

# Holy Week.

“You see, therefore, that what we call the mass is a promise of the forgiveness of sins made to us by God, and such a promise as has been confirmed by the death of the Son of God. For the only differences between a promise and a testament is that the testament involves the death of the one who makes it. A testator is a promiser who is about to die, while a promiser (if I may put it thus) is a testator who is not about to die. This testament of Christ is foreshadowed in all the promises of God from the beginning of the world; indeed, whatever value those ancient promises possessed was altogether derived from this new promise that was to come in Christ. Hence the words ‘compact,’ ‘covenant,’ and ‘testament of the Lord’ occur so frequently in the Scriptures. These words signified that God would one day die. ‘For where there is a testament, the death of the testator must of necessity occur’ (Heb. 9[:16]). Now God made a testament, therefore, it was necessary that he should die. But God could not die unless he became man. Thus the incarnation and the death of Christ are both comprehended most concisely in this one word, ‘testament.’”  
**Martin Luther**, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 36, p. 38, underscore added.



Albrecht DÜRER

Large Passion -- CRUCIFIXION

***Crucifixion***  
(Albrecht Durer,  
***Large Passion***)

The Festival of Maundy Thursday  
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Concordia Lutheran Mission  
Terrebonne, Oregon

## “God’s Last Will and Testament of the Gospel Bequeaths to Men Absolution of Sin and Life Eternal.”

“This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you..”

**St. Luke 22:20**

### **Introduction.**

What does it mean that God makes a testament? God making a testament means, in the first place, that God would become man. For only men make testaments.

Finally, God making a testament means that God would die. God in and of Himself as God cannot die, but when God becomes man, God can and did die.<sup>1</sup>

And where there’s a testament, there’s an inheritance. And so what does God bequeath to men in His Testament? God bequeaths to men what they need the most: Absolution of all sin. Sin causes man’s eternal death and ruin. The Absolution of that sin delivers man from that destruction of sin.

And where there is deliverance from death, there he gains also life eternal.

The Lord’s Supper is the Last Will and Testament of God.<sup>2</sup> And God bequeaths to men in His Last Will and Testament Absolution of sin, life eternal, and all the riches of the Kingdom of Heaven.

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<sup>1</sup>*“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.**<sup>44</sup>, underscore added.*

## **I. God's Making a Testament Means God becomes Man and Dies for the Sins of All Men.**

### **A. God making a Testament means God has become man.**

The fact that God Himself makes a testament means that God would become man. For only men make testaments. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

For a testament *is* of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.<sup>3</sup>

And God became man in Jesus Christ. The Apostle St. John writes:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.<sup>4</sup>

The Apostle St. Matthew writes that God became man in Jesus Christ:

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<sup>2</sup>“They are the words of the last will and testament of the very Son of God and not a game or place for exercising the mind by dreaming up unending interpretations that depart from the simplicity and proper meaning of the words. ... when the last will and testament of a man has been executed, we are required under the law to observe the words with special care so that nothing be done which is either beside or contrary to the final will of the testator. ... Now, because the Son of God in His last will and testament has not permitted His heirs the liberty of believing or doing whatever seems good to them, but has willed that we believe what He has spoken in His words of institution and do what He has commanded, therefore we should give careful thought that we do not thrust anything upon these words of the last will and testament of the Son of God, lest we deprive ourselves of the benefit of eternal happiness conveyed to us by His will or our inheritance itself be taken from us as being unworthy because we have departed from the will of the Testator as it has been given to us in the words of His last testament.” Martin Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper, De coena Domini*, tr. J. A. O. Preus, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979, pp. 26, 27.

<sup>3</sup>**Hebrews 9:17.**

<sup>4</sup>**St. John 1:1-3, 14.**

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled. Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.<sup>5</sup>

God became man in Jesus Christ. And because God became man, God made a testament. Jesus says in today's Gospel:

This cup *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.<sup>6</sup>

### **B. God making a testament means God would die.**

And because God made a testament, God would die. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

For where a testament *is*, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament *is* of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.<sup>7</sup>

But how can God die? In and of Himself, God cannot die. But now that God has become man, God can and did die. Hence, the Apostle St. Paul writes:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.<sup>8</sup>

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,"*

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<sup>5</sup>**St. Matthew 1:21-23.**

<sup>6</sup>**St. Luke 22:20.**

<sup>7</sup>**Hebrews 9:16-17.**

<sup>8</sup>**I Corinthians 2:7-8**, underscore added.

“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.”<sup>9</sup>

Because God made a testament, God resolved to die and in fact did die. Luther writes:

Now God made a testament, therefore, it was necessary that he should die. But God could not die unless he became man. Thus the incarnation and the death of Christ are both comprehended most concisely in this one word, ‘testament.’”<sup>10</sup>

**C. The Sacrament of Holy Communion is the New Testament, namely, it is the forgiveness of sins, sealed in Christ’s Body & Blood.**

But why would God die? Is not sin the cause of death? Does not St. Paul write that “the wages of sin is death?”<sup>11</sup> So, why would God die because death is a function and product of sin? Obviously, God’s death has nothing to do with sin on God’s part. It is not God’s sin that brings about God’s death, but rather *our sin and the sin of all men*. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins.<sup>12</sup>

It was our sins that caused Christ’s death because our sins were reckoned to Him. Luther writes:

St. Bernard<sup>13</sup> was so terrified by this that he declared, “I regarded myself secure; I was not aware of the eternal sentence that had been passed on me in heaven until I

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<sup>9</sup>*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ.*<sup>44</sup>, underscore added.

<sup>10</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 36, p. 38, underscore added.

<sup>11</sup>**Romans 6:23.**

<sup>12</sup>**I Corinthians 15:3.**

<sup>13</sup>“**Bernard of Clairvaux**, St., 1091 to 1153. The most influential man of his day; an upright monk (Cistercian), spending himself in ascetic practises. His wise rule as first and lifelong abbot of the newly founded cloister at Clairvaux, France (1115), served to extend the order (now also called Bernardinos) throughout Europe, and the influence of his eloquence and personality gave a new impetus to monasticism.... he was a sincerely pious, a truly humble Christian, and he was that because he loved the Bible and because he believed in justification by faith, deploring on his deathbed, as throughout his life, the sinfulness of his life (*Perdite vixi*) ..., and imploring the mercy of God for the sake of the righteousness gained by Christ ... Luther

saw that God's only Son had compassion upon me and offered to bear this sentence for me. Alas, if the situation is that serious, I should not make light of it or feel secure."<sup>14</sup>

And Christ's death for our sins is the New Testament. The prophet Jeremiah writes:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more.<sup>15</sup>

And here we have the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Jeremiah right here in the Lord's Supper. Jesus says:

This cup *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.<sup>16</sup>

In the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we have the New Testament, i.e. the remission of sins, sealed with Christ's Precious Body and Blood. Christ seals the forgiveness of sins in His Precious Body and Blood in order to convince us that, indeed, He is earnest when He gives to us the remission of our sins.<sup>17</sup>

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says: 'When Bernard is speaking of Christ, it is a pleasure indeed to listen to him; but when he leaves that subject and discourses on rules and works, it is no longer St. Bernard.'" *Concordia Cyclopaedia*, p. 72, s. v. "**Bernard of Clairvaux, St.**"

<sup>14</sup>*Luther's Works*, Vol. 42, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup>**Jeremiah 31:31-34**, underscore added.

<sup>16</sup>**St. Luke 22:20.**

<sup>17</sup>**313. What do these words, "Given and shed for you for the remission of sin," tell us?** These words tell us that in the Sacrament Christ gives to *every* communicant as a *pledge* of the remission of sins that *same body and blood* with which He *earned for us* the forgiveness of sins." *The Small Catechism*, p. 200, question 313.

## **II. God Bequeaths to Men Absolution of Sin and Life Eternal through the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the Gospel.**

### **A. God bequeaths absolution of all sin to men through His Last Will and Testament, the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the Gospel.**

What Christ gained for us 2000 years ago and half a globe away on the Cross of Calvary, He bequeaths and gives to us in the Lord's Supper today.<sup>18</sup> As St. Paul has written, Christ died to absolve us of our sins:

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures....<sup>19</sup>

The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes of the Precious Nature of Absolution because Christ gave His Life to Absolve us of our sins:

Christ is condemned in an innocent fashion so that we might be pronounced absolved.<sup>20</sup>

And this Precious Absolution He won for us on the Cross He bequeaths to us in His Last Will and Testament, the Gospel. Jesus says in tonight's Gospel<sup>21</sup>:

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<sup>18</sup>“How can what Christ did for us two thousand years ago – through His life, death, and resurrection – become effective in our lives today? During the Reformation, as also today, some imagined they would experience the Holy Spirit through their own reflections, by enjoying nature, or by ecstatic religious experiences. The comforting truth is that the Holy Spirit works through objective, external, sure, and certain means of grace, through which we receive justification by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone.” *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Readers Edition of the Book of Concord*, gen. Paul Timothy McCain, assoc. ed. Edward Andrew Engelbrecht, assistant eds. Robert Cleveland Baker, Gene Edward Veith, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, second edition, 2006, p. 33.

<sup>19</sup>**I Corinthians 15:3.**

<sup>20</sup>*An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ ...*, tr. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger, Repristination Press: Malone, TX: 1999, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup>God's 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*

This cup *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.<sup>22</sup>

## **B. God bequeaths to men life eternal through the Gospel.**

And because sin is the source of all the calamities and woes of men, the Absolution of that sin in the Sacrament can only mean life eternal with all the riches of Heaven. Jesus prays in His High Priestly prayer:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.<sup>23</sup>

And with life eternal comes dwelling in the mansions of glory prepared for us by God Himself. Jesus says:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.<sup>24</sup>

What greater treasure could God bequeath to us than life eternal and the riches and glories of His eternal Kingdom? For this reason, the Lutheran Church confesses the unsurpassable blessings of the Sacrament, the Last Will and Testament of the Son of God:

For here He offers to us the entire treasure which He has brought for us from heaven, and to which He invites us also in other places with the greatest

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*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.*

"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.*

<sup>22</sup>St. Luke 20:20.

<sup>23</sup>St. John 17:3.

<sup>24</sup>St. John 14:1-2.



kindness, as when He says in St. Matthew 11, 28: *Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* ... We must never regard the Sacrament as something injurious from which we had better flee, but as a pure, wholesome, comforting remedy imparting salvation and comfort, which will cure you and give you life in both soul and body. For where the soul has recovered, the body also is relieved.<sup>25</sup>

### Conclusion

With such great desire does Christ wish us to receive the blessings of the Sacrament that He seals the Absolution with His Most Precious Body and Blood in order to convince us absolutely that He is reconciled to us, loves us, and desires to give us all things.<sup>26</sup>

Through the Absolution of sin in the Sacrament He does give us all things. For through Absolution of sin comes the removal of the cause of death; through Absolution of sin comes saving faith, life eternal, the resurrection of the body, the mansions and treasures of glory.

In the Last Will and Testament of God, God bequeaths to fallen and sinful men Absolution of all sin and life eternal.

*Amen.*

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<sup>25</sup>The Large Catechism, **Part Fifth. The Sacrament of the Altar.** 66, 67, 68, *Triglotta*, p. 769.

<sup>26</sup>“What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” **Romans 8:31-32.**