

Lent Vespers 3
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Concordia Lutheran Mission
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“The Prophets Vividly Foretold Christ’s Agony of Body and Soul to Atonement for the Sins of All Men and, through His Passion, to Save Them.”

“... the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.”

Psalm 22:16

Introduction

Are we reading from the Gospels? I thought we were reading from the Old Testament, from the Psalms, during this season of Lent.

We indeed are reading from the Psalms. But here we see in **Psalm 22** Christ Himself reporting vividly His suffering on the Cross to us 1000 years before it happened. Christ allows us to see through His eyes and how He looked down from the Cross and views His murderers, assassins, and tormenters. And notice, as He does so, a distinct lack of vitriol in His speech toward His tormenters and murderers, reflected again in His absolution of them from the Cross: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”¹

We see here again that the prophets vividly reproduce the life of Christ and in particular here His suffering and death. And in **Psalm 22** we gain a glimpse through Christ’s eyes of His severe agony of body while suffering for our sins and the sins of the entire world.

The worst of it, though, was His agony of soul, for His soul was pierced through with God’s wrath², even to the point of pressing out and manifesting itself physically with drops of blood in Gethsemane.³

¹**St. Luke 23:34.**

²“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. He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.” **Isaiah 53:10-11.** “And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this *child* is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

This unanimous testimony to and vivid confession of Christ and His Passion down through the millennia (consensus of the prophets⁴) convinces us once again of God's great mercy for fallen man and His salvation of us.

I. The Consensus of the Prophets: Christ-Crucified for the Sins of Men to Save Them.

A. Powerful Evidence: The Prophets witnessed the Gospel.

Luther writes of the Gospel:

This is the greatest power and the proof of the Gospel, that it has the witness of the old Law and the Prophets that it would be so in the future. For the Gospel proclaims only what prophecy has said it would proclaim, so that we may say that it has been ordained by God's previous decision to be so before it should happen, and thus God alone should receive the glory for this doctrine and not our own merits and endeavors, obviously because this Gospel was ordained before we existed ...⁵

(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." **St. Luke 2:34-35.**

"The external suffering of Christ was never so great and burdensome; His inner (spiritual) love had to be more ready to suffer when it undertook the pressing need of our salvation." The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard, *An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the four evangelists, presented so that we may be awakened in the knowledge of the love of Christ and may blessedly grow according to the inner man.* tr. the Rev. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. the Rev. Dr. David O. Berger, Malone, TX: Repristination Press, p. 82.

³"And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." **St. Luke 22:44.**

⁴"But Peter also here cites in our issue the consensus of the Church: *To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name, whosoever believeth in Him, shall receive remission of sins*, etc. The consensus of the prophets is assuredly to be judged as the consensus of the Church universal. [I verily think that if all the holy prophets are unanimously agreed in a declaration (since God regards even a single prophet as an inestimable treasure), it would also to be a decree, a declaration, and a unanimous strong conclusion of the universal, catholic, Christian, holy Church, and would be justly regarded as such.] We concede neither to the Pope nor to the Church the power to make decrees against the consensus of the prophets." *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Article XII.[V].66, 67, *Triglotta*, p. 271, **Acts 10:43.**

⁵*Luther's Works*, Vol. 25, pp. 144, 145.

The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes:

Centuries, yes, a millennium earlier, before ever occurred what we read in 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.⁶

St. Paul the Apostle writes that the Gospel was witnessed by the prophets:

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference ...⁷

Likewise, St. Peter writes:

To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.⁸

B. Christ suffers on the Cross to atone for the sins of men.

This passage of David's from **Psalm 22** delivers a remarkable recounting of Christ's Crucifixion from Christ Himself. For by inspiration, David was writing Christ's Words which the Holy Spirit was recounting to him. In **Psalm 22** we read:

⁶*Christ in Old Testament Prophecy*, tr. the Rev. Dr. Erwin W. Koehlinger, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 59.

⁷**Romans 3:21-22.**

⁸**Acts 10:43.** The Lutheran Church, therefore, following St. Peter, confesses: "But Peter also here cites in our issue the consensus of the Church: *To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name, whosoever believeth in Him, shall receive remission of sins*, etc. The consensus of the prophets is assuredly to be judged as the consensus of the Church universal. [I verily think that if all the holy prophets are unanimously agreed in a declaration (since God regards even a single prophet as an inestimable treasure), it would also to be a decree, a declaration, and a unanimous strong conclusion of the universal, catholic, Christian, holy Church, and would be justly regarded as such.] We concede neither to the Pope nor to the Church the power to make decrees against the consensus of the prophets." *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Article XII.[V].66, 67, *Triglotta*, p. 271.

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look *and* stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.⁹

One can see why Dr. Stoeckhardt says that the prophets write, “as though they had been on the scene.”¹⁰ Well, by the Spirit of Christ, they had a better seat than being on the scene; they had Christ’s own recounting of His Passion.¹¹ David, therefore, by the Holy Spirit was hearing Christ Himself while transfixed on the Cross in the midst of His agony of body and soul for our sins. The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt¹² writes of this passage and I will quote extensively from him because he is a far greater Biblical scholar and writer than I:

⁹**Psalm 22:14-18.**

¹⁰*Christ in Old Testament Prophecy*, p. 59.

¹¹“Note well this passage [**I Timothy 2:6**] and others like it. They distinguish between redemption as an actual act and redemption as it is preached. Had Christ been crucified a hundred thousand times and had nothing been said about it, what profit would the act of His being brought to the cross have brought? But when I come to this, I must draw this act into history and publish it for all the world. Also, if anyone had seen this, he would not have thought that the work of redemption was taking place there. The work is fulfilled on the cross, but no one knows of the redemption except the Father and the Son. Therefore to the act also the use of the act must be added, that it may be declared through the Word and that one may hold it by faith and, thus believing, may be saved.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 28, p. 268.

¹²Dr. Stoeckhardt was the greatest exegete (an exegete is a man who works with the Bible in the original languages) America has produced. “Stoeckhardt, Georg; b. February 17, 1842, at Chemnitz, Saxony; In 1878 he became pastor of Holy Cross Church, St. Louis, and, having since 1879 lectured on Old and New Testament Exegesis at Concordia Seminary, was elected professor in 1887. In 1903 Luther Seminary, Hamline, Minn., created him a Doctor of Divinity. D. January 9, 1913, Stoeckhardt was an exegete of the first rank. Coupled with his great learning, his familiarity with the original languages, etc., and his logical mind was his firm belief in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures and his childlike acceptance of all the teachings of Scripture, his great love of the revealed truth. He permitted nothing but the text to influence his thought. Concentrating all the powers of his believing heart and mind on the written Word, he obtained a wonderful grasp of the deep thoughts of the Spirit, and he had the rare gift of unfolding them in concise, clear, convincing language. ... The Missouri Synod owes much to him; his exegetical ability and love of the truth of Scripture made him one of the leaders with Walther, in the

The description of the sufferings of the Messiah proceeds to a new feature. The great Sufferer tells of the tortures and pains He endures. He complains that He is poured out like water. He feels His life, His soul, overwhelmed with anxiety and torments, is flowing out and has lost its grip upon the things of this life. His life is in the process of dissolution. He complains that His bones are out of joint. The bones have slipped out of their socket at their joints. ... To us who believe it is no longer a question what anguish and tortures are here described. Very obviously this is a prophecy of the crucifixion of Christ. The agonies here described fit only the Crucified One, who, with arms outstretched, hangs there suspended on the cross. The Holy Spirit in this prophecy very definitely points men to this Sufferer as the Crucified One. ... This Psalm was something for Old Testament believers to ponder as it presented to them what exceeding great agonies the coming Messiah would endure to redeem His people. ... "Thou layest Me into the dust of death." The Messiah asserts that God Himself is causing His death and is conducting Him into His grave. This Sufferer sees behind the human enemies the hand of God who gave that evil Foe power over Him. ... Nowhere in the New Testament are the sufferings of Christ described in such detail as here in the Old Testament. In this case the Old Testament supplies what the New is lacking. We are also in need of such a portrayal of Christ to rightly acquaint our hearers with the true image of our Savior. ... "My hands and my feet they have pierced" This reveals the cause of His intense pain and torment of which the foregoing verses have been speaking. The pack of wild hounds have surrounded the Hind of the Morning¹³. The Band of evildoers have succeeded in surrounding their Victim. Now they are doing Him violence, laying their hands upon Him, transfixing His hands and feet, so that He cannot get away from them anymore. ... It pleased the Holy Ghost to reveal something of the intense suffering of the coming Messiah to the believers in the Old Testament. They could see His pierced Hands and feet. This was to intimate to them His crucifixion. The Old Testament believers no doubt pondered these words carefully for they did not understand as clearly as we

controversy on election and conversion and in the other battles the Church was, and is, engaged in, such as for verbal inspiration. ... [H]e labored, by word and pen (his doctrinal articles in *Lehre und Wehre*, in *Lutheraner* and in the synodical reports), to conserve this most precious treasure of the Missouri Synod; and he admirably succeeded in impressing upon both his students and his readers his exegetical method, his loving reverence for the written Word." *Concordia Cyclopaedia*, pp. 729, 730, s.v. "**Stoeckhardt, Georg**".

¹³“As the hind [deer] is the emblem of the hunted soul panting for deliverance, so the dawn pictures the deliverance which follows the dark night of misery and wretchedness. In the humiliation of His great Passion, Christ was like the hind; in the exaltation following His overthrow of the enemies of mankind the rich beauty of the eternal morning dawned over Him.” The Rev. Dr. P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible, The Old Testament, Volume II*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1924, p. 79, amplification added.

do in the New Testament that the coming Savior was to be crucified for them and all men. This Psalm gave the people in the Old Covenant something to think about. It enabled them to more fully appreciate the great price of their redemption. ... “I can count all My bones. They stare and gloat over Me.” After the suffering Messiah has indicated what is causing His agonies, He continues to pour out His heart to God concerning His troubles. The extreme tortures have brought on a fever heat, which dried up His strength. His flesh has wasted away so that physically He has been reduced to a ghastly skeleton. ... Yet while He is so pitifully exposed to the gaze of His enemies, does he find any sympathetic consideration there? None whatsoever! First, without mercy they had pursued their noble Game. Then, they had surrounded and laid violent hands upon Him. Finally, without a speck of pity they had transfixed His hands and feet. Now, that they have Him in their power and know He must die miserably, they stand around to watch with demonical satisfaction, to see Him writhe in pain and expire with excruciating agonies. ... What was foretold here was literally fulfilled on Golgatha under the cross. The Evangelist tells us that there the rabble stood and looked, taunted, vexed, and made sport of the suffering and dying Savior.¹⁴ ... “They divided my garments for themselves, and for My raiment they cast lots.” This sad spectacle was also foretold by the Holy Ghost a thousand years before it happened. As it was foretold, it was also literally fulfilled under the cross of Christ. This prophecy and its fulfillment is another cogent proof that Scripture was given by divine inspiration. A description is given of the evil doers. They divided the garments of their Victim among themselves. By this action they showed that they considered Him through with this life and practically dead. People otherwise wait until a person has expired before they claim his property. Here they determine who shall have the Victim’s garments while He is yet alive. The suffering Messiah is treated as one who has lost all personal property right,

¹⁴Luther notes that the traditional compassion extended to the condemned was not afforded Christ: “As Christ is hanging on the cross, He calls out and says, ‘I thirst’ (John 19:28). Then His crucifiers do not give Him a drink of water. In their great envy and hate, vexation, and vengeance they give Him gall and vinegar, Psalm 69:21, or as St. Mark writes (15:23), ‘wine mingled with myrrh’ to drink in His great thirst. They do not do this to the other criminals who were crucified on either side of Him. It is the custom through the world to sympathize with criminals when they are being led out and executed; when their soul is troubled and their tongue becomes dry, they are given the best and most refreshing drink, as the wise man commands in Proverbs 31:6. In short, it is unheard of in the world that men should lose all compassion for any robber, murderer, or scoundrel, however evil he might have been. But they lost all compassion for Christ on the cross. This is the devil, who so embitters, incites, and impels the world against Christ.” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 12, pp. 115, 116.

even before He has expired.¹⁵ ... Yes, the Spirit of Christ pointed also to Christ's torture on the cross. True, the prophets did not publish the name of the torture stake, did not name the cross. But the sufferings, tortures, pangs of the suffering, dying Messiah, as they are sketched here, fit only crucifixion, no other type of criminal punishment.¹⁶

Notice the lack of vitriol in Christ's voice as we, through the eyes of the prophet, gaze down from the Cross with Him¹⁷ at His tormenters, murderers, and assassins. He merely recounts His suffering for our sakes – so we would know He did in fact endure these punishments and pains for us – and He prayed the Father to forgive them because they knew not what they were doing. That's because He was suffering this torment of body and the even greater torment of His soul, pierced by the wrath of God, for them as well as for the rest of us and, not surprisingly, prayed for them even there, at that moment, on the Cross – so great is God's mercy toward us, toward our neighbor, and toward all men. The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

In the second part of this text it is recorded that Christ prayed for His crucifiers: **Father, forgive them**, He says, **for they know not what they do**, the first word which Christ spoke on the cross. In the Old Testament, as the sacrifice was being offered, the high priest at the same time had to instruct the people about its true benefit. Christ, the High Priest of the New Testament, also does this; and He teaches that this His sacrifice is intended for the forgiveness of sins. Also, since Christ suffered not for Himself but for us, He does not immediately at the outset lament that He was forsaken by God. Rather, He, as it were, forgets His agony and concerns Himself with us human beings and prays that God would forgive us for what we were doing to Him. He thus here portrays Himself as our Advocate, 1 John 2, who pleads on our behalf before the heavenly Father with the power of His sacrifice. He holds before Him, as it were, His wounds and petitions that God would allow His wrath to abate. Just as in those times Christ's petition was so powerful that many of those who helped crucify Him were converted and the remainder were given forty more whole years in which to repent ... , so now Christ's intercession retains its power to this very day. For we should not think that Christ was praying [only] for the Jews and soldiers who at that time [sic]

¹⁵*Lectures on Select Psalms*, pp. 73, 74, 75, 76, underscore added.

¹⁶*Christ in Old Testament Prophecy*, p. 65.

¹⁷“For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.” **I Corinthians 2:15**

crucified Him. Rather, this prayer applies to us all. He was crucified for the sake of all our sins, Isa. 53; and with our sins we caused Him pain and effort, Isa. 43.¹⁸

And, finally, while Christ's physical suffering was staggering, perhaps its magnitude, depth, and girth, can lead us to a better understanding of His far greater suffering: the piercing of His soul by God's wrath over our sins. Simeon told the Virgin St. Mary, Jesus' mother:

Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also¹⁹

St. Mary suffered to see her Son's Innocent Soul pierced by God's wrath²⁰ in order to atone for her sins and the sins of the entire world. Isaiah the prophet writes²¹:

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. He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him *a portion* with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.²²

II. The Witness of the Prophets is the Power of God unto Salvation, the Gospel.

A. The Witness of the Prophets is the Gospel, i.e. the Word and the Sacraments.

¹⁸The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard, *An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the four evangelists, presented so that we may be awakened in the knowledge of the love of Christ and may blessedly grow according to the inner man.* tr. the Rev. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. the Rev. Dr. David O. Berger, Malone, TX: Repristination Press, p. 243.

¹⁹**St. Luke 2:35.**

²⁰“But the deepest stroke that pierced Him Was the stroke that Justice gave.” **Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted**, *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 153.

²¹“But believers must suffer much for Christ's sake for a sword will pierce through Mary's soul, as she stood under the cross of her Son, her heart was broken.” The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Wisdom for Today, Volumes II & III*, tr. the Rev. Arthur E. Beck, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 16.

²²**Isaiah 53:10-12.**

Because the prophets bring to us the Passion of Christ through the Word, St. Paul the Apostle says the Church is also built on them:

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 prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner *stone*; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.²³

In the Word and in the Sacraments, because the Sacraments are the Visible Word²⁴, we see the Passion of Christ Our Cornerstone witnessed by the prophets. In the Blessed Waters of the Fountain of Baptism, we see the Cross of Christ, for St. Paul says, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?”²⁵, and, Christ Himself says about the Sacrament of Holy Communion, “... this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”²⁶ And through seeing the Passion of Christ, body and soul, in the Words of the Apostles and Prophets, our hearts are comforted, moved to faith, and we come to rest on the Cornerstone and become a part of God’s House, the Church. Hence, the prophet Isaiah says of this Knowledge of Christ presented through the vivid eyewitness of Christ’s Passion of the prophets:

... by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.²⁷

B. Through the Witness of the Word and the Sacraments comes life eternal

And through the Word and the Sacraments, the witness of the Apostles and the Prophets, comes life eternal because the Saving Knowledge of God in the Passion of Christ is revealed to us. Jesus says:

²³**Ephesians 2:19-22.**

²⁴“But just as the Word enters the ear in order to strike our hearts, so the rite itself strikes the eye, in order to move the heart. The effect of the Word and of the rite is the same, as it has been well said by Augustine that a Sacrament is a *visible word*, because the rite is received by the eyes, and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore the effect of both is the same.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XIII (VII): Of the Number and Use of the Sacraments.5, Triglotta*, p. 309.

²⁵**Romans 6:3.**

²⁶**St. Matthew 26:28**

²⁷**Isaiah 53:11**

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.²⁸

Conclusion

The prophets vividly report to us the Passion of Christ. And that's why we believe and are saved, because through the Word and the Sacraments, these vivid reports of God's Suffering and Passion move us to believe that even though we are great sinners, God is not against us but forgives our many sins and is for us.

And through this vivid Passion History in the Word and Sacraments, we gain the saving Knowledge of God and life everlasting.

Amen.

²⁸**St. John 17:3.**