

Lent Vespers 1
20 March 2011
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

“On the Cross of Jesus, God Forsook God and not Men in Order to Save Men and Grant Life Eternal.”

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Psalm 22:1

Introduction

This plea of Christ from the Cross says everything we need to know about God. *After all, when one sees that God rather than forsake mankind because of our sin forsakes rather God, then what else do you need to know about God? You have seen into the deepest depths of God; and at the deepest depths and core of God is love and mercy of men without peer and beyond comprehension.*

No one can understand *how* God could do it. But it doesn't matter. He did do it. And it means we are never forsaken by God.

Now we begin to see what value our lives have because of *how* they are valued by God. No man's life is meaningless, for rather than let men perish God rather forsook God not men and, thereby, treasured us and gathers us all up forever into His Bosom.

On the Cross of Jesus we see into the uttermost depths of God. And there in the very heart of God lies a burning passion for fallen men. That Blessed Ardor sent His Only-Begotten Son to the Cross in our stead. Now that we've seen the Heart of God, then, we know we are never forsaken of God and enjoy nothing but the best riches and best blessings from Him.

I. The Cross of Jesus Reveals God's Wrath Against Sin.

A. Psalm 22 is a Messianic Psalm.

During this season of Lent we will be meditating on **Psalm 22**. **Psalm 22** is a Messianic Psalm. That means it's a psalm about the Person and Work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.¹

¹“Weissagung von Christi Leiden and Herrlichkeit.” (Prophecy Concerning Christ's Suffering and Glory.) *Die Bibel oder die ganze Helige Schrift Alten und Neuen Testaments*,

There are different kinds of psalms². There are, for example, 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

nach der deutschen Uebersetzung Dr. Martin Luthers (The Bible or the Entire Holy Scripture, Old and New Testaments, according to the German Translation of Dr. Martin Luther), St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1905, p. 565.

²“Of 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 evenly 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.

³“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.

⁴Our Lutheran Confessions declare that seeking the remission of 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.” *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

Messianic Psalms, then, are God's hymns about His Messiah. The word Messiah comes from the Hebrew word *meshiach*. *Meschiach* means anointed (Christ is the word originated from the Greek which means "anointed"), as, say, we would anoint someone with oil. But Jesus was not anointed with oil, but rather with the Holy Spirit because **A.** Jesus is God and, therefore, possesses God's Holy Spirit, and **B.** was anointed with the Holy Spirit in order to save men from their sins.⁵

Psalm 22, then, is a Messianic Psalm that teaches us about the Person and Work of Christ to save us from our sins, especially His suffering in the midst of His Passion and His glorification after His resurrection from the dead.

B. The Cross of Jesus manifests the wrath of God against sin and Christ's atoning for that sin.

Psalm 22 immediately plunges us into the depths of Christ's Passion: He is forsaken of God. Nothing is more unspeakable or dreadful than to be forsaken of God. For all the good that we enjoy and all the blessings, pleasantries, and support we have comes from God. But when God removes Himself, then, all good retreats irretrievably and all that remains is everything absent the goodness of God. It is a darkness, dread, and terror incomprehensible. Consequently, Jesus says:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? *why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*⁶

In this Psalm and other Messianic Psalms we gain remarkable insight into Christ's Passion in this Psalm. For here Christ Himself is recounting for us the terrors He endured for all mankind. The Rev. Dr. Raymond Surburg writes:

Luther and the Lutheran Confessions accepted the teaching of the New Testament that in the Psalms there were numerous predictions about the Messiah. Moorehead wrote concerning this matter: "The Psalms are full of Christ. They speak about His humiliation and exaltation, of His rejection by the world and of His final triumph

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"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." **St. Luke 4:18.**

6Psalm 22:1.

over all opposition. But they go deeper, as we may say; deeper even than the gospels; they *let us into the thoughts and feelings when the billows of wrath were rolling over Him, when the heavy cloud of judgment which was all our own burst upon His devoted Head.*⁷

The billows of wrath rolling over Christ here is God's wrath over our sin and the sins of all men. In the Passion of Christ we can see dramatically – albeit still a glimpse – how dreadfully seriously God takes sin. Jesus, God's Only-Begotten Son, suffered rejection and condemnation by God because He bore our sins.⁸ The Lutheran Church confesses:

Yes, what more forceful, more terrible declaration and preaching of God's wrath against sin is there than the suffering and death of Christ, His Son? But as long as all

7Exegetical Essays and Materials Dealing with the Interpretation of the Psalms, Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary, Press, p. 28, emphasis added.

The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes: “Centuries, yea, a millennium earlier, before ever occurred what we reading the final chapters of the four Gospels, the prophets had spoken and written concerning Christ's suffering and death and had related this grand story in such minute detail as though they themselves had been on the scene. It is the Spirit of prophecy, the Spirit of Christ, who has spoken through the prophets; and this is the eternal Spirit of God, the Lord, with whom there is no distinction in time, and who it is that reveals to men what and how and when He will.” *Christ in Old Testament Prophecy*, tr. Erwin W. Koehlinger, Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 59

⁸“The old Theologians assert that Christ actually endured the torments of hell, when he uttered those mysterious words: ‘Why has Thou forsaken Me?’ ... By that outcry Christ asserts that He was really forsaken of God, forsaken, as only the damned in hell are forsaken. This marks the peak of His suffering. This indicates the height of His anguish. God had withdrawn from Him all help and protection and had delivered him up to darkness and death. At the same time, God had withdrawn from Him every token of grace and comfort. He was totally forsaken of God. Christ no longer saw or felt a ray of divine mercy. He was actually and really now suffering the pangs of hell, which otherwise only those experience who are banished to that place of eternal torment. As men live here in time, they may already feel the crushing burden of God's wrath and curse resting upon them, yet there are always some evidences of God's goodness at hand, such as the light they see and the air they breathe. However, in hell such evidences of God's kindness have vanished altogether. They see and feel only God's burning wrath and unabating fury. Such was the condition that Christ was in, when on the cross He cried: ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’ Christ felt Himself completely forsaken.” The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on Select Psalms*, tr. the Rev. Dr. H. W. Degner, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, pp. 68, 67.

this preaches God's wrath and terrifies people, it is not yet the preaching of the Gospel nor Christ's own preaching, but that of Moses and the Law against the impenitent. For the Gospel and Christ were never ordained and given for the purpose of terrifying and condemning, but for comforting and cheering those who are terrified and timid.⁹

Jesus restates this forsaking and its terrors again in the next verse:

O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and there is no silence for me.¹⁰

God refuses to hear Christ's pleas because He has truly forsaken Him because of our sins.

Moreover, God not only refuses to hear Jesus' pleas for help because He has truly forsaken Him, but God does not allow him to rest "in the night season", the time for rest, but rather pours out His eternal, infinite, and everlasting condemnation upon Jesus for our sins and the sins of all men. Christ, therefore, says, "And in the night season, and there is no silence for Me." No silence because God is continuously pouring out His wrath upon Him because of and condemning Him for our sins.

So, whether it be day or night, it is darkness for Jesus because God has truly forsaken Him because He bears our sins.¹¹

In addition, not only do we see Jesus' *Passive Obedience*, i.e. His obedience to God even when He suffers God's punishment, but also His *Active Obedience*, i.e. His keeping of God's

⁹*The Formula of Concord, Article V.12, Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition*, p. 555.

¹⁰**Psalm 22:2.** The second half of the verse is my translation from the Hebrew (wlo [and not] silence [dumiyah] to Me [li]). Also, King James Version of *World Wide Publishers* includes in the notes, "there is no silence to me." p. 431, note 17.

¹¹"The Messiah's entire life is according to prophecy nothing but suffering. The Messiah's entire life is according to prophecy one of continuous obedience" *Christ in Old Testament Prophecy*, tr. Erwin W. Koehlinger, Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 56.

commandments.¹² For 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.¹³ Jesus does not curse God and die, as say Job’s wife advised her suffering husband¹⁴. Jesus does not abandon God in the midst of God forsaking Him and say, “Look at what *your* God is doing to Me,” 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. For, because hell is being forsaken of God, Jesus retained God as His God and fulfilled the First Commandment and, therefore, all the commandments of God in the midst of hell and, thereby, forever destroyed the gates of hell for us. The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes:

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

12“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.” *The Small Catechism*, question 132 B, p. 108.

“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.’” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 375.

13The 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.

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

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 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.¹⁵

It is no surprise, then, that the gates of hell have been rendered impotent, for Christ obeyed and worshiped God while even in the depths of hell. No greater devastation could be inflicted on the gates of hell nor ruin the gates of hell suffer than for Christ to fear, love, and trust in God above all things while in the bowels of hell and the stronghold of darkness. Through His obedience even in suffering, Christ absolutely routed the gates of hell.

In the Cross of Christ, then, we certainly see the gravity of sin. But Christ was never sent to terrify us over the gravity of our sin, but to save us from our sins. The Lutheran Church confesses:

Yes, what more forceful, more terrible declaration and preaching of God's wrath against sin is there than the suffering and death of Christ, His Son? But as long as all this preaches God's wrath and terrifies people, it is not yet the preaching of the Gospel nor Christ's own preaching, but that of Moses and the Law against the impenitent. For the Gospel and Christ were never ordained and given for the purpose of terrifying and condemning, but for comforting and cheering those who are terrified and timid.¹⁶

II. The Cross Reveals that God Rather Forsook God than Allow Men to Perish and thereby Cherishes All Men.

A. The Cross of Christ reveals God's deep love for fallen men.

In the Cross of Christ, then, we see God's deep, abiding, and unfathomable love of fallen men. The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes:

¹⁵*Lectures on Select Psalms*, tr. the Rev. Dr. H. W. Degner, Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 67, underscore added.

¹⁶*The Formula of Concord, Article V.12, Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition*, p. 555.

This [Patience in Suffering] is more than human, this is divine patience. Through all the Messiah's suffering glow the love, patience, longsuffering, the innocence and holiness of God. The Servant of the Lord, yes, He is the Lord Himself. The Lord said about the thirty pieces of silver, for which those of Israel sold their Shepherd: "A goodly price that I was prized at of them." Zech. 11, 13. The Lord Jehovah, the God of Israel said: "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced." Zech. 12, 10. The suffering of the Messiah is the Passion of the Lord. Messiah's suffering and death, that is God's martyrdom, God's blood, God's death.¹⁷ Thus the suffering of the Messiah is truly He who should redeem Israel from all its troubles, from all its sins.¹⁸

But some folks look at the Cross and see only the gravity of their sin. They think, "If my redemption cost God his life, then I must be a pretty bad person." But if we move past the gravity of our sin and look at the propitiation of our sin, i.e. that the Son of God paid our debts, then the Cross warms our hearts. Luther writes:

But now bestir yourself to the end: first, not to behold Christ's sufferings any longer; for they have already done their work and terrified you; but press through all difficulties and behold his friendly heart, how full of love it is toward you, which love constrained him to bear the heavy load of your conscience and your sin. Thus will

17Dr. Stoeckhardt gets these expressions from Scripture, reflected also in the Lutheran Confessions. St. Paul the Apostle states: "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.**

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 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.

18*Christ in Old Testament Prophecy*, tr. Erwin W. Koehlinger, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, pp. 67, 68.

your heart be loving and sweet toward him, and the assurance of your faith be strengthened. Then ascend higher through the heart of Christ to the heart of God, and see that Christ would not have been able to love you if God had not willed it in eternal love, to which Christ is obedient in his love toward you; there you will find the divine, good father heart, and, as Christ says, be thus drawn to the Father through Christ. Then will you understand the saying of Christ in Jn 3, 16: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,” etc. That means to know God aright, if we apprehend him not by his power and wisdom, which terrify us, but by his goodness and love, there our faith and confidence can then stand unmovable and man is truly thus born anew in God.¹⁹

The Cross of Christ, then, reveals to us the deep, abiding, and unfathomable love of God for fallen men. No one can begin to describe or understand it. But we can and do know it and are blessed by it.

B. God treasures us and gathers us up into His arms forever.

And in the Cross of Christ, we can see that God so values even fallen men in His great mercy that He chose instead to forsake God rather than forsake men, which we all richly deserved. Now we know that all men are treasured mightily by God because of the Price of Redemption.

And that includes us. We know that we are of great value to God for Christ’s sake, and, therefore, God treasures us and gathers us up into His arms now and forever.

Conclusion

The Cross of Christ tells you all you need to know about God: God rather forsook God than forsake men who so richly deserved to be forsaken because of our sins. The Cross of Christ tells us how vastly God values all men because of the Price of their Redemption. No one is worthless, but all are treasured by God because of the Great Price He paid for all men.

And knowing that Incomprehensible Price, then we know we are treasured by God and gathered up in the safe and abiding arms of God both now and forever. *Amen.*

¹⁹*The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol. 1.2, p. 190.