁶. Jesus does not abandon God in the midst of God forsaking Him, but rather calls upon Him for help and calls Him “My God.” Thus Christ fulfilled perfectly the commandments in the midst of God forsaking Him and, thereby, burst the gates of hell for us. Because hell is being forsaken of God and Jesus continued to call God His God and fulfilled the First Commandment and, therefore, all the commandments of God in the midst of hell, Christ, then, worshiped God purely, perfectly, and completely, in the midst of hell and forever destroyed the gates of hell for us; for because of Christ’s work, there now is no place that man has not worshiped God purely, perfectly, and completely, even in the depths of hell and the midst of God’s rejection. *Consequently, because there is now no place where man has not worshiped God perfectly, hell ceases to exist for those in Christ; Christ’s obedience has dissolved it utterly at its core.* The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes of this glorious marvel:

Yet, while Christ knows Himself totally forsaken of God in the abyss of hell, He cries, “My God, My God!” Even in such an abject condition, as He was in, He still clings to God as His personal God. This was a God-pleasing prayer that as it were issued from the pit of hell. This is something extraordinary, something unheard of. In the midst of the torments of hell Christ asserts that as His Son He will cling to God and claim Him as His own! Never before and never after has such a confident prayer issued from the abyss of hell on the part of those who are

¹⁴**St. Matthew 27:46.**

¹⁵The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes: “Even as Christ in [the] midst of such agony also cried out: **My God, My God**, thereby confessing that in His heart He no less still regards God as His own God and gracious Father, so also such troubled hearts should not cast aside their trust. Instead, they should steadfastly cling to God’s promises, for He says in Isa. 49: **Zion says, the Lord has forsaken me; the Lord has forgotten me. Can a mother also forget her child? And even if she does forget it, yet I will never forget you. See I have stamped [branded] you [your name] into My hands.**” *An Explanation of the History of the Sufferings and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ*, tr. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger, Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 1999, p. 276.

¹⁶“Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.” **Job 2:9.**

damned in that place. Ordinarily from those who suffer the torments of the damned come only cries and sighs of despair, never prayers of faith. It was by this prayer that Christ conquered and overcame the power of hell.¹⁷

Christ, then, worshiped, loved, and obeyed God perfectly all throughout His life, even in the midst of His Passion.

B. Christ's obedience in the midst of His Passion destroys the gates of hell.

Because Christ was obedient to God perfectly even in the midst of His Passion, St. Paul writes that God heard Him and answered His prayers:

Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplication with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.¹⁸

Christ was delivered from eternal death and God answered His prayer because He had obeyed God perfectly and completely atoned for the sins of all men that God had reckoned to Him. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.¹⁹

And where no sin remains, there the gates of hell lie in ruins, utterly wasted. Christ suffered the wormwood and the gall²⁰ of God's rejection over sin for us so that we would never have to suffer it.

For Satan, however, Christ's obedience is not a blessing but a lethal stroke right through the heart of his kingdom. Christ's obedience gutted his kingdom and forced the devil to drink forever, thoroughly, and completely, down to the dregs, of the cup of the gall of bitter defeat. For what possibly could be more galling and wrenching for God's bitter, sworn, and arch enemy, than to have to suffer the defeat of his kingdom because a Man is worshiping God purely in the very heart of his kingdom and at the throne of the gates of hell. Nothing could be more galling for the devil nor more lethal to his kingdom. A holy man worshiping God purely and completely

¹⁷*Lectures on Select Psalms*, tr. the Rev. Dr. H. W. Degner, Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 67, underscore added.

¹⁸**Hebrews 5:7.**

¹⁹**Romans 4:25.**

²⁰“Oh, the worm-wood and the gall! Oh, the pangs His soul sustained.” **Go to Dark Gethsemane**, *The Lutheran Hymnal*, #159.

in the midst of hell is that last thing the devil wanted or needed for his kingdom; for it meant a *triumph de luxe*²¹ for his archenemy and the end of the devil's realm.

Christ by His obedience even in the midst of His passion completely overthrew the gates of hell.

II. The Church Prevails against the Gates of Hell because the Ramparts of the Church are Christ's Gospel.

A. The ramparts of the Church are the Gospel, i.e. Christ's Word and Sacraments.

Christ, therefore, says of His work to save men from their sins:

And I say unto thee, That thou are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.²²

What is this Rock upon which the Church rests and the gates of hell cannot overcome? This Rock is the Gospel²³, i.e. Christ's Word and Sacraments.²⁴ For through the Word and the Sacraments Christ is put on and men are saved by faith. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

²¹An especially exquisite victory and the riches, rejoicing, and pageantry that flow from it – and none of it fleeting.

²²**St. Matthew 16:18.**

²³The Lutheran Church confesses: “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 of man, but upon the ministry of the confession which Peter made, in w 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.*]” *The Smalcald Articles, Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope.*²⁵, *Triglotta p. 511.*

²⁴The Word and Sacraments are the Gospel: “But let us speak of the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly signify a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry, and agrees aptly with our belief, namely, that one minister who consecrates tenders the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches tenders the Gospel to the people, as Paul says, I Cor. 4, 1: *Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, i.e. of the Gospel and the Sacraments.* And 2 Cor. 5, 20: *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in God's stead, be ye reconciled to*

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.²⁵

St. Peter the Apostle 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....²⁶

Because the Gospel, i.e. Christ's Word and Sacraments, give to us the fruits of Christ's work by faith, they deliver us from the power of the devil and death and, thereby, save. Obviously, then, because the Word and the Sacraments are the Lord's salvation, they are the soaring Ramparts of Zion, i.e. the high, unsurmountable Fortress Walls of the Church, as the prophet Isaiah said they would be:

In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will *God* appoint *for* walls and bulwarks.²⁷

The gates of hell will not prevail against Christ's Church because the Church to this very day and hour rests on Christ Himself through the Gospel. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*....²⁸

B. Where the gates of hell lie in ruin by the Gospel, there is life eternal.

And because the Gospel delivers us from the gates of hell and eternal death and ushers us into the Eternal Fortress of the Holy Trinity, then there in the Gospel we have life eternal. Jesus says:

God. Thus the term leitourgia agrees aptly with the ministry.” The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII.): Of the Mass, Of the Term Mass.80, 81, Triglotta, p. 411.

²⁵**Galatians 3:26-27.**

²⁶**I Peter 3:21.**

²⁷**Isaiah 26:1.**

²⁸**Ephesians 5:19-20.**

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that hearth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.²⁹

So we learned in Catechism of this power of the Gospel to save and grant life eternal:

What does Baptism give or profit? It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.³⁰

Conclusion

Christ's obedience to God is remarkable. For even when God rejected Him and condemned Him for our sins, Christ remained obedient to God, worshiped, and loved Him.

And because Christ remained obedient throughout, God heard Him and delivered Him, the gates of hell lying forever ruined in His Wake.

And by Christ's Work God delivered us from death, the power of the devil, and eternal damnation, because Christ was suffering and obedient for us in order that we not perish but gain life eternal.

Amen.

²⁹**St. John 5:24.**

³⁰*The Small Catechism*, p. 174.