

Vespers, Lent III
24 February 2008
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

"Jesus Lacked God on the Cross so Men Would Never Suffer Want."

"For Thou hast made Him a little lower than the angels"

Psalm 8:5

Introduction

What does it mean to be made a little lower than the angels? To be made a little lower than the angels means to do without God, to lack God, to want for God.¹

But who is this that does without God? He who does without God is the Son of Man, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the very Son of God. This psalm, as we have noted earlier, is a Messianic psalm. That means it is about the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, to save sinners. Hence, the Man who does without God here is the Messiah.

But why does Jesus do without God? He does without God for us, for all men, because He is bearing the punishment we deserved because of our sin: to do forever without God's blissful presence and experience only the absence of God and His blissful presence. That's the punishment we deserved and it is the punishment Christ bore for us.

Because Jesus wanted for God for us, we never lack God nor anything. Hence, the Lord teaches us to sing in Psalm 23: "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want."² We never lack for anything and gain eternal life because Christ suffered this lack of God for us so that we would never suffer the lack of God but would rest safely in His bosom forever.

¹The Hebrew reads, "For Thou hast made Him to lack [or to want for] God for a little while."

²The same word used in Psalm 23 for want or lack is the same word use in Psalm 8 for Jesus' lacking or wanting for God, *chasar*. Hence, because Jesus lacked God for us, we shall not lack or want for God or for nothing. So Jesus says, "The Son of Man became poor that ye might become rich."

I. Things Turned Upside Down: The Sinless Son of Man Assumes Man's Sins.

A. Review: Universal Praise, the Nature of the Praise, and now the Rationale for the Praise.

Psalm 8 begins with God's praise resounding throughout the earth. In Psalm 8 David foretells how the Crucified, Risen, and Ascended Lord would be praised not only in Judea, but throughout the world as the Gospel spreads after Christ has come.³

Verse two of Psalm 8 shows to us the *nature* of the praise: it is from babes and sucklings born of the Gospel, not worldly wisdom and knowledge.

Verses three through five give us the *reason* for the remarkable and miraculous events in the first two verses: *namely the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ.*

B. Creation is turned upside down in the Son of Man.

Frequently, thoughts on verses three and four of Psalm 8 stray to thoughts on the marvels of creation, the heavens, the moon, and the stars; how great creation is. And from there men think how God must love man because of this vast and wonderful creation He to man has given.

Yet we cannot know if God loves us by the marvels of creation. After all, people perish all the time in the wonderland of creation: tornadoes, snow storms, electrical storms, hurricanes, earthquakes, tidal waves, etc.

Not even the positive aspects of creation tell us whether or not God loves us. Jesus says:

[God] maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.⁴

¹Luther writes: "He [David] turns to the King and addresses Him, as though he wanted to say: 'Before Thy coming to earth, O King, Thou art praised and thanked only in the tiny narrow corner of Judea and in Jerusalem. But after Thy coming there will be more ringing and singing, thanking and praising, not in the narrow corner of Judea alone, but in all the lands under heaven, throughout the world.' By this he prophesies and proclaims at the very beginning of this psalm that through this coming King God will be praised and worshiped throughout the world." *Luther's Works*, Vol. 12, p. 99, amplification added.

4St. Matthew 5:45

Hence David here is not speaking of the marvels of creation in regard to man, but in regard to the *Son of Man*.

And David arranges creation here in a *strange* fashion: Whereas in the book of Genesis God begins with the least of God's creation, the building blocks of creation, the lights of the heavens, and proceeds to the pinnacle and crown of God's creation, man, David begins with the least of God's creation, the light of the heavens, and *moves not upward but downward* to man. Man, the crown of God's creation, is *beneath* the least of God's creation: the moon and the stars. Now, man is not worth God's consideration:

When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy Fingers, the moon and the stars,
which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him?⁵

This is rather like the owner of a large estate saying to his son, the heir, "When I consider the beasts of burden, the chickens and the pigs, what are you, my son, that I should consider you? The heir that I should be mindful of you?" Were anyone of us on the receiving end of a comment like this, we would not consider it a compliment or a harbinger of good things to come. On the contrary, we would consider ourselves dismissed from our father's estate and life.

Because of man's sin, he has now fallen from God's favor, fallen even below the inanimate objects of the heavens. God elsewhere describes fallen man to be beneath the lower levels of creation. In Jeremiah the Lord says of fallen man:

Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD.⁶

Of such a man God is no longer mindful.

Surprisingly, however, -- and thanks be to God! -- we find *Someone even lower than us: the Son of Man!* Here, beneath even the moon and the stars; here, beneath even sinful man; here, at the very bottom of creation is The Son of Man, The Christ, The Messiah, The Savior. And not only is The Savior at the very bottom of creation, but God is *not mindful of Him, neither does He visit Him*⁷:

5v. 3-4a

6Jeremiah 8:7

¹Luther writes: "But he pictures Christ in distinction from all men on earth and says, 'What is Man that Thou are mindful of Him, and the Son of Man that Thou dost care for Him?' He says this about the height and depth of Christ's humiliation. For he looks at Christ in His greatest torment and highest suffering, that He

... and the Son of Man, that Thou visitest Him? (v. 4b)

Here David reveals the great, deep and profound Mystery of the Son of God being *forsaken* on the Cross because of our sins. God forsakes His Only-Begotten Son, *refuses to visit Him*, and indeed only *visits our iniquities upon Him*. The prophet Isaiah writes:

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.⁸

God told David concerning David's Son, the Son of Man:

is mocked, spit upon, scourged, crowned, and crucified, as St. Paul also says about such humiliation (Phil. 2:8): 'He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.' In such humiliation no one regarded Him as a man, but all those who passed by (Lam. 1:12) shook their heads and said: 'Ugh! How God has cursed this man that He should hang on the cross!' Isaiah speaks to this (52:14; 53:2, 3): 'As many were astonished at Him -- His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and His form beyond that of the sons of men. He had no form or comeliness that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.' And Psalm 22:6: 'I am a worm, and no man; scorned by men and despised by the people

"David is amazed at this and says: 'Is it really possible or ought one believe that God would be mindful of such a wretched and miserable man and care for a son of man who dies so miserably, executed on a cross? Is He supposed to be the dearest child and the chosen one of God, He whom everyone spits upon, mocks, and blasphemes? How foolishly God acts! Is He supposed to be God's Son, the Lord, our Ruler, whose name is glorious in all the lands and to whom thanks are given in heaven -- He who hangs on the cross and is regarded as a mockery and curse of the people?' David says this in great amazement, as though he were to say: 'The whole world thinks that God has forgotten this Man and does not care for this Son of man. But 'the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.' (Psalm 118:22, 23)." *Luther's Works*, Vol. 12, pp. 123, 124.

8Isaiah 53:5a

I will be His Father, and He shall be My Son. If He commit iniquity, I will chasten Him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men.⁹

Christ's abandonment by God is clearly stated when David writes:

For Thou hast made Him a little lower than the angels...¹⁰

This verse speaks *an eternity of meaning*¹¹; for the angels do always behold the Father's Face¹².

9II Samuel 7:14

10v. 5a

¹Luther writes: "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 soul is 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

But here, remarkably and miraculously, the Angel of the Lord¹³ who is the Son of God is denied the Father's blessed face as He hanged from the Cross. Because Christ was denied God's blessed presence, being truly forsaken of God for our sins, He assumed a status and a rank lower than that of the angels.

The little phrase "a little lower than the angels" is an *enormous, yawning, gaping, eternal, and infinite chasm*. It expresses powerfully the *deep, deep* descent of the Son of God from heavenly glory to the *utter bowels of Hell* for *sinner*s. This passage expresses what Hebrew language says in this passage:

For Thou hast made Him to do *without God* for a little while.¹⁴

To do without God is to plummet into hell, darkness, and eternal death. And so the Son of God cries out from the Cross of his *endless* suffering in Hell for sinners:

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

had free access to Christ, and the deity withdrew its power and let the humanity fight alone." *Luther's Works*, Vol. 12, p. 126

12St. Matthew 18:10.

13"Jesus appears as God on the pages of the Old Testament. He reveals Himself under such titles as 'Angel of the Lord,' Whenever in the Old Testament the name 'Lord' occurs, it is pre-eminently not the Father, nor the Holy Spirit, but the Son of God. Ex. 13:21 Moses writes of the Israelites in the wilderness: 'And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of fire, to give them light.' Who is this Lord? Ch. 14:19 He is called 'the Angel of God,' which is a well-known appellation of Jesus in the Old Testament. Here the Angel of God is directly termed 'Lord.' All doubt is removed by Paul (I Cor. 10:3-4): 'Our fathers did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; *and that Rock was Christ*. ... Luther writes: 'The God who led Israel out of Egypt and through the Red Sea; who went before them in a pillar of a cloud and of fire; who nourished them with bread from heaven and did all the miracles which Moses relates in his books; again, who brought them into the land of Canaan and gave them kings and the priesthood and everything, is this God and none other than Jesus of Nazareth. Mary's, the Virgin's Son, whom we Christians call our God and Lord, whom the Jews have crucified and still today blaspheme and curse, as Isaiah says, 8:21: 'They shall fret themselves, and curse their King and their God.' Again, He it is who on Mount Sinai gives Moses the Ten Commandments. ... Yes, Jesus of Nazareth, who died for us on the cross is the God who says in the First Commandment: 'I, the Lord, am thy God.'" *The Abiding Word*, Vol. I, pp. 20, 21

14v. 5a, emphasis added

hearest not; and in the night season, and there is no silence toward me.¹⁵

Luther writes of Christ's being forsaken of God:

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 soul is 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.¹⁶

Christ's Suffering, however, *did come to an end*, for David says, "... for a little while." While the time of Christ's suffering was limited, the *depth and breadth* of His suffering are boundless because of the Majesty of the infinite and eternal person of the suffering Son of Man who is also the Son of God and therefore God Himself. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

That Christ was but temporarily forsaken of God is explained by the fact that He is the eternal, divine Son of God. When the Person who is God was forsaken for *a little while*, this transient condition was the equivalent of all sinners' being eternally forsaken of God. This is not a man-made "theory of compensation," but

15Psalm 22:1-2

16*Luther's Works*, Vol. 12, pp. 123, 124

Scripture teaches this compensation by the divine majesty of the Person of Christ in all passages in which it asserts the truth that it is through the work and suffering of the eternal Son of God that we sinners have been redeemed (1 Pet. 1:18-19). ... 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 it is the doctrine of Scripture.¹⁷ Christ "fully balanced our account," the settlement is "mathematically" correct as God views the matter.¹⁸

Christ did without God "for a little while" because His suffering came to an end. And His suffering came to an end because the punishment for our sins came to an end. And the punishment for our sins came to an end because Christ had fully paid the price. The price was eternal punishment. Only God is big enough to pay that price. Consequently, Jesus, because of the Infinite Majesty and Power of His Person, was fully able to pay our debt and possessed the capacity to bring to a close our well-deserved punishment.

II. The Resurrection and the Exaltation of the Son of Man.

A. Christ rises from the dead because He truly atoned for our sins.

Because Christ by the Infinite Majesty and Power of His Person truly swallowed up all the darkness, death, and everlasting torment of Hell, His suffering came to an *end*. And so David straightaway speaks of Christ's victory over death and Hell by speaking of His Resurrection:

... and [Thou] has crowned Him with Glory and Honor.¹⁹

Because Christ obeyed the Father and by His obedience, suffering, and death conquered God's enemies and man's, He is raised from the dead and exalted to the Right Hand of the Father and given a Name above all names. And God has placed *all* things under His feet²⁰. Now the same Christ, this same Crucified and Risen Savior, this same Son of Man now rules *all things* for the sake

17"Dorescheus (in Baier III, p. 87): "The eternity of human suffering is compensated by the majesty and excellence of the Person (Christ)." *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 354, footnote 48.

18*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, pp. 311, 354

19Psalm 8:5

20Psalm 8:

of His Beloved Church. St. Paul writes:

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.²¹

B. Christ's work and resurrection becomes ours through the Gospel.

And this glorious work and resurrection of Christ is given to us through the Gospel. St. Peter writes:

The like figure whereunto *even* baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Christ.²²

Holy Baptism gives us a clear conscience because it gives us the absolution Christ won for us on the Cross and carried out in the resurrection of Christ. St. Paul writes:

Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.²³

By Christ's resurrection the entire world was absolved of all sin. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

Now, then, if the Father raised Christ from the dead, He, by this glorious resurrection act, declared that the sins of the whole world are fully expiated, or atoned for, and that all mankind is now regarded as righteous before His divine tribunal. This gracious reconciliation is clearly taught in Rom. 4:25: "Who was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification." ... This truth Dr. Walther stressed anew in America. He taught that the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the *actual absolution pronounced upon all sinners*. ... Calov, following Gerhard, rightly points out the relation of Christ's resurrection to our justification as follows: "Christ's resurrection took place as an actual absolution from sin As God punished our sins in Christ, upon whom He laid them and to whom He imputed them, as our Bondsman, so He also, by the very act of raising

21Ephesians 1:19-23

22I Peter 3:21

23Romans 4:25

Him from the dead, absolved Him from our sins imputed to Him, and so He absolved also us in Him.”²⁴

And because of this absolution in Holy Baptism, the resurrection from the dead is also given to us in Holy Baptism. St. Paul writes:

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.²⁵

C. We shall not want because Christ lacked God for us and overcame our lack of God.

And with a clear conscience toward God because of Christ’s work given to us through Holy Baptism, we know we shall never lack or want for anything because we know we will never lack God and that we can go to Him for help in all circumstances. David writes in Psalm 23 of Christ as His work for us:

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.²⁶

The word David uses to express “shall not want” is the same word²⁷ used in Psalm 8 to say that Christ “lack or wanted of God for a little while.” Precisely because Christ lacked God we will never lack God. And, therefore, we will always be rich in eternal life because we will always be with God and never be without or lack God. Hence, St. Paul says:

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.²⁸

Conclusion

Jesus, then, suffered the lack of God in His Passion so none of us would have to suffer the lack of God at any time, ever.

And because Christ is the Son of God, He has infinite power and majesty to swallow up this

²⁴*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 321

²⁵**Romans 6:4-5**

²⁶**Psalm 23:1**

²⁷The Hebrew word used in both Psalms is *chasar*.

²⁸**II Corinthians 8:9**

infinite and eternal darkness of the absence of God for us and thereby deliver us from it and bestow upon us the blessed and blissful presence and countenance of God forever.

Because, then, the Son of God lacked God for us, we shall never want or lack for anything because we have God forever. We, therefore, sing with David in Psalm 23:

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.²⁹

Amen

29Psalm 23:1