**Lent Vespers III,**

**The Fourth Week in Lent,**

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*Concordia Lutheran Mission,*

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**“No Man is Ever Forsaken by God because Christ was Forsaken Already on the Cross for the Sins of All Men.”**

My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?

**Psalm 22:1**.[[1]](#footnote-1)1

**Introduction**.

No man is ever forsaken by God because Christ was already forsaken of God for all men. Jesus of Nazareth, God’s Only-Begotten Son, is the only man ever to be forsaken by God.

But why was Christ forsaken by God? Christ was forsaken by God not because of any sin He committed[[2]](#footnote-2)2 but because He shouldered the guilt of the sins of all men. Sin earns God’s forsaking because God is Holy. The Holy God has nothing to do with sin and its unholiness. Consequently, forsaking sinners is only right, just, and natural, for God because He’s Holy.

Christ, however, is God in the flesh. Consequently, God Himself bore the forsaking men had garnered by their sins. God bore this awful burden Himself out of Pure Mercy for fallen mankind. Consequently, those who are in Christ never have to bear the dreadful consequence of God forsaking them because of their sins.

Now that Christ has suffered the forsaking of all mankind, no man is ever forsaken by God, but rather gains God and all His Blessings forever.

**I. Christ was Forsaken by God because He bore the Guilt of the Sins of all Men.**

**A. God forsakes sinners.**

Nothing is more dreadful than God’s forsaking. God forsaking a man leaves a man to wander forever in the long, endless night with God’s wrath at his elbow every step of the way. We get a glimpse of this dreadful condition in the Passion of Christ: The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

**Why, then, did Christ suffer all this?** He Himself was innocent, as is shown completely throughout the entire passion history in the testimony to Christ’s innocence by friend and foe alike. However, He endured all this for the sake of our sin, as our text indicates: **Christ offered Himself in His own body for our sins**. That is why the sufferings of Christ are the clearest reflection of divine wrath over sin that person can ever obtain from any source.[[3]](#footnote-3)3

The Lutheran Church confesses that the Cross of Christ reveals God’s wrath against sin:

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 purpose of terrifying and condemning, but for comforting and cheering those who are terrified and timid.[[4]](#footnote-4)4

Luther writes of Christ’s suffering for us and for all men:

In this verse David describes how miserably Christ will be forsaken. No human words can describe this as clearly, briefly, and simply as it is here. He is not speaking of the physical suffering of Christ, which was also great and difficult, but of His sublime, spiritual suffering, which He felt in His soul, a suffering that far surpasses all physical suffering. He describes the highest degree of this suffering and says: “Thou wilt let Him be forsaken of God for a little while.” What this is, no man on earth understands, and no man can reach or express it in words. For to be forsaken of God is far worse than death. ... There is no doubt that in the spirit David is here looking at Christ as He struggles with death in the garden and cries out on the cross, “My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46) For that is His real, sublime, spiritual suffering, which no man can imagine or understand. In the garden He Himself says, “My souls very sorrowful, even to death” (Matt. 26:38). This is what He wants to say: “I have such sorrow and anguish that I could die of sorrow and anguish.” He withdraws from His disciples about a stone's throw (Luke 22:41), kneels down, and prays. In prayer He begins to struggle with death, and He prays more fervently. His sweat becomes like drops of blood that fall on the ground. David is talking here about this sublime, spiritual suffering, when Christ fought with death and felt nothing in His heart but that He was forsaken of God. ... And in fact He was forsaken by God. This does not mean that the deity was separated from the humanity -- for in this person who is Christ, the Son of God and of Mary, deity and humanity are so united that they can never be separated or divided -- but that the deity withdrew and hid so that it seemed, and anyone who saw it might say, “This is not God, but a mere man, and a troubled and desperate man at that.” The humanity was left alone, the devil had free access to Christ, and the deity withdrew its power and let the humanity fight alone.[[5]](#footnote-5)5

Christ’s Passion reveals to us the horrors of sin and Divine wrath against it. This dreadful situation comes about because God hates sin and forsakes sinners, as rightly He should according to justice.

**B. In His Passion Christ was forsaken of God for all men because He bore the guilt of the sins of all men.**

But as our Confessions stated, Christ’s Suffering wasn’t appointed for our fear and dread but for our comfort and cheer. John Gerhard writes:

Thus Christ’s soul was grieved unto death so that we might rejoice forever.[[6]](#footnote-6)6

On the Cross God forsook thoroughly Christ because God chose out of pure mercy to bear the burdens of sinful men and its consequences. David writes:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? *why art thou so* far from helping me, *and from* the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and [there is no silence for me].[[7]](#footnote-7)7

The Holy Christ is forsaken of God. Because of He bears the sins of all men, Jesus is in dire straits. He is suffering the pangs of hell. The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes:

The old Theologians assert that Christ actually endured the torments of hell, when He uttered those mysterious words: “Why has Thou forsaken Me?” ... By that outcry Christ asserts that He was really forsaken of God, forsaken, as only the damned in hell are forsaken. This marks the peak of His suffering. This indicates the height of His anguish. God had withdrawn from Him all help and protection and had delivered him up to darkness and death. At the same time, God had withdrawn from Him every token of grace and comfort. He was totally forsaken of God. Christ no longer saw or felt a ray of divine mercy. He was now actually and really suffering the pangs of hell, which otherwise only those experience who are banished to that place of eternal torment. As men live here in time, they may already feel the crushing burden of God’s wrath and curse resting upon them, yet there are always some evidences of God’s goodness at hand, such as the light they see and the air they breathe. However, in hell such evidences of God’s kindness have vanished altogether. They see and feel only God’s burning wrath and unabating fury. Such was the condition that Christ was in, when on the cross He cried: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” Christ felt Himself completely forsaken.[[8]](#footnote-8)8

Because Christ is forsaken, God doesn’t respond when He cries out for help. Dreadful silence in the midst of dire need alone comes from God in response to His pitiful pleas. In the night seasons, when a man should find rest and peace, Jesus hears nothing but God’s shrill and soul piercing[[9]](#footnote-9)9 condemnations of Him because Jesus bears the sins of all men, sins which move God to forsake Him because sin is abhorrent, obviously, to the Holy God. This awful condition goes on forever, circumscribed only by Jesus’ infinite Power and Majesty to coral it because is the Almighty God in the flesh.1[[10]](#footnote-10)0 The prophet Isaiah writes of how the Infinite Majesty of Christ’s Person circumscribes and reduces to a trifle the infinite and everlasting burden of sin:

And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.1[[11]](#footnote-11)1

In this midst of this dreadful judgment and death, Christ remains faithful to God and to men. 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 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 worshiping 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.1[[12]](#footnote-12)2

This was the last thing the devil needed: A man worshipping God perfectly from the heart and throne of his kingdom. Now, because of Christ, there is no place that man is not holy, not even in hell. That is how hell disappeared for men. *Because Christ was obedient in all circumstances, even in hell, which is the place of God’s forsaking, for to be without God’s Blessed Presence is the definition of hell, there is no hell for those in Christ*.1[[13]](#footnote-13)3

This Suffering of Christ is the full measure of forsaking of a man, nothing short of that. Consequently, no forsaking for man remains because Christ has already endured that forsaking for all men to its full completion in the Service of sinners.1[[14]](#footnote-14)4

**II. The Gospel Teaches Men that No Man is Forsaken because the Gospel Reveals the Passion of Christ**.

The Gospel teaches men that no man is forsaken of God because it reveals the Passion of Christ, wherein we see that Christ suffered God’s forsaking over sin of all men. Moreover, the Gospel teaches us that at no time in our earthly lives are we forsaken of God, whether it be in good times or bad. Every circumstance God is working not to forsake us but for our everlasting good. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. ... 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?1[[15]](#footnote-15)5

Because none of us are forsaken of God, every moment of our lives, whether good or bad, are brimming with everlasting meaning. Luther writes:

This is what the Holy Ghost would teach us when He condescends to write about the saints and their petty affairs: the lowliest works of the saints please God. Behold the glory and worth of a Christian man: there is nothing so lowly about him but it pleases God. To shed one’s blood, to die, to sweat, to strive and battle against the devil is in truth a great thing and pleases God much. You must conclude thus: After you have come to faith, then also the natural, carnal, and physical works please God, whether you eat or drink, are awake or sleep, these are surely nothing but bodily natural works. Such a great thing is faith. Therefore see to it first that you become a Christian and that your person becomes acceptable and pleasing to God through Word, through Baptism and the Sacrament. When the person believes and becomes attached to the Word, no longer persecutes it, but thanks God for it, then all you are to do is what Solomon tells you in Ecc. 9:7-8: “Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.”1[[16]](#footnote-16)6

**Conclusion**.

No man is ever forsaken by God because Christ was already forsaken by God for all men because of their sins.

Now in Christ no man is forsaken by God. Moreover, God is always there to help those in Christ every step of the way, in good times and bad, unto life everlasting.

***Amen.***

1. 1**Psalm 22** is a Messianic Psalm that teaches about the Person and Work of Christ to save us from our sins. “Weissagung von Christi Leiden and Herrlichkeit.” (Prophecy Concerning Christ’s Suffering and Glory.) *Die Bibel oder die ganze Helige Schrift Alten und Neuen Testaments, nach der deutschen Uebersetzung Dr. Martin Luthers* (*The Bible or the Entire Holy Scripture, Old and New Testaments, according to the German Translation of Dr. Martin Luther*), St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1905, p. 565.

   “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. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2Daniel prophesied Christ’s innocence. “And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself ... .” **Daniel 9: 26**. We see an indication of Christ being the only man forsaken when Christ cries out, “Our fathers trusted in thee: they rusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.” The fathers of Israel were heard by God because their pleas were based on the fact that Christ suffered all their foresaking for them. Thus they were heard by God. Consequently, we have an indication that no man is forsaken because God heard the pleas of Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3John Gerhard, *An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ*, tr. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger, from the 1663 edition, second printing, Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 1999, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 4The Formula of Concord, **Article V.12**, Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition, p. 555, underscore added.

   “According to Scripture, Christ’s death reveals both God’s love and God’s wrath. This truth is brought out in this very passage, Rom. 5:8-11: ‘Hated by God (... lying under God’s wrath), we were reconciled to God.’ Love prompts God to reconcile us to Himself by the death of His Son, that is, to render satisfaction ti His punitive justice. Scripture teaches that God’s compassionate will or love does not preclude the settlement with the righteousness of God, but includes it.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 5Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 12, p. 126 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 6John Gerhard, *An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ*, tr. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger, from the 1663 edition, second printing, Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 1999, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 7**Psalm 22:2**. The second half of the verse is my translation from the Hebrew (wlo [and not] silence [dumiyah] to Me [li]). Also, King James Version of *World Wide Publishers* includes in the notes, “there is no silence to me.” p. 431, note 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 8The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on Select Psalms*, tr. the Rev. Dr. H. W. Degner, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, pp. 68, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 9“He shall see the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.” **Isaiah 53:11.** [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 10“Others object: Christ did not in fact suffer eternal damnation; His suffering therefore was not vicarious. ... Scripture teaches plainly that the very punishment which we should have suffered on account of our sins was meted out to Christ. The very curse which was denounced against sinful man (‘Cursed is everyone that continueth not, etc.,’ Gal. 3:10), fell in its full weight upon Christ: ‘Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, *being made a curse for us*” (Gal. 3:13). Yes, the suffering of Christ was of comparatively short duration. But observe God’s method of computation. When Scripture measures the value of Christ’s Passion, it does so by the exalted dignity of the Sufferer. It was the suffering of the Son of God, 1 John 1:7: ‘The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.’ Acts 20:28: ‘His [God’s] own blood.’ The teaching of the ‘orthodox theologians’ that the brief suffering of Christ, as that of the Son of God, is equivalent to the eternal suffering of mankind is not a ‘dogmatic construction,’ but the doctrine of Scripture.48[48Dorscheus (in Baier, III, p. 87): ‘The eternity of human suffering is compensated for by the majesty and excellence of the Person (Christ).’] Christ ‘fully balanced the account,’ the settlement is ‘mathematically’ correct as God views the matter.” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 354. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 11**Isaiah 49:6**. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 12*Lecutres on Select Psalms*, tr. the Rev. Dr. H. W. Degner, Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 67, underscore added. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 13“In Matthew 25[:41] Christ says of the Kingdom of Glory that it was prepared for the blessed of His Father from the foundation of the world, hence from the beginning intended for them. Of the fire of hell, however, Christ says that it was prepared for the devil and his angels. If men go to hell, they go to a place originally not prepared for them. ‘Hell was originally not built for men. [Bengel]’” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 498, amplification in brackets and underscore added. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 14“This [Patience in Suffering] is more than human, this is divine patience. Through all the Messiah’s suffering glow the love, patience, longsuffering, the innocence and holiness of God. The Servant of the Lord, yes, He is the Lord Himself. The Lord said about the thirty pieces of silver, for which those of Israel sold their Shepherd: ‘A goodly price that I was prised at of them.’ Zech. 11, 13. The Lord Jehovah, the God of Israel said: ‘They shall look upon me whom they have pierced.’ Zech. 12, 10. The suffering of the Messiah is the Passion of the Lord. Messiah’s suffering and death, that is God’s martyrdom, God’s blood, God’s death. Thus the suffering of the Messiah is truly He who should redeem Israel from all its troubles, from all its sins.” The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Christ in Old Testament Prophecy*, tr. Erwin W. Koehlinger, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, pp. 67, 68, amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 15**Romans 8:28**, **31-32**. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 16Quoted in Francis Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I, p. 252, underscore added. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)