

The Festival of Palm Sunday
The Sunday of the Passion
13 April 2014
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

“Christ Humbled Himself to be Saved to Save Men from the Destitution of their Sin.”

Philippians 2:8

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

Introduction

The world cannot make sense of a Savior who Himself suffers to be saved in order to save. It just doesn't make sense to them; hence, the world rejects the Gospel and perishes.¹

In a world that is perishing, however, God deigned to save it by perishing with it. God perished with the world in the Cross of Christ. In so doing, God brought an end to any and all human suffering and perishing because even everlasting destitution and perishing is not big enough to hold the Almighty. With no human suffering and perishing left, all men are saved alive forever.

Christ suffered to perish with the world that He might eliminate all human suffering and destitution caused by sin and, thereby, eliminate any and all perishing by men. Hence, Christ cried out in the midst of His Passion in **Psalm 69**, “Save Me, O God”², and the prophet

¹“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” **I Corinthians 1:18**.

²**Psalm 69:1**. “Des Messias Gebet in seinem Leiden.” [The Messiah's Prayer in His Suffering.] *Die Bibel oder die ganze Heilige Schrift Alten und Neuen Testaments, nach der deutschen Uebersetzung Dr. Martin Luthers* [*The Bible or the Entire Holy Scripture, Old and*

Zechariah describes Him as a Savior who is “being saved”³. The Apostle St. Paul says in today’s epistle He emptied Himself, i.e. did not use the Divine Majesty and Power He enjoyed because He is God in the flesh⁴, and suffered the ignominious death of the Cross. In this way, Christ put an end to all human suffering because of sin.

New Testaments, according to the German Translation of Dr. Martin Luther], St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1905, p. 588, translation from the German in brackets is mine.

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

³“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He *is* just, and being saved, afflicted” **Zechariah 9:9**, translation is mine. “[be saved] is the only correct translation and suits the context. ... the original Hebrew term always = poor, needy.” The Rev. Dr. Theodore Laetsch, *Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, p. 454.

The question arises: *In Zech. 9:9, why is the Messiah not called [Savior] in the active sense, but ... ‘saved,’ in the passive sense?* We respond: ... Christ is not only “Savior” but is also Himself “saved.” That is, because He wished to redeem us with His suffering and death, and descended into the depths of our wretchedness, therefore it was necessary that he be saved first, so that, having been saved, he might be able to save us too. “I looked around, but there was no helper; I was in anxiety, and there was no one to help” (namely, among men). “My own arm” (the power of My divinity) “has saved Me, and My anger’ (or zeal) “has helped Me” (Isa. 63:5).

⁴“This majesty He [Christ] always had according to the personal union, and yet He abstained from it in the state of His humiliation, and on this account truly increased in all wisdom and favor with God and men; therefore He exercised this majesty, not always, but when [as often as] it pleased Him, until after His resurrection He entirely laid aside the form of a servant, but not the [human] nature, and was established in the full use, manifestation, and declaration of the divine majesty, and thus entered into His glory, Phil. 2, 6 ff., so that now not only as God, but also as man He knows all things, can do all things, is present with all creatures, and has under His feet and in His hands everything that is in heaven and on earth and under the earth, as He Himself testifies Matt. 28, 18; John 13, 13: *All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.* And St. Paul says Eph. 4, 10: *He ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.* And this His power, He, being present, can exercise everywhere, and to Him everything is possible and everything is known.” The Formula of Concord. Epitome. Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ.16, *Triglotta*, p. 821.

Such a Savior wins the hearts of men. Who could not help but love a God and Savior who would suffer so for unworthy sinners? No one could reject such a Savior. Through the Gospel, this Great Passion of the Lord is preached, hearts are won, and souls forever saved by the Savior who saves by Himself being saved.

I. Christ Saved by Suffering the Destitution caused by Men's Sin.

A. Christ suffered to save by Himself being saved.

The bulk of people are put off by Christ because He is a Savior who saves by suffering the destitution of men in order to save. After the fall of Adam, men think in worldly terms and look only for a Savior who conquers physically and immediately – might makes right. Anything less than that is no savior or mighty rescuer at all. Such are the ways of the world.

In addition, reflecting upon the Suffering of Christ reminds men of what their sin has wrought. It has wrought utter devastation, ruin, and destitution, reflected in the sorely disfigured Christ bearing our burdens. Because of the indescribable disfigurement Christ suffered because of our sins, Christ prays in **Psalm 69**, in the midst of the disfigurement caused by His Passion⁵ under the load of our sins:

Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel.⁶

Christ suffers unspeakable disfigurement because of our sins; yet He is ever concerned not for Himself in His immense suffering, but for us, that we not stumble at His horrible disfigurement for us. Yet here we see why men reject en masse Christ: His Suffering for men reveals to men the enormity of their sin. 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

⁵“As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.” **Isaiah 53:14.**

⁶**Psalm 69:6.**

purpose of terrifying and condemning, but for comforting and cheering those who are terrified and timid.

Christ, however, undertook to suffer the calamity men incurred by their sin in order to deliver them from it. David pens Christ's Words in the midst of His Passion:

Save me, O God; for the waters are come unto *my* soul. I sink in deep mire, where *there is* no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.⁸

Christ cries out to be saved because He is truly suffering the ruin, devastation, and destitution caused by the sins of men, indicated by the *terra infirma* of the mud, mire, and quicksand and the waters cascading over Him as they burst their retaining walls. Similarly, the prophet Zechariah writes:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He *is* just, and being saved, afflicted....⁹

The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

The question arises: *In Zech. 9:9, why is the Messiah not called [Savior] in the active sense, but ... 'saved,' in the passive sense?* We respond: ... Christ is not only "Savior" but is also Himself "saved." That is, because He wished to redeem us with His suffering and death, and descended into the depths of our wretchedness, therefore it was necessary that he be saved first, so that, having been saved, he might be able to save us too. "I looked around, but there was no

⁷The Formula of Concord, Article V.12, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition*, p. 555.

"... the wound required so great attendance, that the Lord of all came down to die, and so put a stop to the evil" St. John Chrysostom, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, ed. Philip Schaff, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., reprinted, September 1980, p. 412.

⁸**Psalm 69:1-2**, underscore added.

⁹**Zechariah 9:9**, translation is mine, underscore added. "[be saved] is the only correct translation and suits the context. ... the original Hebrew term always = poor, needy." The Rev. Dr. Theodore Laetsch, *Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, p. 454.

helper¹⁰; I was in anxiety, and there was no one to help” (namely, among men). “My own arm” (the power of My divinity) “has saved Me, and My anger’ (or zeal) “has helped Me” (Isa. 63:5).¹¹

Christ suffered to be saved, to suffer the ignomy of the Cross, in order to save men from the destitution of their sins. 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.¹²

The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

St. Bernhard says: “He was whipped for you, so that He could free you from the whipping of eternal wrath; He was crowned with thorns for you, so that He could crown you in heaven; He was wounded for you, so that He could heal you.” ... That’s why we must view this in no other way than that God Himself had the whip in His hand and so pitifully whipped His own Son – not as if He deserved it or as if God was at enmity with His Person, but because [Christ] took upon Himself all sin.¹³

B. Christ ends human suffering by completing His Suffering on the Cross.

In a world that is perishing, it pleased the Almighty God to save the world by perishing with it. God perished with the world in the Cross of Christ. In so doing, *God brought an end to any and all human suffering and perishing because even everlasting destitution and perishing is not big enough to hold the Almighty.*¹⁴ Jesus says:

¹⁰Compare also **Psalm 22:11**: “Be not far from me; for trouble *is* near; for *there is* none to help.”

¹¹*Loci Theologici ... On the Person and Office of Christ*, tr. Richard J. Dinda, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009 p. 11

¹²**Philippians 2:8.**

¹³“*An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ*, tr. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger, Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 1999, p. 191.

¹⁴“But if I can believe in and accept this remedy, that God gives us His Son—not an ordinary son like Abraham, Isaac, and David, of whom God has many, but His only-begotten Son—it is certain that this Son can effect a new birth in us and can, therefore, be a victor and conqueror of the devil. This is because God’s Son is vastly greater than death, far stronger than

Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.¹⁵

While Christ, indeed, did perish in His Passion because He is Truly Human and truly bore all human suffering, including perishing, i.e. being forever forsaken of God¹⁶, nevertheless, He remained the Almighty God in His Suffering.¹⁷ *While the travesty caused by human sin is indeed great, it is not greater than the Almighty.* The Apostle St. Peter, therefore, writes:

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath

sin and the devil. Through Him we have the grace of God rather than wrath, and whatever else we may need besides. If it puzzles you how a man is to be transferred from the devil's realm to the kingdom of God, God's gift of His Son must surprise you still more. And if you accept this in faith, you will no longer be puzzled about the other. If we have the Son of God, who faces death and opposes the devil on our behalf, on our side, let the devil rage as he will. If the Son of God died for me, let death consume and devour me; for he will surely have to return and restore me, and I will stand my ground against him. Christ died; death devoured the Son of God. But in doing so death swallowed a thorn and had to get rid of it. It was impossible for death to hold Him. For this Person is God; and since both God and man in one indivisible Person entered into the belly of death and the devil, death ate a morsel that ripped his stomach open." *Luther's Works*, Vol. 22:354, 355, underscore added.

"To sum up, we must, first of all, have a Savior who can save us from the power of this world's god (2 Cor. 4:4) and prince (John 16:11), the devil, that is, from sin and death. This means that He must be the true, eternal God, through whom all believers in Him become righteous and are saved. For if He is not greater and more exalted than Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, or John the Baptist, He cannot be our Redeemer. But if, as God's Son, He sheds His blood to redeem us and cleanse us from sin, and if we believe this, rubbing it under the devil's nose whenever he tries to plague and terrify us with our sins, the devil will soon be beaten, he will be forced to withdraw and to stop molesting us. For the hook, which is the divinity of Christ, was concealed under the earthworm. The devil swallowed it with his jaws when Christ died and was buried. But it ripped his belly so that he could not retain it but had to disgorge it.²⁴ He ate death for himself. This affords us the greatest solace; for just as the devil could not hold Christ in death, so he cannot hold us who believe in Christ." *Luther's Works*, Vol. 22, p. 24. The editors add in footnote 24: "This metaphor for the atonement had considerable currency among the fathers, and Luther frequently referred to it."

¹⁵**St. John 2:19.**

¹⁶**Psalm 22:1.**

¹⁷"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord." *The Small Catechism*, p. 10.

raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.¹⁸

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

Christ could not dispense with His deity in the state of exinanition [Christ's emptying Himself according to the Apostle St. Paul in **Philippians 2:7**]. He had to attach the full weight of His deity to His obedience, suffering, and death, as Scripture tells us Gal. 4:4-5 and Rom. 5:10. Facing death, He had to be the mighty God that He might be able by His death to overcome death, to raise up again the temple of His body (John 2:19, 21), and to take up His life again (John 10:18). Jesus Christ "died not simply as any other man, but in and with His death conquered sin, death, hell and eternal damnation" (*Trigl.* 1023, F.C., Sol. Decl. VIII, 25). To be able to render such perfect obedience in the stead of men, to suffer and die for them, He had to renounce not seemingly, but actually the full use of the form of God. Our reason cannot perceive how all this is possible, but we believe it on the basis of Scripture. Luther expresses it in the familiar lines: "No garb of pomp or power He wore, A servant's form, like mine, He bore, To lead the devil captive"....¹⁹

With no human perishing left because all human suffering and perishing perished on the Cross, all men are saved alive forever.

*Because God Himself Personally engaged, wrestled with, and took down human suffering and perishing, in the same psalm that speaks so vividly of Christ's Passion, **Psalm 69**, we soon find Christ is delivered from these sufferings because He has brought them to an end by His Passion. David, again penning Christ's Words, writes:*

I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving.²⁰

Likewise, the Apostle St. Paul writes:

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name....²¹

¹⁸**Acts 2:23-24.**

¹⁹*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 289.

²⁰**Psalm 69:30.**

II. Christ Saves by Winning Hearts through the Gospel of His Suffering to be Saved to Save.

When we stand on the floor of the coliseum with the lions of the wrath of God, the world, the flesh, and the devil, poised to devour us body and soul and suddenly, at the moment they are about to pounce, this God-Man bursts on to the scene and wrestles them down to defeat and death, forever destroying them, and He, scarred and bruised²², rising from the death struggle²³ to now embrace us, what can that do but move us to the most ardent love of our God and Savior? The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

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 loving²⁴, praising, and

²¹**Philippians 2:9.**

²²Christ's suffering is the bruising of His heel prophesied in **Genesis 3:15**. "And I will put enmity between thee and the womb, and between thy seed and her seed; [He] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Translation from the Hebrew in brackets is mine. Underscore added.

²³"It was a strange and dreadful strife. When Life and Death contended. The victory remained with Life. The reign of Death was ended. Holy Scripture plainly saith. That Death is swallowed up by Death. His sting is lost forever." Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands, *The Lutheran Hymnal*, #95.

²⁴"Convince a man of this wondrously great love of God for him, and he cannot help loving God in return and avoiding sin for the sake of his love of God." The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, pp. 9.

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?²⁵

Now we see the Power of the Gospel to win hearts. The Gospel presents and gives to men the Heroic Work of God to wrestle with the infirmities and ruin of sin for men, to take them down, and deliver men from their clutches forever. Who cannot but love such a Hero? And this Hero is our God and Savior. Consequently, because the Gospel inspires such love of God in men, it saves and gives life eternal.

Conclusion

It pleased God ever so wonderfully in His Mercy toward fallen men to perish on the Cross of Christ to deliver men from the eternal ruin of their sin. Because God undertook to Personally suffer these afflictions brought on by men's sins, no human suffering, ruin, perishing, or destitution remains, being swallowed up by the unbounded vastness of the Almighty God. Who can begin to understand such a Wonder? It is beyond words and understanding. It is, in and of itself, an Absolute Beauty.

But we needn't understand it – just know it and its ours.²⁶ No more human suffering, destitution, ruin, or perishing remains, because God has Personally already taken them all down. All that now remains is joy, pleasure, and life eternal with this Gracious and Wonderful God in His glorious and rich Kingdom.

Amen.

²⁵*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, pp. 291, 292, underscore added.

²⁶“Concerning this knowledge and its power the prophets have spoken gloriously and clearly prophesied, as in Isaiah 53[:11]: ‘By knowledge of Him shall He (My Servant, the Righteous One) make many just or righteous.’ This means: ‘He will redeem them from sins and snatch them from the devil’s jaws solely through this; that they know Him and who He is.’ ... Likewise, Jeremiah 9[:23-24] says: ‘Let no one boast of his wisdom nor of his might nor of his riches’ – in short, let no one boast at all – ‘but if anyone wants to boast, let him boast in this, that he knows Me and knows who I am: the Lord, who does good and establishes righteousness and justice on earth.’” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 69, pp. 35, 36.