**Vespers II,**

 **15 March 2020,**

 **The Third Sunday in Lent,**

 ***Concordia Lutheran Mission,***

**Terrebonne, Oregon**.

**“Christ Resolved from Eternity to Die on Good Friday to Atone for the Sins of the World.”**

The stone *which* the builders refused is become the head *stone* of the corner.

**Psalm 118:22**.

 The builders, namely, the clergy, who rejected Christ needn’t have troubled themselves to crucify Christ because Christ had resolved from eternity, from before the foundation of the world, to die on Good Friday to Atone for the sins of the world and save. Had they left Christ alone, He would have expired at the same time on Good Friday according to the Father’s will and as He Himself had resolved from eternity to do.[[1]](#footnote-1)1

 The builders are the leaders of Judah but also reflect the opinions of the majority of the people of Judah who rejected the Messiah in unbelief. The majority in Judah chose to festoon Christ’s sacrificial death for them and for all men with the garland of murder. This rejection and murder became a part of Christ’s Passion. To His everlasting Glory He endured these sins committed against the Son of Man[[2]](#footnote-2)2 and paid for them also with His Sacrificial death.[[3]](#footnote-3)3 While Christ’s suffering this rejection is to His everlasting Glory, it is to the everlasting ignominy of the majority of the people in Judah and their leaders and, indeed, all who reject Christ in unbelief.

 While the people did their best to stop Christ, He accomplished what He set out to do and became the Cornerstone of the Church by His Passion. Also, to this day Christ continues undaunted because through the Gospel men come to rest on the Cornerstone of Christ and gain salvation and life everlasting.[[4]](#footnote-4)4

 The conspiracy of murder against Christ was so unnecessary for He had resolved from eternity to die at that time on Good Friday to Atone for the sins of the world. It was also futile because Christ rose from the dead on the Third Day and inaugurated the Preaching of the Saving Gospel throughout the world.

**I. Christ Resolved from Eternity to Die on Good Friday to Atone for the Sins of Men and Save.**

**A. The folly and futility of works righteousness.**

But why did the builders, i.e., the Church leaders of Judah, reject the Cornerstone of the Church, the Messiah? They rejected Him because of Absolution. Christ came preaching Absolution of sin but the leaders of Judah did not believe in salvation by Grace but rather believed they would live by their own good works. Luther writes:

Now the psalmist [**Psalm 118**] turns to the Head of holy Christendom and presents Him as an example. Since He was humbled and exalted as much as and more than all the saints, we should not deem it odd or strange if we also suffer tribulation and affliction. “If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of His household? The servant is not better than his Master” (Matt. 10:24–25). In the verse before us the psalmist summarizes the sufferings and resurrection of Christ. By using the word “rejected” he indicates the suffering, death, disgrace, and reproach to which Christ was subjected. By using “the chief Cornerstone” he indicates His resurrection, life, and eternal dominion. He uses the parable of a building. When a stone does not fit into the wall or match the others, but disfigures the whole building and is an unfit, useless stone, it must be rejected. Then another builder, a stranger, comes along. He knows well how to use the stone and cries: “Stop, you big fools, are you really builders and still do not want that stone? I can use it, not merely to plug a hole or for fill, nor as a common, ordinary stone, but as a cornerstone in the foundation. It shall bear not one but two walls, and it shall do more than all the other stones in the whole building.”

Thus Christ would not fit the ways and holiness of the Pharisees, or the whole world itself. They could not stand Him. He disfigured their building. He reprimanded and rebuked their outwardly fine and holy behavior. Then they became angry and condemned and rejected Him, for they did not know how to use Him. Then God, the real Builder, chose Him and made Him the Cornerstone of the foundation on which the whole Christian Church, made up of Jews and Gentiles, stands. It is no different today. The stone is rejected and stays rejected. Nonetheless, with the believing righteous, who build, not on their human works or on the might of princes but on this stone, He remains precious, noble, and valuable (1 Peter 2:7).[[5]](#footnote-5)5

 Here we see to where the false doctrine of works righteousness can lead one. It can lead someone to reject God Himself and Crucify the Savior. *This murderous conspiracy was folly and futile because Christ had already resolved from eternity to die at that time on Good Friday to Atone for the sins of the world and save*. The Apostle St. Paul writes of the resolution of Salvation from eternity:

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will ... .[[6]](#footnote-6)6

 Had the leaders simply left Christ alone, He would have expired at the same time on Good Friday because He had resolved from eternity to die at that time on Good Friday to Atone for the sins of the world. We see that Christ died at the time He, not men, appointed because the soldiers did not need to break His legs to hasten His death because He had expired already.

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs.[[7]](#footnote-7)7

Christ’s death came to pass as He said it would on His own time and His own schedule. Christ expired when He, not men, determined. The Apostle St. John writes:

Then said Jesus unto them again, ... No man taketh it [My Life] 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]](#footnote-8)8

Men, however, seeking to justify themselves by their own works stumble into the most heinous of crimes and the most wicked unrighteousness, the murder of God[[9]](#footnote-9)9. The Apostle St. Paul writes that it was God Himself whom they murder because God was now Incarnate:

Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: 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.1[[10]](#footnote-10)0

 Not only does works righteousness tilt at futile endeavors like killing someone who’s already determined He would expire at that day and time, but it leads not into righteousness but even more unrighteousness like the heinous crime without peer of murdering God.

**B. Christ succeeds in spite of the opposition because He had Resolved from eternity to die on Good Friday to Atone for the sins of the world and save.**

 It is too Christ’s great Glory that He suffered these murderous conspiracies. They form a part of His Passion1[[11]](#footnote-11)1 wherein He Atoned for their soliciting and attempting His murder. Christ forgave them from the Cross.

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.1[[12]](#footnote-12)2

Gerhard writes of Christ suffering for His murderers:

... Christ prayed for His crucifers: **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, 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 true 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 timed [sic] 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. And if we still at times go forth with confidence (brashness) and don’t realize what we are doing – that is, we don’t realize the consequence of lying in sin, nor do we consider what a serious matter the wrath of God is – behold, with His intercession Christ presents the very best and obtains so much that God grants time for repentance and does not so quickly destroy with His wrath. Ponder here also the incomprehensible patience of Christ, how He in His distress also prayed for His worst enemies who dealt with Him so pitiably and horribly. They had affixed Him with nails so hat He could do not other good for them. Only His tongue remained which even so, because of torture, stuck to the roof of His mouth, Psa. 22. Yet, He used it still to pray for His crucifers. Indeed, how distant are those from this example of Christ who do not pray for their enemies. Even more distant are those who return evil with evil. Farthest away of all are those who deliberately offend their neighbors. From this, God graciously preserve us. Amen.1[[13]](#footnote-13)3

 It is to their ignominy that they festooned the death of a man willingly lay down His life for them and all men with the garland of murder. More importantly their efforts were futile because Christ rose again on the Third Day. Consequently, this rejected Cornerstone vanquished them.

**II. The Church Rests on Christ the Cornerstone through the Gospel.**

**A. Christ Fashions the Saving Gospel by His Passion**.

 Not only did the people fail to stop Christ’s Saving Purpose in His Passion, but Christ also forged ahead undaunted to Fashion and Establish the Saving Gospel by His Passion -- *the very Passion with which they desired to exterminate and stop Him now formed the foundation of the expansion of His Kingdom worldwide*. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death ill he come.1[[14]](#footnote-14)4

The Holy Communion, the Last Will and Testament of the Son of God and clearly the Lord’s Passion, is the Preaching of the Saving Gospel1[[15]](#footnote-15)5 to men because it lifts up to them the Cross of Christ and communicates to men the Saving Benefits of the Cross of Christ. The Apostle St. John writes that the Cross of Christ draws men back to God:

Jesus answered and said, ... Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.1[[16]](#footnote-16)6

 Thus Christ’s Passion, wherein men tried to exterminate Christ and His Kingdom, forms the Foundation for the expansion of His Kingdom throughout the world and for its everlasting existence

**B. The Gospel Fashioned by Christ’s Passion forms the Foundation of life everlasting for all men**.

 By the Gospel through faith, men rest upon the Cornerstone of Christ and gain life everlasting. The Apostle St. Matthew writes:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.1[[17]](#footnote-17)7

The Apostle St. Paul notes that this Remarkable Cornerstone is Christ’s Word and Sacraments, through which He communicates His Saving Work to Men, *when he speaks of the prophets and the apostles*:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens 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* ... .1[[18]](#footnote-18)8

The Lutheran Church confesses this Blessed Truth of Christ the Cornerstone of His Church through His Word and Sacraments:

In all these passages Peter is the representative of the entire assembly of apostles [and does not speak for himself alone, but for all the apostles], as appears from the text itself. For Christ ask not Peter alone, but says: *Whom do ye say that I am?* And what is here said [to Peter alone] in the singular number: *I will give unto thee the keys; and whatsoever thou shalt bind*, etc., is elsewhere expressed [to their entire number], in the plural Matt. 18, 18: *Whatsoever ye shall bind* etc. And in John 20, 23: *Whosesoever sins ye remit*, etc. These words testify that the keys are given alike to all the apostles, and that all the apostles are alike sent forth [to preach]. ... Therefore it is necessary that in these passages Peter is the representative of the entire assembly of the apostles, and for this reason they do not accord to Peter any prerogative, aor superiority, or lordship [which he had, or was to have had, in preference to the other apostles]. ... However, as to the declaration: *Upon this rock I will build My Church*, certainly the Church has not been built upon the authority of man, but upon the ministry of the confession which Peter made, in which he proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He accordingly addresses him as a minister: *Upon this rock*, i.e. upon this ministry [Therefore he addresses him as a minister of this office in which this concession and doctrine is to be in operation, and says: *Upon this rock, i.e.,* this preaching ministry.]1[[19]](#footnote-19)9

**Conclusion**.

 Works righteousness is not only futile but it leads into the most horrific unrighteousness, namely, the murder of God. Christ had already planned from before the foundation of the world to die at that time on the Cross on Good Friday in order to Atone for the sins of men and save. It’s to the everlasting ignominy of men that they Crucified God on that day who was dying for their sins, festooning His Sacrificial death for men with the garland of murder, but to the everlasting Glory of God that He would suffer such calumnies in order to save men from theirs.

 Moreover, Christ continued past this shameful wickedness against Him to establish by His Passion the Saving Gospel whereby men worldwide and down through the ages come to rest upon Him forever for life everlasting.

 ***Amen.***

1. 1“No man taketh it [My Life] 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.” **St. John 10:18**, amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2“And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him ... .” **St. Matthew 12:32**. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” **St. Luke 23:34**. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 4“In all these passages Peter is the representative of the entire assembly of apostles [and does not speak for himself alone, but for all the apostles], as appears from the text itself. For Christ ask not Peter alone, but says: *Whom do ye say that I am?* And what is here said [to Peter alone] in the singular number: *I will give unto thee the keys; and whatsoever thou shalt bind*, etc., is elsewhere expressed [to their entire number], in the plural Matt. 18, 18: *Whatsoever ye shall bind* etc. And in John 20, 23: *Whosesoever sins ye remit*, etc. These words testify that the keys are given alike to all the apostles, and that all the apostles are alike sent forth [to preach]. ... Therefore it is necessary that in these passages Peter is the representative of the entire assembly of the apostles, and for this reason they do not accord to Peter any prerogative, aor superiority, or lordship [which he had, or was to have had, in preference to the other apostles]. ... However, as to the declaration: *Upon this rock I will build My Church*, certainly the Church has not been built upon the authority of man, but upon the ministry of the confession which Peter made, in which he proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He accordingly addresses him as a minister: *Upon this rock*, i.e. upon this ministry [Therefore he addresses him as a minister of this office in which this concession and doctrine is to be in operation, and says: *Upon this rock, i.e.,* this preaching ministry.]” *The Smalcald Articles:* **Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope**.23, 24, 25, *Triglotta*, p. 511. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 5Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 14, p.96, amplification in brackets added. Luther writes that holding onto Christ alone as the Cornerstone is difficult because the flesh rejects Him as did the builders in Jesus’ day. Luther goes so far as to call himself a “poor and weak Lutheran” because the flesh always battles the simplicity of faith holding onto Christ. “What is the cause of so much dissension among Christians today, of so many heresies and sects? Why is the papacy now so rabid, furious, blind, mad, and foolish that it cannot tolerate the teaching that faith without works makes people pious, blessed, alive, and free from sin, death, and the devil? As long as they confess with the mouth that Christ is the Cornerstone, first rejected and then elected, why do they refuse to let Him be effective or actually to acknowledge Him as such? Is there any wonder that carnal-minded people and false hypocrites take offense at this? David says that this is marvelous in our own eyes. Even though the dear saints and Christians take no offense, it is still amazing to their hearts and difficult to believe; they must study it all their lives to believe it. What others feel, that they know best. I consider myself a Christian, but I know full well how hard it was, still is, to grasp and hold this Cornerstone. Men may call me a Lutheran, but they misjudge me; or at best I am a poor and weak Lutheran. May God strengthen me!” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 14, p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 6**Ephesians 1:3-5**. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 7**St. John 19:30-33**. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 8**St. John 19:7**, **18**. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 9“*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.**44, underscore added. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 10**I Corinthians 2:6-8**. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 11“In the verse before us the psalmist summarizes the sufferings and resurrection of Christ. By using the word ‘rejected’ he indicates the suffering, death, disgrace, and reproach to which Christ was subjected. By using “the chief Cornerstone” he indicates His resurrection, life, and eternal dominion.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. .14, p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 12**St. Luke 23:34**. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 13*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, pp. 243, 244, underscore added. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 14**I Corinthians 11:26**. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 15“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. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 16**St. John 12:30**, **31-33**. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 17**St. Matthew 16:18**. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. 18**Ephesians 2:19-20**. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. 19*The Smalcald Articles:* **Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope**.23, 24, 25, *Triglotta*, p. 511. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)