

Lent Vespers 2
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Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

“Through the Cross, Christ Restored what Man Forfeited: His Life.”

“They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, *being* mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I *restored* that which I took not away.”

Psalm 69:4

Introduction

What didn't Christ take away? Christ did not take away man's life. Man forfeited his life by his sin.

Man's sin manifests itself again in the wrongful hatred of Christ for His Atoning work – and the enemies are legion because all of mankind is fallen. They hate Christ without any legitimate basis because the Cross of Christ is the enemy and death of, and justice for, the fallen human nature; and that same despised Cross is the salvation of mankind.

But for those who believe on Him, the Cross is restoration unto new life and life eternal. For Christ restores to men by the Cross through the Gospel the life they forfeited through sin and restores it better than new.

I. Man Forfeited His Life through His Sin.

A. Man forfeits his life through sin; God does not take away his life.

Notice that Christ says He restored that which He did not take away. That's because Christ did not take from man his life, but rather man forfeited his life. In the Garden of Eden, God did not take away man's life, but rather man forfeited his life through his sin and succumbed to death. St. Paul the Apostle 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.¹

¹**Romans 5:12.**

God did not cause man to sin nor did God arbitrarily take from man his life. Rather, man forfeited his life through his own sin.

B. Enemies are numerous and wrongfully Christ's enemies because the entire human race fell in Adam's fall and share the same fallen nature that hates God and Christ.

Yet, why are the enemies legion if Christ came to restore life to men? Well, man forfeited his life through hatred of God. Man has become a different person² after sin – a person that loathes, hates, and desires to be without God. Moses reminds us of that when he records the flight of Adam from God:

And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the Garden.³

The creature flees his Creator? That is odd. And it should strike us odd. Something is wrong here. Plainly, Adam is a different person after sin. Now he flees His Great Benefactor, God, who gives him life, food, house, and home, and has no desire to be with God. Hence, when Christ comes to restore man through the forgiveness of sins, the old Adam bristles and bears his teeth because in Christ, God, whom the old Adam loathes, is just too close. Luther writes of the fall of Adam.

Therefore the perfect natural endowments in man were the knowledge of God, faith, fear, etc. These Satan has corrupted through sin; just as leprosy poisons the flesh, so the will and reason have become depraved through sin, and man not only does not love God any longer but flees from Him, hates Him, and desires to be and live without Him.⁴

This corruption of the human nature is why men hate the Gospel. Men hate the Gospel because the old Adam hates God. Hence, people bristle and become surly in and around the Gospel because the Gospel just brings God too close to them. This ugly truth is especially

²“It follows, therefore, that Adam is no longer the same that he was, but that he has undergone a change and has become a different person, one who is looking for a fictitious reason as his excuse. How can it be true that the reason for his fear is the voice [of God], when previously he did not fear the voice but heard God with delight?” *Luther's Works*, Vol. 1, p. 174, amplification added.

³**Genesis 3:8.**

⁴*Luther's Works*, Vol. 1, p. 165.

manifest in our day in people's hatred of the Liturgy, which is the Gospel⁵. The Liturgy is Christ's coming to men in His Word and Sacraments in order to forgive sin and save. But, as we've already seen, the old Adam bristles and balks at this Work because the old Adam wants nothing to do with God; for the old Adam was conceived by hatred of God.

Because the old Adam hates God, men hate Christ. That's why Christ lamented the multitude of His enemies and that they were His enemies *wrongfully*, i.e. without a just basis:

They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, *being* mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty; then I restored *that* which I took not away.⁶

Luther writes:

... when the Jews had crucified Christ, they thought that all had now been convinced that He was the worst kind of person and cursed by God and in every way ungodly and a deceiver. For the Law says, "Cursed by the Lord is he who hangs on a tree" (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13). Therefore they rushed to this kind of death, so that they might show Him to be hateful to God and might now conclude by authority of the Law that He could not have perished by means of such a death unless He were unrighteous before God. Therefore they said: "He trusted in God. Let Him deliver Him, if He wants to" (Matt. 27:43), as if to say: "It does not look as if He wanted Him or had any desire for Him. For 'cursed by the Lord is he who hangs on a tree.'" Behold, then, the people who do not know how He was cursed. And it is indeed true that He was cursed by the Lord, for the Father made Him a curse for us, and He truly died because of sins. Yet they did not know that these were their own sins, but God knew. For that reason He says: "They do not know My offenses, but You know them. That is, they do not understand how they are Mine, for I have made the sins of others Mine.["]"⁷

⁵“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 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.

⁶**Psalm 69:4.**

⁷*Luther's Works*, Vol. 10, p. 364, final quotation mark added.

To be sure, Christ was cursed of God. But Christ was cursed of God because of the sins of His crucifiers. Christ didn't require them to crucify Him. Christ had already determined to give His life for His crucifiers and for all sinful men. Jesus says:

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.⁸

The fact that the people crucified their own Savior speaks volumes regarding the ugliness and darkness of the hearts of men.

In addition, the death of Christ for the sins of all men obviously explodes people's concept of self-righteousness. For the death of the Son of God in their behalf means their righteousness and good works are nothing of the sort, but only evil of an unthinkable magnitude, approximated only by the vastness of the Majesty of Christ who suffered for them. The Lutheran Church confesses:

*Yea, what more forcible, more terrible declaration and preaching of God's wrath against sin is there than just the suffering and death of Christ, His Son? But as along as all this preaches God's wrath and terrifies men, 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 of comforting and cheering those who are terrified and timid.*⁹

And when we throw in that God's Son is also God, as everyone knows, then, men become all the more enraged because we are speaking of God's death caused by the self-righteousness of men. 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,'

⁸**St. John 10:17-18.**

⁹*The Formula of Concord, Article V. The Law and the Gospel.* 12-13, Triglotta, pp. 355, 357.

'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.'¹⁰

For this reason, if a man presume to take up his cross and follow Christ, he can fully expect the hatred of the world as did Christ. The Lutheran Church confesses:

For only begin to act as though you would be godly and adhere to the Gospel, and see whether no one will become your enemy, and, moreover, do you harm and violence, and likewise give you cause for sin and vice. If you have not experienced it, then let the Scriptures tell you, which everywhere give this praise and testimony to the world.¹¹

And Christ's enemies wrongfully are legion, for they are as plentiful as the human race because all mankind fell in Adam's fall. St. Paul the Apostle 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

Christ Our Savior's enemies are His enemies wrongfully, for He is their Savior. But their enmity and hostility toward Our Savior only reveals their lack of righteousness and their abundant iniquity. For they loathe God and love darkness¹³. Christ comes with saving righteousness – not the righteousness of the law but the saving righteousness of the Gospel¹⁴ – and they hate him. And they hate Him because this saving righteousness of Christ brings God too close to them and brings to a close the life of the old Adam and brings forth the new man of life eternal. Jesus says:

¹⁰*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ.*44, underscore added.

¹¹*The Large Catechism, Part Fifth. The Sacrament of the Altar.*79, *Triglotta*, p. 771.

¹²**Romans 5:12.**

¹³**St. John 3:19.**

¹⁴“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: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” **Romans 3:21-24.**

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hated the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.¹⁵

Christ Our Savior's enemies are legion because all of mankind after the fall is born of the same hatred of God that formed the fallen Adam in Eden.

II. Christ Restores Man's Life through His Vicarious Righteousness for Man on the Cross.

A. Christ restores man's life through His Vicarious Righteousness for Man on the Cross.

If, however, we do not remain at the scandal of the Cross and its revelation of the gravity and depth of our sin, but move beyond that to the Purpose of the Cross, our Salvation, then, we find great joy and comfort in Christ and Him Crucified for the sins of all men. 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 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.¹⁶

Christ restores man's life by restoring the righteousness he forfeited in Eden. For man's life was lost when he lost the righteousness in which God created him. Here in **Psalm 69**, we see

¹⁵**St. John 3:19-21.**

¹⁶*The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol. 1.2, p. 190.

that Christ is suffering the consequences of sin, but not His own sin, but rather the consequences of *our sin* and the *sin of all men*.¹⁷ Christ says:

Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face.¹⁸

For God's sake He is suffering these woes inflicted by our sins because God desired Him to bear the punishment for our sins so we would not have to bear the punishment and perish. The prophet Isaiah writes:

Surely he hath borne our grief, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he *was* wounded for our transgression, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.¹⁹

St. Paul the Apostle writes:

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures....²⁰

¹⁷St. Augustine: "He was the bearer of transgressions, but not the committer." *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Saint Augustin*, ed. Philip Schaf, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, rpr. May 1989, p. 303.

"Augustine. One of the greatest of the Latin Church Fathers and one of the outstanding figures of all ages ; b. Tagaste, 354; d. at Hippo Regius, 430., both in Africa. ... For more than thirty years Augustine was the leading theologian and leader of the Church in Africa, his influence at the various synods and councils being decisive. As a defender of the orthodox faith he stands head and shoulders above his contemporaries, although in some points he did not reach the clearness in the doctrine of sin and grace which is found in the later writings of Luther. But he fought the Pelagian heresy ... consistently, chiefly in the interest of letting the grace of God stand forth in the fulness of its beauty over against man. Among his chief writings are: *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio* (Of Grace and of Free Will), *De Catechizandis Rudibus* (a treatise on the art of catechizing), *De Doctrina Christiana* (Of the Christian Doctrine), *De Civitate Dei* (Of the City of God), and his *Confessions*." *Concordia Cyclopaedia*, pp. 49, 50, s.v. "**Augustine**".

¹⁸**Psalm 69:7.**

¹⁹**Isaiah 53:4-5.**

²⁰**I Corinthians 15:3.**

And here also St. Paul reminds that Christ died for our sins “according to the Scriptures”, i.e. according to the Old Testament²¹ – for the Scriptures includes the Old Testament – which Scriptures would include passages like **Psalm 69**.

And not only did Christ suffer for our sins, but He also produced for us the righteousness that avails before God for us. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.²²

Righteousness before God means to keep God’s commandments. Well, what do we do now? We’ve already failed irretrievably to do that. But, while it is irretrievable for us, it is not for Christ who is the Almighty God. After all, is anything too hard for the Lord²³? Because Christ is the Almighty God in the flesh, He can fulfill God’s commandments and the righteousness of God for all men in all circumstances no matter where in or about the globe they are.²⁴ St. Paul the Apostle writes:

²¹“For since St. Paul testifies in 1 Cor. 15 that Christ died ‘according to the Scriptures,’ it undeniably follows that in the Scriptures of the Old Testament there had to have been a prior proclamation of the suffering and death of Christ. ... Thus, in the first Gospel promise about the woman’s Seed in Gen. 3[15], it is announced that the hellish snake would sting Him in the heel. This heel-prick is none other than the sufferings of Christ. Psalm 16 says of the Messiah: I must suffer on behalf of you. This Psalm is applied to Christ. In Acts 2 and 13 [and] in Ps. 22 are described the abusive words which the Jews poured out against Christ, Judas’ betrayal is prophesied in Ps. 41 and 55, and in Ps. 69 it is announced how Christ was given a drink of gall and vinegar in His great thirst.” 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. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger, Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 1999, p. 7.

²²**II Corinthians 5:21.**

²³**Genesis 18:14.**

²⁴“Therefore, we find two things attested in Old Testament Scriptures: faith in the present forgiveness of sins and hope for the future forgiveness. This is not contradictory. The forgiveness of sins is the essential blessing of the New Covenant. And if Israel in the Old Covenant took comfort in the forgiveness of sins, it, as it were, anticipated the gift of the New Testament. Yes, according to God’s design it should relate to the promise of future mercy. For the New Testament mercy is a ‘mercy built up for ever’, Ps. 89, 2, which is efficacious backwards and forwards, covers up and blots out the sins of all sinners of all times.” The Rev.

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 sons.²⁵

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, President of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod from 1899-1911, writes of this Blessed Work of Christ 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."²⁶

And Christ was able to accomplish this great task of restoring righteousness and life for all men because He is the Almighty God in the flesh. This Blessed Fact He indicates again when He says, "then I restored *that* which I took not away."²⁷ Only God can restore the righteousness of God in men – no creature, man or angel, can do that. Only God can restore life in men – no creature can do that. Thus we see that Christ was able to restore righteousness and life to men by assuming the impossible burdens of men because He is the Almighty God in the flesh to bear men's burdens and save them from their sins.

Christ restored man's righteousness by Himself being man's righteousness in his place on the Cross.

B. Christ bestows His vicarious and saving righteousness through the Gospel.

Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Christ in Old Testament Prophecy*, tr. Erwin W. Koehlinger, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, pp. 51, 52.

²⁵**Galatians 4:4-5.**

²⁶*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 375. This Blessed Work of Christ in our behalf we learned in catechism is His *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." *The Small Catechism*, question 132 B, p. 108.

²⁷**Psalm 69:4.**

And Christ communicates to men His vicarious and saving righteousness through the Gospel. In **Psalm 69** David writes:

I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. *This* also shall please the LORD better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs. The humble shall see *this, and* be glad: and your heart shall live that seek God.²⁸

In the first place, we see that, while Christ, indeed, did truly die for the sins of all men and fully suffered every last scintilla of an ounce of God's wrath, nevertheless, He did not perish but is risen from the dead because He is singing virtues of the Lord in the congregation.

Finally, the Risen Christ sings to His Church through His Word and Sacraments. For in the Word and Sacraments we have not sacrifice, but God's mercy toward sinners through the Vicarious Atonement of Christ. This mercy comforts and gladdens the hearts of men because it bestows up them the remission of sins Christ won for them on the Cross and gives to them life eternal. Jesus says:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth 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

From the depths of sin and God's wrath, Christ, by His Vicarious Suffering for us, exalts to life eternal whose glories, bliss, and joy can only be gauged by the magnitude of the Infinite Majesty of the Person of the Son of God who suffered for us. Luther writes:

Rom. 8:32: "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him?" These words are beyond evaluation and incomprehensible. The Gift that has been given is very great, except that it is not yet revealed. Eternal life is not as great as Christ. From the very magnitude of the Gift I have received I perceive the greatness of the gift which God has yet to give.³⁰

²⁸**Psalm 69:30-32.**

²⁹**St. John 5:24.**

³⁰*Luther's Works*, Vol. 28, p. 247.

Conclusion

Christ can and does restore to man which He Himself took not away because Christ is the Almighty God, fully ably to restore man's righteousness before God by assuming man's burdens and expiating them.

And where the righteousness of God is restored in man, there also man's life, eternal life, is restored to him.

And this life eternal is glorious, which glory, joy, and bliss is approximated for us by the Infinite Majesty of the Person of the Son of God who suffered for us, rose from the dead on the Third Day, and rose from the dead in order to sing and preach this Blessed Work to men through His Word and Sacraments to usher them into eternal glory and the resurrection.

Amen.