**The Festival of Good Friday**,

15 April 2022,

*Concordia Lutheran Mission,*

Terrebonne, Oregon.

**“Jesus Converts Death to Sleep by His Passion.”**

**When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said,**

**It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.**

**St. John 17:30**.

**Introduction**.

Here Jesus converts death into mere sleep by His Passion. Normally, the abiding wrath of God settles in upon a man *after* he has breathed his last, “given up the ghost”. But Christ gives up the ghost *after* He has suffered the abiding and everlasting wrath of God over sin.

Jesus suffered everlasting and abiding of wrath of God *before* He breathed His last when He cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (**St. Matthew 27:46**) Jesus brought this suffering to a close when He said, “It is finished.” *After* this moment, Jesus “bowed His head, and gave up the ghost.”

Because Jesus suffered the abiding wrath of God and brought it to a close for all men *before* He died, Jesus converted death into mere sleep from which we will awaken in glory and life everlasting on the Last Day in the resurrection from the dead.

**I. Jesus Converts Death into Mere Sleep by His Passion.**

**A. The abiding wrath of God against sin settles in after a man breathes his last.**

The definition of human death is the separation of body and soul. King Solomon writes of human death being the separation of body and soul:

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.[[1]](#footnote-1)1

Once body and soul separate, then the abiding wrath of God settles in and dwells forever with and upon the man because of his sin. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law.[[2]](#footnote-2)2

The Lutheran Church confesses that the sting of death is sin:

And death itself serves this purpose, namely, to abolish this flesh of sin, that we may rise absolutely new. Neither is there now in the death of the believer, since by faith he has overcome the terrors of death, that sting and sense of wrath of which Paul speaks 1 Cor. 15, 56: *The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the Law*. This strength of sin, this sense of wrath, is truly punishment as long as it is present; without this sense of wrath, death is not properly punishment.[[3]](#footnote-3)3

The abiding wrath of God settles in and dwells forever with and upon a man *after* he has breathed his last.

**B. Christ converts death to sleep by His Passion.**

Notice, however, that Jesus reverses the order in His death. *Before* He breathes His last, Jesus experiences the abiding wrath of God . In this case Jesus experiences the abiding wrath of God not for Himself but for all men according to prophecy. The Prophet Daniel writes of Jesus’ Passion:

Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.[[4]](#footnote-4)4

What did Jesus say in the midst of His Passion? “It is finished.” What did the Prophet Daniel prophecy would be finished? “transgression, sins, and iniquity.”

How did the Prophet Daniel prophecy this would come about? It would come about through the death of the Messiah. The Prophet Daniel writes:

And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself ... .[[5]](#footnote-5)5

If the Messiah were cut off or killed not for himself, for whom then? The Messiah was cut off for us, the people, all mankind, in order to put an end to transgression, to finish sin and iniquity for us.

Thus we see according to prophecy and its fulfillment in Jesus’ Passion, Jesus experienced the abiding wrath of God *before* He breathed His last. The Apostle St. Matthew writes of Christ suffering God’s everlasting wrath *before* He breathed His last:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? ... Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.[[6]](#footnote-6)6

This reversing of the order means that death is no longer death but sleep. One does not arouse from death, but one does around from sleep, as did Jesus when He arose from the dead on the Third Day and we also on the Last Day when He returns again in glory. Luther writes of death in Christ as sleep:

“Scripture has a lovely manner of speaking of death and the deceased ... : Scripture does not call it death, but a sleep ... . We must henceforth learn a new speech and language in speaking of death the grave. ... That is not a human, earthly language, but a divine, celestial language. For the like you find in none of the books of all learned and wise on earth ... . But among Christians this should be a familiar, common, and current speech.”[[7]](#footnote-7)7

By His Passion Jesus turned death into mere sleep.

**II. The Gospel Converts Death into Mere Sleep by the Passion of Christ.**

**A. The Gospel makes men partakers of the Blessings of Christ’s Blessed Death.**

The Gospel incorporates men into this Blessed Death of Christ that converts death into mere sleep. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of *his* resurrection ... .[[8]](#footnote-8)8

Just as Christ was raised from the dead so also are we raised to newness of life by faith now and raised bodily on the Last Day when He returns again glory.[[9]](#footnote-9)9

The Gospel makes men partakers in the Blessed Death of Christ that converts death into mere sleep.

**B. The Gospel rouses men from the sleep of death unto life everlasting.**

Because the Gospel incorporates men into Jesus’ Death that converts death into mere sleep, the Gospel raises men from the dead on the Last Day when Christ returns again glory. Jesus says:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that hearth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.1[[10]](#footnote-10)0

Because neither sin nor unbelief no longer hinders man’s hearing God, the sleep of death is also much lighter than normal sleep because men rouse instantly at the Voice of Christ in the resurrection. Luther writes:

Christ is saying to us ... I can very readily raise you from the dead – as easily as you rouse someone from sleep – and desire very much to do so, having both the necessary power and intention. ... It follows from this, therefore, that those who lie dead and buried in the churchyard and under the ground sleep more lightly than we do in our beds. We know it can easily happen that a person sleeps so soundly that he is called ten times before he ever hears. But the dead hear that lone word of Christ and wake up. The moment he speaks that one word, “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!”; “Lazarus, come forth!”; “Talitha cumi, Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise!”, they hear in that very instant. And on Judgment Day, when he speaks that one word, the dead will hear in that very same moment and come forth from the graves. It is true, we sleep much more soundly in bed than we do in the churchyard! Thus before our Lord God, death is not death but a sleep. For us, when we die it is and is termed death, but before God it is but a sleep and a very light sleep at that.1[[11]](#footnote-11)1

**Conclusion**.

Jesus converted death into mere sleep by His Passion because He experienced the abiding wrath of God *before* He breathed His last, defanging death and turning it from mortality into mere sleep.

As from any sleep we and all believers will be roused from our sleep in Christ on the Last Day and raised to life everlasting in glory.

Amen.

1. 1**Ecclesiastes 12:7**. “*What temporal death is*. Temporal, or bodily, death is not the total annihilation of man (Russellism; atheism), but the deprivation of natural life, occurring through the separation of soul and body (Baier). That temporal death is not the annihilation of the soul is clear from Matt. 10, 28; that it is not the annihilation of the body follows from John 5, 28. 29, where Christ tells us that the dead bodies, though turned to dust, are awaiting in their graves the day of resurrection (cp. also Dan. 12, 2). That death, properly speaking, is separation of the soul from the body is clearly taught in Luke 12, 20; ‘This night thy soul shall be required of thee’; and in Matt. 27, 50 (John 19, 30), where the death of our Lord on the cross is described as the ‘yielding up of the ghost,’ or as the ‘giving up of the ghost.’” The Rev. Dr. J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955, p. 613.

   “**Russellism** [Later Jehovah’s Witnesses, F. E. Meyer, *The Religious Bodies of America*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961, p. 464]. A strange religious perversion, deriving its name from a Millenial Dawn fanatic by the name of Charles Taze Russell. Born in Allegheny, Pa., February 16, 1852, he was privately educated and, for a while, belong to the Congregationalists. ... The Russellites deny the immortality of the soul, saying that ‘God did not give man a soul separate and distinct from man.’ ‘Man is only a little higher creature than an animal.’ The word ‘soul,’ to them, means only a living, breathing creature. And they say, concerning death: ‘What, then, dies? Russellites answer: It is the soul that dies.’ -- With such anti-Biblical statements as the basis of their belief, it is not surprising that the Russellites reject the doctrine of hell and eternal punishment for the wicked. They say: ‘The only rational people who believe in hell are such as do not use their brains on the subject. The Old and the New Testament know nothing about hell. Hell always means second death, or annihilation.’ They do not realize that their denial of death involves the denial of the redemption through Christ.” *Concordia Cyclopedia*, eds. Ludwig Fuerbringer, Theodore Engelder, P. E. Kretzmann, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1927, p. 667, s. v. “**Russellism**”, amplification in brackets added.

   “**Baier, Johann Wilhelm;** b. 1647; profess at Jena, rector of the University of Halle, general superintendent, court preacher, and city pastor at Weimar; d. there 1695. His chief work is *Compendium Theologiaei Positivae*, which shows the great influence of Johann Musaeus, his teacher and father-in-law, had upon him (synergism [man cooperates with God in his conversion]. This work passed through many editions latest by Dr. Walther, St. Louis, Mo., 1879, with a rich collection of extracts from earlier Lutheran Theologians.” *Concordia Cyclopedia*, eds. Ludwig Fuerbringer, Theodore Engelder, P. E. Kretzmann, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1927, p. 56, s. v. “**Baier, Johann Wilhelm**”, amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2**I Corinthians 15:56**. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, **Article VI: Of Confession and Satisfaction**.56. 57, *Triglotta*, p. 299. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 4**Daniel 9:24**. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 5**Daniel 9:26**, underscore added. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 6**St. Matthew 27:46**, **50**. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 7Quoted in Francis Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 511, footnote 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 8**Romans 6:3-5**. 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 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 9“As, then, there are two regenerations, of which I have already made mention, – the one according to faith, and which takes place in the present life by means of baptism; the other according to the flesh, and which shall be accomplished in its incorruption and immortality by means of the great and final judgment, – so are there also two resurrections, – the one the first and spiritual resurrection, which has place in this life, and preserves us from coming into the second death; the other the second, which does not occur now, but in the end of the world, and which is of the body, not of the soul, and which by the last judgment shall dismiss some into the second death, others into that life which has no death.” *The City of God*, **Book XX**, **Chapter 6**, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Vol. II, ed. Philip Schaff, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, rpr. May 1988, p. 426. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 10**St. John 5:24-25**. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 11*The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol. VII, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)