

Christian MONTHLY

DEDICATED TO THE PROCLAMATION
OF THE WORD OF GOD



Psalm 119:105
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path.

March 2015

The Season of Lent

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THE SEASON OF LENT IS the 40-day period between Ash Wednesday and Holy Week. As we are into the season of Lent, it is worth looking at what the season represents. Often we think of fasts, Fat Tuesday, Mardi Gras, sorrowful introspection, and temptation. The truth is, we are looking at the time of Jesus going to the cross. What does this mean? How are we to view this time?

Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday, the triumphal entry of our Lord into Jerusalem, and ends with the crucifixion of the Savior. We often think of the end of Holy Week as the sorrowful rejection of Jesus at the hand of Jerusalem and the governing parties; however, the reality is that the triumph never turned to disappointment. Holy Week ends in triumph—a triumph for us, and one that our Savior counts as His own. Jesus said, as recorded in *John 12:23-24*: *The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*



JOHN 12:24
Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

We are thus the fruit of Jesus' work. If this is what Lent leads to, why would this time be filled with anything other than the reverence of the victorious accomplishment of our Lord? The cross does bear the sign of darkness, but in Jesus Christ it is the mark of glory. This is because we know what follows the cross and Good Friday: Easter Sunday. This makes the cross victorious. As Paul tells us in *1 Corinthians 1:18*: *For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.* Lent should never be a time for turning inward, but always for turning to the power of God. With that in mind, the Lenten hymn "The Old Rugged Cross" seems to draw upon Paul's writings:

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
The emblem of suffering and shame;
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best
For a world of lost sinners was slain. (George Bennard)

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, we ought never to look at ourselves, our world, or even the Scriptures unless it is in the light of the cross. It is in the cross that we find the fulfillment of all things. So, we never look at the period leading to the cross, except in the light of the victory found in it. We look at it in the light of Easter, the resurrection of our Lord. We look at it in the light of our resurrection. Let us be encouraged in our resurrection, remembering it is not just for a season—the cross, and Easter, is the time in which we continually live.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

Colossians 3:1-4
God's peace.

Crux Theologorum: The Theologians' Cross

(The theological question that cannot be answered)

1. We know that people are saved by God's grace alone through faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We further know that such saving faith is something that we cannot produce in ourselves; rather it is a gift of God worked in sinful and spiritually dead man by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word.

1 Cor 2:14: But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Eph 2:8-9: For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

1 Cor 1:17-18: For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

Rom 10:17: Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Col 2:13: And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

2. We know that God earnestly desires all men to be saved.

Ezek 18:30-32: Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.

1 Tim 2:3-4: For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

3. We know that those who are saved were chosen by God in Christ from before the creation of the world.

2 Tim 1:9: Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

Eph 1:5: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

Rom 8:28-30: 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. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

2 Thess 2:13-14: But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

4. We know that those who are not saved have only themselves to blame.

Matt 23:37: O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

Ezek 33:11: Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

Here's the big question: How do we reconcile these statements? If God wants everyone to be saved, and people are saved only by the power and grace of God, why isn't everyone saved?



This is the Crux Theologorum: Why are some saved and not others?

Two historic attempts to answer this question dominate in theological circles. They are:

Calvinism which says, "Because God chose some to be saved and others to be damned. Jesus Christ died only for the chosen or 'elect'. If you are one of the elect, you will eventually come to faith in the Gospel and be saved; if not, there is nothing you can do. God glorifies Himself by condemning you to hell." (This is the historic position of the Presbyterian, Baptist, and Christian Reformed churches.)

Arminianism which says, "Because it's a question of free will. Every person has the capacity to choose to believe in Jesus and follow Him or not. Those who choose Jesus are saved. Those who do not are damned." (This is the historic position of Methodist and Pentecostal churches, and the present position of most US Baptist and nondenominational churches.)

The problem with both positions is that they deny clear Scripture. The Calvinist denies that God really wants all men to be saved. The Arminian makes a fallen human's decision to believe in Jesus and follow Him the final factor, denying that man is dead in sin and that salvation is entirely the work of God. Both positions, unfortunately, take the focus of faith off the Gospel of Christ.

How do we resolve this dilemma? We don't. Why not? Because Scripture does not give us the answer. So instead, we acknowledge the paradox (it's one of many in the Scriptures, like, for example, the Trinity of the Godhead and the Incarnation of the Son of God), and we let what appears to be a contradiction to us to stand as it is. And we say:

- If a person is saved, it is entirely the work of God.
- If a person is not saved, it is entirely the fault of the person.

But someone will protest: "That doesn't make sense!" To which we respond, "That's right, it doesn't make sense—at least not to us. But then, it doesn't have to make sense to us to be true."

Is 40:13: *Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counselor hath taught him?*

Is 55:8-9: *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Deut 29:29: *The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

Rom 11:33-34: *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?*

And there's an important reason why the question must remain unresolved. It's so that the salvation of humankind can rest entirely on the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His work for us on the cross. Here's why:

1. The Calvinist really doesn't need to trust in the Gospel. His focus is taken off what Jesus did, and the big questions in his life are, "Did God choose me?" and "Am I one of the elect?"
2. The Arminian really doesn't need to trust the Gospel either. His focus is also taken off what Jesus did, and the big question in his life is, "Did I decide for Jesus?" or "Did I choose Jesus?" Or, stated another way, "Did I do my part?" And here's where the failure of both Calvinism and Arminianism is revealed: sooner or later every Christian wants to find some kind of assurance of their salvation. Eventually every Christian will ask, "How do I know for sure that I am saved? How can I tell?" And here's the problem: neither the Calvinist nor the Arminian can simply look to the cross and their Savior for assurance. Why not? Because the work of Christ on the cross for the Calvinist is only helpful *if* he's one of the elect—and he doesn't know that for sure. Likewise, the work of Christ on the cross is helpful for the Arminian only *if* he *properly* decides for Jesus and chooses to follow him with sufficient faithfulness—and of that he can never be quite certain. So, since neither can look to Christ for assurance, they must look someplace else. And oddly enough, both will end up looking in the same place. Both know from the Scripture that people are saved by faith, and that saving faith produces good works. So they end up looking for the proof of their election (Calvinist) or the sincerity of their decision for Jesus (Arminian) in their own lives. The question then becomes: "Do I see ample evidence of the fruits of faith in my life?" Or, stated another way, "Am I doing enough good works to confirm my faith?"

Unfortunately, there's no comfort there. Such an examination will always lead either to despair or to self-righteousness. If they're honest with themselves, they will

see lots of sin, and few and flawed good works; and so be convinced of their damnation. If they're not so honest, they may close their eyes to their many sins and deceive themselves into believing that they're doing well enough in their Christian walk, and smugly assume they're saved. Notice that neither is looking to Christ for assurance of their salvation. Both have made the assurance of saving faith a question of their subjective evaluations of their own works.

Fortunately for us, assurance of salvation is found only in the objective Gospel. By leaving the question unresolved to human satisfaction, God forces our faith to rest on what Christ has done for us. So, when struggling with the question, "How do I know for sure that I am saved?" we can boldly answer, "Because Jesus Christ died for my sins and rose again for my justification." Letting the paradox stand directs the doubting soul to Christ and His work alone where it belongs.

Finally, it's worth noting one more faulty attempt to resolve this paradox that is sometimes put forth by well intentioned but erring teachers. It's an attempt to synthesize the election of God from eternity past with the so-called "free will" of the Arminian. The basic notion is that God foresees those who will one day come to faith in Jesus by the exercise of their free will, and in view of their proper choice he elects to save them. Theologians who support this view sometimes use the Latin phrase and say that God elects people *intuitu fidei*; that is, "in view of their faith." The mistakes inherent in this idea are fairly obvious. First, it's clear that such "election" on God's part is not really election at all. He is not choosing or foreordaining anything. He is simply ratifying and supporting the decision of the individual that he foresees will be made in time. Secondly, salvation in this scheme is still entirely left up to a fallen, spiritually dead person's choice. Therefore all the errors and subsequent problems related to Arminianism remain.

It is, of course, very tempting to seek some resolution to the paradox that is the *Crux Theologorum*. But the simple facts are these: God has not revealed to us the answer to the question. And all human attempts to resolve the problem must first deny part of what God *has* plainly revealed, and their answers ultimately direct a person's faith away from the work of Jesus on the cross to something else. Therefore it is best to simply accept what God has said about this issue, trust in Christ alone, and leave the resolution of what seems to be a contradiction to the limited mind of man to God who is all wise.

Author Unknown

People think: If I could hear God speaking in His own Person, I would run so fast to hear Him that my feet would bleed... but I advise you: Do not go there. So experience certainly teaches. If He were to speak in His majesty, you would see what a running would begin, as there at Mount Sinai, where, after all, only the angels spoke; yet the mountain smoked and trembled.

Martin Luther

What Manner of Child Shall This Be?

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children,

Greetings to each of you. I am hopeful that your day is going well and that you are in good health. We have had lovely weather much of our winter, which is usually cold and wet. We have had cold spells and rain, but many breaks of sunny days and beautiful sunrises and sunsets.

The first two months of the new year are over, and before we know it Easter will come. I want to share with you what is recorded of Jesus' forerunner (one who comes before), John the Baptist, from *St. Luke, chapter 1*.

ZACHARIAS WAS IN THE TEMPLE doing his priestly duties and a great crowd of people were outside praying. The angel Gabriel came to Zacharias in the quiet of the temple. Zacharias was afraid, but the angel said, *Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. (Luke 1:13-14)*

Because Zacharias did not totally believe what he heard, the angel said he would not be able to speak until the baby was born.

- The angel also said that this child would be great in the sight of the Lord.
- He would not drink wine or any strong drink.
- He would be filled with the Holy Ghost from the womb.
- He would turn many hearts to the Lord.
- He would make ready a people prepared for the Lord.



The Vision of Zacharias
James Tissot

When Zacharias finally came out of the temple the people could see that he was different and supposed that he had seen a vision. For many months Zacharias was not able to utter one word. Elisabeth conceived and when she was in the 6th month of her pregnancy, she got company. It was her young cousin Mary.

God had also sent Gabriel to Mary, to proclaim that she too would have a Son, and she would call Him Jesus. Gabriel told Mary that her cousin Elisabeth was with child, too. Mary quickly went to see Elisabeth. Coming into the house, Mary called out a greeting. Elisabeth's baby leaped in her womb and she was filled with the Holy Ghost. This special baby heard Mary. Zacharias and Elisabeth's son John would be the one to make way for the Lord.

ELISABETH'S TIME CAME and she brought forth a son. Eight days later as was the custom, the baby was to be circumcised and some wanted to name him Zacharias after his father. But his mother said, *Not so; but he shall be called John. (verse 60)* The others wondered how this could be! They tried to ask the voiceless father what he thought and Zacharias asked for something to write on. Zacharias wrote: His name is John.

Immediately Zacharias was again able to speak, and he praised God. The ones who were gathered there marveled. Fear came on all that lived near them and these things were told all around the hill country of Judea. Everyone who heard kept these things in their hearts and said, "What manner of child shall this be!"

Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost and prophesied saying, *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, (now speaking of his own son John), shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. (verses 68-79)*

Such beautiful words. You should try to read them slowly to hear all that is being said. Those words are for all to hear and believe.

The hand of God was on John and he would be the greatest prophet that ever lived. The child John grew into a young boy and then a young man, strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until he first appeared to the people of Israel. His clothes were made of camel hair and his diet was locusts and wild honey (St. Mark 1:6).

Jesus was soon to be made known after John grew to a man and began to preach about Him. John prepared the people's hearts to receive the Lord when He Himself would begin to teach the people. John would preach about Jesus, and Jesus would teach about His Father God. Remember God and Jesus and the Holy Ghost are one and the same.

I pray that this account will be special to you and that you will be able to see how God works in such amazing and powerful ways and that He is true to His promises.

God loves you children. Don't forget that.

God's peace.



Hosanna!

I HAVE BEEN THINKING OF that day when Jesus came in to Jerusalem, of the large crowd which was paying homage to their Deliverer as they shouted "Hosanna" (save us), of how happy they were that the day had finally come when they were going to be freed from the oppression of the Roman rule by their Messiah who was much greater than Caesar, who through His reign would give them peace. How they must have watched Him go by, how the cries must have died down as they went back to their homes, not knowing what would transpire in the next days as the religious authorities, because of envy, began to deal with this "rebel." How confused the crowds must have been when the One they thought would free them gave Himself willingly to His arresters, submitted to their mock trials, endured their mockings and scourgings and willingly carried His death instrument, a cross, up to the top of Mt. Calvary to be killed instead.

In allowing Himself to be killed, He was providing for a way for even His crucifiers, we as sinful and condemned humanity, to be bought back with the blood that was spilled from the cross, a blood that even though our (all humanity) hostility and hatred motivated the spilling of His innocent blood, it was a shed blood which cries better things than the blood of Abel. The blood of Christ cries of forgiveness while the blood of Abel cried for vengeance.

So when they cried "Hosanna" they were no different than we are today in our generation as we cry out in our need to be saved from many different situations that we find ourselves in. He has promised to hear our "Hosannas" when we cry them to Him and especially the Hosanna for the deliverance from our sin which does not come from anywhere but His cross. The significance of meaning in the one word, "Hosanna," has brought great comfort, encouragement and strength to me as I read of, think about and meditate upon the events of Passion Week and Holy Week. Through the Lenten Season I have received renewed strength and encouragement to grip tighter to Jesus Christ and to point fellow human sufferers to the Innocent Sufferer who through His death (and life) has brought life and immortality to all through His Gospel. *2 Timothy 1:10: But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.* Hosanna!

Pastor Orval Wirkkala; Kingston, Minnesota

Lost People

I WAS LOOKING AT A missing persons websites, where they have photos of young people who have disappeared, either because they were runaways or were kidnapped. The situation seems so hopeless when you scroll through hundreds and hundreds of faces, and wonder how in the world anyone will ever recognize them. It seems so futile.

Then I wondered what I would do if it was one of my own kids. To what extent would I go to find my own son or daughter? Words can't express the empty, panicked anxiety that I would feel. Any parent can identify with that. I would stop at nothing, spare no expense, spend every waking moment desperately searching to find my lost child. I wouldn't rest day or night, for how could my eyes find sleep as long as my son or daughter was lost? I would gladly give up all my resources to find them, searching every shelter, every slum, under every bridge. Their face would be on every website, every milk carton, every peg board as I would plead with the world to help me find my child.

My heart became filled with compassion for these parents, and also for the children, who are either enslaved or running away from a place they didn't feel loved or wanted.

Then I thought of the heart of God and how it must break for the millions of men and women around the world who are lost, without the Savior. Every one of them is His son or daughter. Whether they are the prodigals, who for whatever reason are running from their Father, or are enslaved by their sins, addictions, or circumstances, God's love for them burns even more intensely than my love for my own children. Every one of them was created with special purpose and God has paid the ultimate price to redeem them. Jesus paid the ransom with His own blood to bring them home.

From this perspective, it's no wonder the Bible says that all of heaven rejoices when just one sinner comes to repentance. Have you ever been in a stadium and felt the awesome power of the crowd screaming after a goal or touchdown? Can you imagine that multiplied by a thousand thousands as the whole host of heaven celebrates over one single soul? Wow, God certainly loves us immensely!

Jesus said that the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost. God could have chosen to use all sorts of means to spread the Gospel, but He has chosen to use US. We are supposed to be the hands and feet of Jesus. God is the Father to the fatherless. Jesus is the friend of sinners. But how does He do it? Through you and me.

But, you protest, you can't open your mouth. You wouldn't know what to say. Okay, then support someone who does. Not everyone is called to go out onto the mission field. If everyone was supposed to be going, then there wouldn't be anyone left to do the sending! There are missionaries all over the world who need your prayer and support. When you give financially to a missionary, you become a missionary. You take part in the work.

Imagine if it were your child who was lost. What would you be willing to give to bring your son or daughter home? Could you give just a fraction of that to help reach the world for Christ? How are you supporting mission work today?

Billy Kyllonen; Tri-Cities, Washington

Beyond Scars

Jill Carattini

Submitted by Alvar Helmes; Battle Ground, Washington

I HAVE ALWAYS FOUND IT immeasurably comforting that Jesus gave Simon the name “Cephas,” or Peter, before Cephas had done much of anything. Before Peter had even determined to follow Jesus, let alone serve Him or love Him as the Christ, before Peter had muttered his denials of knowing Jesus or had one of his moments of blurted insight, before Jesus had reason to call Peter “Satan,” Jesus called him the “Rock.” (1)

What does this say? First, it says a great deal about who Jesus is. He is willing to vouch for us. Before you even know what you stand for, He is willing to stand up for you. And second, it reminds us that we are more than the sum of our blunders and failings, as well as our victories and our bright spots. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans that God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Before we had a chance to prove ourselves, before we had a chance to fall on our faces or say something fairly smart, Christ knew that He would die to show us the reach of His love. And He did.

Still, Peter is the disciple that makes many of us feel okay about ourselves. He is a loud statement to the hopeless, to the skeptic, to the guilt-ridden that God can take our doubt, our regret, the hopelessness of our past or our present, and create something solid by giving us the Son. In Peter we find that pains of regret and faithlessness may leave a permanent mark, but that even scars can be reminders of the living hope we profess. Or as Peter calls it, the Word that will not wither. (2)

Even so, when we look at our own moments of faithlessness or foolishness, those marks of humiliation, the bitter sting of missed and lost opportunities, it is hard to see much beyond regret and remorse, even if we were once told that Jesus had forgiven us. Can there be more to see in the weight of our past, the glimpses of guilty motives, disappointments, and poor behavior? The testimony of Peter himself is that yes, very definitely, there is.

Peter’s passion for Christ was no doubt shaped by the pain and humiliation of denying Him. If we are faithless, God remains faithful, for God cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13). Scars indeed have a way of reminding us that we are alive, participating in this fragile thing called life. Some of my own remind me that I am not an island, that I need people, that I desperately need a Savior, that I need God in all that I face. Still others remind me that I am

healed or being healed. But even Peter’s most indelible marks were nothing beside the mark of the risen Christ upon his life.

When Jesus appeared to the gathered, frightened disciples after the horror of the cross, He said to them, “See my hands and my feet, that it is me. Touch me and see (Luke 24:39).” The disciples had gathered together to discuss the rumors some had heard that Christ was alive and out of the grave, risen from the cruel death they had witnessed just days earlier. They were disoriented and afraid, and Jesus told them to look at His hands and feet, which had been pierced. And to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side.” (3) To His closest friends, Jesus said, “Look at my scars, see that it is me. Recognize me by my scars; they will point you to God.”



The Incredulity of St. Thomas by Hendrick Terbrugghen

Far beyond any scar we might bear, the wounds of Christ point us to one who touches our disfigured world with His own humanity. He was crushed for our iniquities. By His stripes we are healed. No doubt, it was this piercing reality of Jesus bearing the scars of human failure, carrying our pain, and taking our shame, that Peter bore in mind as he dynamically instructed any who would listen: Throw all your anxieties upon Him, because He cares about you! (4) For Peter, of all people, knew this well.

"Beyond Scars" by Jill Carattini, *A Slice of Infinity*, originally printed 17 September 2014 (www.rzim.org).

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- (1) See John 1:42. (2) See 1 Peter 1:24-25. (3) See John 20:27. (4) See 1 Peter 5:7.

Reach out with Christian love to someone who is hurting! "To the world, you may be but one person, but to one person, you may be the world."

Heather Darling-Cortes

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:3-5

Our Sin-Debt Clock

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

A REAL TIME DISPLAY ON Sixth Avenue in New York City chronicles the total US debt, and the digital numbers flash past so quickly you can't read them. Debt spins out of control, with each citizen owing tens of thousands in personal obligation and the national debt topping 18 trillion dollars. That's *trillion* with a *tr*. We saddle our children to the third and fourth generation with the bill, yet spending continues without restraint.

What about our sin debt clock? Is it spinning out of control as well?



In the Lord's Prayer, we pray that our Father would *forgive us our debts.* (Matthew 6:12) Martin Luther's Catechism explains: "We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins, nor on their account deny our prayer; for we are not worthy of anything we ask, neither have we deserved them; but we pray that He would grant them all to us by grace, for **we sin much every day and deserve nothing but punishment.**"

The Apostle Paul wrote: *There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one... There is no fear of God before their eyes.* (Romans 3:10-12; 18) God requires absolute holy perfection, with never a stumble, never a slip. If we're honest with ourselves, the commandments condemn us, because none of us keep them. Indeed, none of us are *capable* of keeping them, even if we want to.

Sometimes it seems our sin debt clocks are spinning so fast, they're nearly burning up. What do we do with this overwhelming debt, which is greater than we can ever repay? The penalty for sin is death. No exceptions. Romans 6:23 says: *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* (Romans 6:23) The gift of God, the grace of God—there is our hope!

Pointing to Jesus, John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Praise

Jesus that He has taken our debt of sin and nailed it to His cross. He has broken the wildly spinning debt tabulator which was held to our account. He has silenced the accuser. He has fulfilled the righteous demands of the Law.

The Apostle John wrote: *And ye know that he (the Son of God) was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.* (1 John 3:5-9)

The Apostle tells us not only that whoever abides in Christ *does not sin*, he says that they *cannot sin*. The new creation—born of God's Word and Spirit—does not sin. The motions of sin that we feel in our members, that we experience every day, that we see mounting on our wildly spinning sin debt clocks, are not held to our account. They were nailed to the cross of the innocent Lamb of God outside the city walls of Jerusalem, and the wrath of God was appeased.

Your sin debt is PAID. God is satisfied with the blood sacrifice of His perfect Son. Our Father is not angry with you. He doesn't hold your sin against you. Believe it. *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.* (Romans 5:1-9)

Live in the peace that Jesus Christ has purchased, praising Him for paying your enormous debt of sin. Stand in grace and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God! ~

Christian Monthly Vol. LXXI—No. 3

Subscription Rate: 1 Year

US: \$12 (Washington residents add your local sales tax)

Canada: \$18 (US money order only) Foreign: \$25

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Postal Mail to:
CHRISTIAN MONTHLY
PO Box 2126
Battle Ground, WA 98604 USA

Address subscriptions, payments,
and Book Concern orders to:
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The *Christian Monthly* (ISSN 0009-5494) is published monthly for \$12 per year by the Apostolic Lutheran Book Concern, 19113 NE 144th Street, Brush Prairie, WA 98606. Periodical permit paid in Brush Prairie, Washington.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: PO Box 2126, Battle Ground, WA 98604

General Disclaimer: The material in the *Christian Monthly* is reviewed for scriptural soundness and to ensure that it does not conflict with the teachings of the ALCA. Publication does not imply that other material by included authors has been so approved.



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The Joys of Lent

Pastor Jay Weidner
Laurium, Michigan

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

LENT IS USUALLY CONSIDERED A season of sadness and heaviness, a season for somber reflection upon the sufferings of Christ. The color for the season is purple, and as I was wearing my purple tie and vest for Lent several people commented on how much they liked it, that it was pretty. A color meant to express sorrow and penitence was seen as being joyful and beautiful by those who saw it otherwise.

I think that's how Lent is for us: we observe it as a season for deep brooding on the suffering and death of Jesus, but as Jesus saw it, it was a time for joy, the joy of suffering in order to be obedient to His Father and the joy of saving those whom He freely identifies as His fellow offspring, His brothers and sisters.

Not that the suffering was joyful, but it was worth it. We were worth it. Sometimes we forget that by dwelling on our worthlessness we can diminish the luster of Christ's sacrifice. He certainly did not die for us because we're worthless; we were worth Him dying, and that means we're worth a lot. We're worth a lot, not in ourselves but in the image of our God in which we are made.

Perhaps it's time to also see the season of Lent from God's perspective as well as our own, to see that as we tried of forfeit our value to the evil one in the garden, God refused to acknowledge our foolish bargain and instead chose to ascribe to us the ultimate worth, the blood of His Son.

Lent ends with Holy Week and Easter, God's triumph of His grace demonstrated in His Son, and our triumph as well given us through the blood of His Son, freely given. What a gift.

Happy Lent!

Praises

Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living? (Psalm 56:12-13)

THE PSALMIST FULFILLED HIS PROMISE because he was saved from deadly danger. In times of great danger, we are very generous. We are ready to give up everything we have. Our life is so precious that nothing can compare with it. Yet the Scripture gives examples of people who, nevertheless, have been willing to sacrifice their lives because they have found something that is even more valuable. Apostle Peter writes of an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled, and that does not fade away, which is reserved in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:4).

In our human lives we try to fulfill our promises. If we have promised to return a favor that has been done for us, surely we want to fulfill that promise. Most people do not want to be indebted to another person. Many times the debt of thankfulness may seem annoying. How can we pay it? Maybe we will reward the person to whom we are indebted with another favor. This is possible among people.

But we owe an immeasurable debt to the Lord God. How can we pay it? Look at how the psalmist solved the problem. He said: I will render praises unto thee. In another psalm we read: What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. (Psalm 116:12-14)

We can never repay our debt to God. But God is glad that His children here on earth praise Him. May we praise, thank and exalt God and His holy name for all His benefits to us.

Lord, may Thy name be praised and honored now and forever! Amen.

Anselm Hjulfors; Kolppi, Finland
November 1996 CM