

**Lent Vespers 3**  
30 March 2014  
*Concordia Lutheran Mission*  
Terrebonne, Oregon

## **“God Gives Christ Ears that Hearken unto God’s Word for All Men and Saves.”**

Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened:  
burnt offerings and sin offering has thou not required.

**Psalm 40:6**

### **Introduction**

What does Christ mean God has opened His ears? Christ means God has given Him ears that hear God’s Word and follows His Word.

After the fall of Adam, man characteristically has a tin ear regarding God’s Word. In the Garden of Eden, Adam ceased to hear God’s Word aright and perished. Such is the case for all men after the fall of Adam, as is evident from the throngs of men who do not hearken unto God’s Word.

Christ, however, was given Ears that hearken unto God’s Word perfectly at all times. Christ was given such ears not for His sake – after all, Christ is God and has no need of human ears or anything else human – but rather for us in order to give us ears that hear perfectly God’s Word of the Gospel and through this hearing gain salvation, life eternal, and the resurrection of the body.

### **I. Christ’s Ears Hearken unto God’s Word in order to Fashion Human Obedience to Save Men.**

#### **A. Man does not hearken unto God’s Word and perishes.**

Nothing should be more natural than for man to hear God’s Word and obey it. After all, man is God’s creation. Would not God’s creation simply respond gladly to God’s Word? The answer is yes; but sadly, such is not the case with man.

In the Garden of Eden, man heard God’s Word but refused to hearken unto it, hearkening instead unto the word of the devil. This point reminds us and all men that man has to hearken unto someone’s word, whether it be the devil’s or God’s. Consequently, it’s better to pick God’s Word. After all, the devil’s word launched man from paradise to hell. Luther writes:

*And he said: I heard Thy voice in Paradise, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I concealed myself.* Just as Adam stupidly began to flee, so he answers most stupidly; so thoroughly had sin deprived him of all discernment and good sense. He wants to inform God that he is naked – God, who created him naked. By this action he confuses himself, betrays and condemns himself with his own mouth. He says that he heard God’s voice and was afraid. But had he not heard the voice of the Lord before, when He forbade him to eat of the forbidden tree? Why was he not afraid then? Why did he not hide then? Why did he stand glad and upright when he saw the Lord before him? ... 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, when previously he did not fear the voice but heard God with delight?<sup>1</sup>

As Luther notes, Adam was now a different person. God’s Voice now drove him away from God. *Flight from the Blessed Presence of God is the definition of hell.* Luther writes:

Here Adam’s conscience is roused by the real sting of the Law. It is as if God said: “You know that you are naked, and for this reason you hid. But your nakedness is My creation. You are not condemning it as something shameful, are you? Therefore it was not the nakedness that perplexed you, it was not My voice that frightened you; but your conscience convicted you of sin because you ate the fruit from the forbidden tree.” Here Adam, hard pressed in this manner, was in the midst of death and in the midst of hell.<sup>2</sup>

*God’s Voice hadn’t changed; Adam’s ears had changed.* No longer did Adam’s ears hear anything pleasant in God’s Voice, but, rather, he heard God’s Voice chafing against his conscience, shaking Adam’s being to its foundation. To Adam, God’s Voice became as shrill and dissonant as a million fingernails on a blackboard in every fiber of his being. Clearly, Adam can no longer exist with God under such conditions of his own making and must perish and did. The Apostle St. Paul 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....<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 1, p. 174.

<sup>2</sup>*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 1, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup>**Romans 5:12.**

All men suffer Adam's tin ear towards God's Word because the Apostle St. Paul notes that not just Adam but all men die. Man does not hearken unto God's Word and the expected happens: man perishes.

**B. God gives Christ Ears that Harken unto God's Word to save men from their disobedience.**

Because men perished because of their tin ears toward God's Word, God sent His Only-Begotten Son into the flesh to have human ears that would be supple to God's Word and hear and obey God's Word for all men. For this reason, Christ says in today's psalm:

... Mine ears hast Thou opened...<sup>4</sup>

In the first place, we must remember that Christ has no need of ears because Christ has no need of anything because He Himself is the Creator of ears and all things human.

Finally, we see that God gave Christ Ears for our sakes, in order that He give the Perfect Hearing and Obedience of His Ears to us. This Work of Obeying God for us we learned in catechism is called Christ's *Active Obedience*. The catechism reads:

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.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, whereas we have not obeyed God, Christ obeyed God for us at all times. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

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.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>**Psalm 40:6**, text from *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 132.

<sup>5</sup>*The Small Catechism*, question 132 B, p. 108.

<sup>6</sup>**Galatians 4:4-5**. "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.

Christ's entire life was dedicated to obedience to God for our sakes. Jesus says:

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.<sup>7</sup>

Waking and sleeping Christ was obeying God for all men. Even from the womb Christ obeyed God perfectly. David writes of Christ's obedience to God from the womb of the Virgin St. Mary:

I was cast upon Thee from the womb: Thou art My God from My mother's belly.<sup>8</sup>

Because Christ obeyed God from the womb perfectly, He enjoyed a pure conception and birth, unlike all other men who suffered a sinful conception and lethal birth. David writes:

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.<sup>9</sup>

Christ by His Obedience enjoyed a Pure Birth. He, of course, enjoyed a Pure Conception and Live Birth not for His sake – He after all is God and has no need of such human experiences – but rather for our sakes in order to give us a Pure Conception and Live Birth unto life eternal. Luther writes:

Christ is born for you and ... his birth is yours, and come to pass for your benefit. For the Gospel teaches that Christ was born for our sake and that he did everything and suffered all things for our sake ... . Christ has a pure, innocent, holy birth. Man has an impure, sinful, damned birth, as David says in Psalm 51[:5] ... . There is simply no remedy for this except through the pure birth of Christ. ... Christ willed to be born so that we might be born in different manner.... In this manner Christ takes to himself our birth and absorbs it in his birth; he presents us with his birth so that we become pure and new in it, as if it were our own, so that every Christian might rejoice in this birth of Christ and glory in it no less than if he, too, like Christ, had been born bodily of Mary.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>**St. Matthew 20:28.**

<sup>8</sup>**Psalm 22:10**, text is from *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 127.

<sup>9</sup>**Psalm 51:5.**

<sup>10</sup>*Luther's Works*, Vol. 52, pp. 14, 15.

Christ was also obedient unto God even unto the death of the Cross in order to bear the judgment for our sin in order to save us. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.<sup>11</sup>

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes of Christ's obedience unto the death of the Cross for us:

The climax of Christ's emptying Himself was reached when "He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross." Luther: "Above and beyond being found in fashion as a man and comporting Himself as a man, He became lower than all men ... by submitting to a death which was the most ignominious, namely, the death on the Cross; He died as an archknave above all knaves .... So, then, He was made entirely nothing. All this He did not do because we were worthy of it, but He did it because He was obedient to the Father" ... .

Luther's words from the same sermon, in which he shows that the humiliation of Christ took place in obedience to God's will and thus reveals God's heart toward mankind, fittingly close our discussion of Phil 2:5ff.: "Here Paul with one word opens heaven to us and permits us to gaze into the unfathomable abyss of the Divine Majesty and behold the ineffably gracious will and love of the fatherly heart toward us, that we may feel that it pleased God from eternity what Christ, that glorious Person, should do, and now has done, for us, Whose heart will not melt for joy? Who can refrain from loving, praising, and giving thanks and from becoming on his part, too, not only a servant of all the world, but gladly becoming meaner and lowlier than anything, when he sees that God Himself regarded him so dearly and so richly pours out and exhibits His fatherly will in His Son's obedience?"<sup>12</sup>

Even though Jesus was forsaken of God most bitterly, still He remained obedient unto God, unlike all other men who, in the midst of severe suffering, would curse God and die<sup>13</sup>. 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

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<sup>11</sup>**Philippians 2:8.**

<sup>12</sup>*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, pp. 291, 292, underscore added.

<sup>13</sup>"Then said his [Job's] wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die." **Job 2:9.**

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 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.<sup>14</sup>

By this Remarkable Harkening unto God's Word – even from the pit of hell – Christ utterly destroyed the gates of hell and made us pleasing to God with His righteousness for us. For this reason God Fashioned Ears for Christ, that He, by His Obedience and Harkening unto God's Word, would save us from our not hearkening unto and disobedience to God's Word.<sup>15</sup>

## **II. Christ Bestows Upon Men His Saving Ears that Hearken unto God's Word, the Gospel, and Saves.**

### **A. Christ fashions ears that hearken unto God's Word, the Gospel.**

Through the Gospel, Christ gives to us His Ears Fashioned for us that hearken unto God's Word. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.<sup>16</sup>

Luther writes that *men become Christians not through their works but through their listening:*

... listen to Paul, who says here<sup>17</sup>: “Not by your own labor and sweat or by the works of the Law but by hearing with faith you have received the Holy Spirit.” Or listen to Christ Himself, who gives the following answer to Martha when she is deeply concerned and finds it almost unbearable that her sister Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to His words, and leaving her to serve alone. “Martha” He says (Luke 10:41-42), “you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken

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<sup>14</sup>*Lectures on Select Psalms*, tr. the Rev. Dr. H. W. Degner, Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 67, underscore added.

<sup>15</sup>“... Christ ... is obedient to the Father in our stead.” Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 34, p. 119.

<sup>16</sup>**Romans 10:17.**

<sup>17</sup>**Galatians 3:2.**

away from her.” Therefore a man becomes a Christian, not by working but by listening.<sup>18</sup>

This Hearing provided by Christ writes God’s Word in our hearts, i.e., into our innermost being. 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. ... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.<sup>19</sup>

Because the Gospel gives us the Ears that Christ fashioned for us to hearken unto God’s Word, then, we hearken unto God’s Word both outwardly and inwardly as Christ Himself did for us. David writes in **Psalm 40** of Christ hearkening unto God’s Word inwardly and outwardly:

I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law *is* within my heart.<sup>20</sup>

The Apostle St. Paul writes:

For I delight in the law of God after the inward man....<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, the Apostle St. Paul and all men enjoy this hearkening unto God even in their innermost being because *Christ attained this high standard for us and has given it to us in the hearing of the Gospel.* Luther writes:

... “to open the ears” is nothing else than to cause one to hear ... this opening means to cause one to be obedient and to believe. For faith is obedience, as Rom.

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<sup>18</sup>*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 26, p. 214, underscore added.

<sup>19</sup>**Jeremiah 31:31-33, 34**, underscore added.

<sup>20</sup>**Psalm 40:8.** “Psalm [7-8] read, ‘In the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart.’ ... There can be no doubt at all [this is Christ], since all others have not done the will of God and did not have his law within their hearts.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 34, p. 119, amplification in brackets added.

<sup>21</sup>**Romans 7:22.**

1:5 states: “To bring about obedience to the faith.” And thus the meaning will be that in the New Testament the offerings of beasts are not pleasing to God, that is, that we believe. “For he who believes will be saved” (cf. Mark 16:16). ... But the word “ears” is emphatic and forceful to an extraordinary degree.... He requires only ears. To such an extent has everything been reduced to an easy way of life. For if you ask a Christian what the work is by which he becomes worthy of the name “Christian,” he will be able to give absolutely no other answer than that it is the hearing of the Word of God, that is, faith. Therefore the ears alone are the organs of a Christian man, for he is justified and declared to be a Christian, not because of the works of any member but because of faith.<sup>22</sup>

These Blessed Ears that hearken unto God’s completely, inwardly and outwardly, Christ gives to us through God’s Word, the Gospel.

### **B. Ears that hearken unto the Gospel save.**

Hearkening thoroughly unto God’s Word inwardly and outward by faith certainly would mean a man is just before God. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.<sup>23</sup>

Where there is a just man, there is life. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.<sup>24</sup>

These Ears of faith Christ has fashioned and given us through the Gospel save. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship,

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<sup>22</sup>*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 29, pp. 223, 224, underscore added.

<sup>23</sup>**Romans 3:28.**

<sup>24</sup>**Romans 1:16-17.**



created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.<sup>25</sup>

### **Conclusion**

*Christ used His Blessed Ears to hear and hearken unto God's Word for us.* Christ certainly did not need human ears for Himself. Christ is God and, therefore, has no need of human ears. Rather, He took on human ears by becoming man and as a man hearing and hearkening unto God's Word for us and for all men. Now in Christ all men hear and hearken unto God's Word perfectly, inside and out.

Where there is such hearing there is life, because the just shall live by faith. This life is life eternal because it means deliverance and salvation from sin. So, simply through hearing the Gospel, Christ gives to us His Blessed Ears that hearken unto God's Word thoroughly, inwardly and outwardly, justifying us who are sinners and, thereby, saving and giving life eternal.

*Amen.*

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<sup>25</sup>**Ephesians 2:8-10.**