

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 2018

The Innocent Delivered Up for the Guilty

Pastor Ken Storm
Tapiola, Michigan

EACH YEAR AT EASTER, the thoughts of God's children are drawn to the events which have made this time so special. Let us once again prayerfully revisit the happenings that have made all things new for every believer.

We are reminded in God's Word that it was the custom of that day for the governor to release a prisoner unto the people at this particular time of year. Pontius Pilate, on the governor's feast day, offered the people a choice between two prisoners. One was Barabbas, a known thief and murderer who had been imprisoned for some time. The other, taken captive only the night before, was Jesus of Nazareth, with whom Pilate could find no fault.

Surely one would say the obvious choice of the people would be to allow the innocent to be freed to live among them and the guilty to receive his due punishment. However, the self-righteous, unbelieving priests and elders convinced the people to seek the release of the wicked Barabbas and demand death for Jesus. The innocent was thus delivered up to be crucified and the guilty was set free. With the natural mind one would be quick to say that Barabbas, the thief and murderer, along with all those who crucified Christ are themselves worthy of death. Is this judgment fair? In our minds it certainly would seem so. Those wretched men were so evil and sinned so grievously. Surely they were undeserving of any consideration for compassion or pardon. After all, look at the very nature of their deeds. They delivered up the innocent instead of the guilty; the one who healed their sick and did only good in their midst they crucified. Such evil men—banish them from the face of the earth! They don't deserve to live. Although it is obvious that no greater injustice could have taken place, we recognize all this was according to God's plan for the salvation of men. Jesus said, *To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. (John 18:37)*



Barabbas James Tissot
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Now we must ask the most important question. Who were those sinful souls that would rob, murder, or demand death for an innocent one? Dear friend, portrayed in Barabbas, the priests, the elders, and the frenzied mob are you and me. We stand guilty in the judgment of God. We are those who covet that which others have and steal from both God and man. We are those who harbor hatred toward our fellowman. We are those who would stir up others unto bitterness and thus cause many to become defiled. We seek harsh and wrongful judgment against others. Do we recognize that we are guilty of these things and many others and, therefore, are guilty of crucifying the Son of God? Judged of sin, we deserve to die and be eternally separated from a righteous God. *For the wages of sin is death... (Romans 6:23)* Are we not sinners as was Barabbas? Where would our hope be today if there was no pardon for such sinners? But behold, thou guilty Barabbas, you need not languish in the dark prison, bound in the shackles and chains until you pay with your life for your evil deeds. The Innocent One has willingly taken upon Himself all of your sins and given His life on the cross where you should have hung. There He suffered and died so you could live. He has not judged the guilty with righteous anger or with vengeance, but even today He intercedes before the Father in behalf of the guilty: "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do."

Rejoice with me, dear fellow sinner, Barabbas, we have been set free! The innocent has been delivered up for the guilty by the love of God for us. By faith, all who have been washed in the precious blood of Jesus for the remission of their sins can believe them truly forgiven. What a wonderful Savior who would die for us! Not only did He die on the cross for our sins, but He arose victorious over death, hell, and the power of the devil. Our victory, then, is in His meritorious work alone. We wait for a great and glorious day... Jesus promises all who believe: *I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. (John 14:2-3)*

Thank and praise His holy name, dearly redeemed. We are resurrected unto a newness of life with Christ Jesus our Lord. Easter dawns anew for me and for you. May you have a most blessed Easter. ~

My Doctrine Is Not Mine, But His that Sent Me

Pastor Alvin Holmgren; September 2006 CM

Submitted by Andy Tumberg; New York Mills, Minnesota

JESUS SAID, *My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him. (John 7:16-18)*

These words contain an important lesson for all of us, especially for those who labor in the Word and doctrine. We must never allow ourselves the privilege of tailoring the doctrine of Christ to fit our own thinking, or of adjusting it to suit our circumstances, or the time and place of our ministry. This has often been done in order to effect organizational unity or some other type of outward unity.

Who has given such authority? Surely not the Lord, in whose kingdom we serve. His prayer for unity among His followers is only fulfilled through unity of spirit.

When we identify with Christ as the only means of salvation, believing that there is no other name by which we may be saved, we must also identify with His teachings concerning how we become partakers of this perfect plan, of which Almighty God is the author.

Jesus' great commission directed the disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. When Jesus had His first post-resurrection meeting with His disciples, He said to them, *As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you... Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. (John 20:21-23)*

Before His crucifixion, He had referred to the same authority with the words, *I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:19)*

According to contents, the Scripture is basically divided into two parts: the Law and the Gospel. In our preaching, it is not enough to preach the Law, the word that convicts of sin, because the Law only accuses and terrifies the conscience. Peace can only be found when we hear the voice of God as it is expressed in the forgiveness of sins. Jesus said, *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. (Mark 1:15)*

On the other hand, Luther remarked in his writings that there are many preachers who speak of the forgiveness of sins, but hardly say a word about repentance. If forgiveness is preached without repentance, the consequence is that people assume that they have received their sins forgiven. Pastors must be taught and guided so that they preach the whole Gospel: repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

True faith brings with it consolation and joy, and such consolation and joy cannot be experienced unless the heart is penitent and seeking. *To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. (Isaiah 66:2)*

There are two important parts of the Christian faith: repentance resulting from contrition and anguish of heart, and faith in the Gospel through which we receive the forgiveness of sins and are justified before God.

Many people shy away from the use of the authority that Christ gave, and which is commonly called "the keys of the kingdom." They defend their failure by saying that it was intended only for the initial twelve disciples and that, after their decease, the commission is no longer valid. This certainly was not the understanding of Apostle Paul, who was called to his mission after both the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Paul claimed and magnified his office as an ambassador for Christ, and said that he was given both the ministry and the word of reconciliation.

All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

Church history shows that there were serious differences among the adherents of the Protestant Reformation. When Luther's gifted helper, Philip Melancthon, became too conciliatory in his efforts to unify the divided pro-reformation forces, he was reminded that the confessions of the church were not his private property to alter as he saw fit.

This is good advice for today's ministry. Let us be faithful, remembering these words of Jesus: *My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.* The Lord attached so much importance to the Gospel ministry that He said, *This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. (Matthew 24:14)* Let His call be our preparation, His commission our authority, His Gospel our means, and His Spirit our enabling power. ~



Jesus Speaks Near the Treasury James Tissot
Wikimedia Commons

THIS IS THAT MYSTERY WHICH IS RICH in divine grace to sinners: wherein by a wonderful exchange our sins are no longer ours but Christ's, and the righteousness of Christ not Christ's but ours. He has emptied Himself of His righteousness that He might clothe us with it and fill us with it; and He has taken our evils upon Himself that He might deliver us from them. Learn Christ and Him crucified. Learn to pray to Him and, despairing of yourself, say, "Thou, Lord Jesus, art my righteousness, but I am Thy sin. Thou hast taken upon Thyself what is mine and hast given to me what is Thine. Thou hast taken upon Thyself what Thou wast not and hast given to me what I was not."

Martin Luther

He Was Made Sin for Us

Martin Luther

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.

Galatians 3:13

PAUL DOES NOT SAY THAT Christ was made a curse for Himself. The accent is on the two words “for us.” Christ is personally innocent. Personally, He did not deserve to be hanged for any crime of His own doing. But because Christ took the place of others who were sinners, He was hanged like any other transgressor. The Law of Moses leaves no loopholes. It says that a transgressor should be hanged. Who are the other sinners? We are. The sentence of death and everlasting damnation had long been pronounced over us. But Christ took all our sins and died for them on the Cross. *He was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12)*

All the prophets of old said that Christ should be the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, blasphemer that ever was or ever could be on earth. When He took the sins of the whole world upon Himself, Christ was no longer an innocent person. He was a sinner burdened with the sins of a Paul who was a blasphemer; burdened with the sins of a Peter who denied Christ; burdened with the sins of a David who committed adultery and murder, and gave the heathen occasion to laugh at the Lord. In short, Christ was charged with the sins of all men, that He should pay for them with His own blood. The curse struck Him. The Law found Him among sinners. He was not only in the company of sinners. He had gone so far as to invest Himself with the flesh and blood of sinners. So the Law judged and hanged Him for a sinner.

In separating Christ from us sinners and holding Him up as a holy exemplar, errorists rob us of our best comfort. They misrepresent Him as a threatening tyrant who is ready to slaughter us at the slightest provocation.

I am told that it is preposterous and wicked to call the Son of God a cursed sinner. I answer: If you deny that He is a condemned sinner, you are forced to deny that Christ died. It is not less preposterous to say, the Son of God died, than to say, the Son of God was a sinner.

John the Baptist called Him *the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*. Being the unspotted Lamb of God, Christ was personally innocent. But because He took the sins of the world His sinlessness was defiled with the sinfulness of the world. Whatever sins I, you, all of us have committed or shall commit, they are Christ's sins as if He had committed them Himself. Our sins have to be Christ's sins or we shall perish forever.

Isaiah declares of Christ: *The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all*. We have no right to minimize the force of this declaration. God does not amuse Himself with words. What a relief for a Christian to know that Christ is covered all over with my sins, your sins, and the sins of the whole world.

Our merciful Father in heaven saw how the Law oppressed us and how impossible it was for us to get out from under the curse of the Law. He therefore sent His only Son into the world and said to Him: “You are now Peter, the liar; Paul, the persecutor; David, the adulterer; Adam, the disobedient; the thief on the cross. You, My Son, must pay the

world's iniquity.” The Law growls: “All right. If Your Son is taking the sin of the world, I see no sins anywhere else but in Him. He shall die on the cross.” And the Law kills Christ. But we go free.

The argument of the Apostle against the righteousness of the Law is impregnable. If Christ bears our sins, we do not bear them. But if Christ is innocent of our sins and does not bear them, we must bear them, and we shall die in our sins. *But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Let us see how Christ was able to gain the victory over our enemies. The sins of the whole world, past, present, and future, fastened themselves upon Christ and condemned Him. But because Christ is God He had an everlasting and unconquerable righteousness. These two, the sin of the world and the righteousness of God, met in a death struggle. Furiously the sin of the world assailed the righteousness of God. Righteousness is immortal and invincible. On the other hand, sin is a mighty tyrant who subdues all men. This tyrant pounces on Christ. But Christ's righteousness is unconquerable. The result is inevitable. Sin is defeated and righteousness triumphs and reigns forever.

In the same manner was death defeated. Death is emperor of the world. He strikes down kings, princes, all men. He has an idea to destroy all life. But Christ has immortal life, and life immortal gained the victory over death. Through Christ death has lost her sting. Christ is the Death of death.

The curse of God waged a similar battle with the eternal mercy of God in Christ. The curse meant to condemn God's mercy. But it could not do it because the mercy of God is everlasting. The curse had to give way. If the mercy of God in Christ had lost out, God Himself would have lost out, which, of course, is impossible.

Christ, says Paul, *spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. (Colossians 2:15)* They cannot harm those who hide in Christ. Sin, death, the wrath of God, hell, the devil are mortified in Christ. Where Christ is near the powers of evil must keep their distance. St. John says: *And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. (1 John 5:4)*

You may now perceive why it is imperative to believe and confess the divinity of Christ. To overcome the sin of a whole world, and death, and the wrath of God was no work for any creature. The power of sin and death could be broken only by a greater power. God alone could abolish sin, destroy death, and take away the curse of the Law. God alone could bring righteousness, life, and mercy to light. In attributing these achievements to Christ the Scriptures pronounce Christ to be God forever. The article of justification is indeed fundamental. If we remain sound in this one article, we remain sound in all the other articles of the Christian faith. When we teach justification by faith in Christ we confess at the same time that Christ is God. ~



Faithful to the End – A Crown Be Given

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Hello Children!

I pray all is well with you. Where I live, winter is mostly cold and rainy, but the temperature is warming, and the rain is slowing. Spring is coming, and today I hear birds singing. Spring is my favorite season. The bird songs bring me much joy. Soon we will see new leaves on the trees. New life will come on the earth. *God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)*

My calendar Bible verse for the day will be our theme. I encourage you to read the whole verse in your Bible:
Revelation 2:10....be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.



IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED the heavens and the earth, and it was perfect. God created man in His image. God wanted mankind to have features like Him. God is good.

Adam and Eve sinned by eating the fruit that God had commanded them not to eat. They had to leave that beautiful place and live elsewhere, to till the ground and provide for themselves. Children were born, people started filling the earth and they also became very sinful. It became so bad that God was sorry He had made man and was going to send a great flood to destroy everything.

Genesis 6: God called Noah to build an ark, to gather animals and food, and on the appointed day, to go with his family and the animals into the ark and be safe. Then God sent 40 days and nights of heavy rain. By **faith** Noah did as he was told and was saved, he and his family, 8 persons. *Genesis 9:1: And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply (have children), and replenish (fill up again) the earth. Noah had faith and served God unto his end. He died at 950 years old.*

Genesis 12: God told Abram (Abraham) to go to a strange country. By **faith** Abram went to Canaan with his wife, household, and animals. By **faith** Abraham and Sarah had their son Isaac when they were very old. By **faith** Abraham did as God told him, taking Isaac up into the mountain to offer him as a sacrifice. God saw Abraham's **faith** and saved Isaac and brought a ram for the sacrifice instead. Abraham had **faith** and served God all his days. He lived 175 years. God made him a father of many nations just as He had promised.

Isaac married Rebekah, and their first children were twins, Esau and Jacob. Isaac lived in the land of the Philistines by **faith**, as God told him, *Sojourn (live) in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed (descendants), I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swear (promised) unto Abraham thy father. Genesis 26:3* Isaac's descendants were as many as the stars and he was very blessed. Isaac had **faith** and served God as his father Abraham did. He died at 180 years old.

By **faith** Jacob listened to his father who said he should NOT take a wife from the Canaanites but go to his father's people and find a wife. Laban, his father-in-law to be, tricked him into marrying his older daughter Leah. This did not please Jacob as he wanted to marry the younger daughter Rachel. He eventually married Rachel and they had two sons, Joseph and Benjamin. His wife Leah gave him ten sons. Leah's

sons did not like Joseph because their father treated him more favorably. Joseph dreamed that his brothers served him, and God was giving him these dreams. His brothers eventually sold him to some merchants going to Egypt. Joseph grew up in Pharaoh's house and learned the way of the Egyptians. God showed Joseph that a famine was coming, so Joseph had the workers save food for seven years. The famine was in all the land, so Jacob sent his sons (Leah's) to buy food in Egypt. None of them knew their brother was the man in charge, but after a few trips, Joseph told them that he was the brother they had sold many years before. The brothers were sorry and asked him to forgive them. Joseph held nothing against them and by **faith** he told them that though they did wrong against him, it was God that brought him to Egypt to save people's lives. His father and brothers moved from Canaan to live by Joseph, and he took care of them. His father Jacob had spent many years mourning for Joseph whom he thought had died. How happy he was to see Joseph again! Now he could die in peace. Jacob lived by **faith**, serving God until he died at 147 years old. Joseph lived by **faith** all his days and he died at 110 years old.

Exodus 1-2: The descendants of Jacob (called Israel), were living in Egypt under the rule of a new pharaoh. The Israelites grew in great numbers and the king was worried that in a time of war, the Israelites might join the enemy and fight against Pharaoh and his people. Taskmasters were set over the Israelites and made their lives very hard. Pharaoh ordered all the Hebrew baby boys killed, but the nurses who served God by **faith** would not hurt the babies. When Moses was born, his mother Jochebed had **faith** in God and wanted to keep him from being killed by Pharaoh's soldiers. When she could no longer keep Moses quiet, she put him in a basket by the river's edge while his sister watched from the grasses nearby. Jochebed had **faith** that God would protect her baby boy. Pharaoh's daughter found the Hebrew baby, and she wanted to keep him. Moses' sister Miriam asked Pharaoh's daughter if she could find someone to take care of the child for her. Miriam brought her mother Jochebed, who was paid to take care of her own son. What a happy day that was!

God called Moses to lead His people out of Egypt. By **faith** Moses called on God many times as they left Egypt and wandered 40 years in the wilderness. When the people cried for water, God told Moses to speak to a rock and water would come out. Moses hit the rock two times with his rod and water came out. It displeased God because He had told Moses to speak to the rock, and God told Moses that he would not go to the Promised Land. Moses saw the Promised Land from the top of Pisgah on Mount Nebo. Moses was 120 years old, his eyesight and strength were still good, but he died on the mountain and God buried him. Moses walked in **faith**.

All these people had **faith** in the promise of a Savior and will gain a crown of life in heaven. It will be the same for all who keep the **faith** and believe in Jesus. **Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...** (Acts 16:31) We have been given a promise of a beautiful life that will last forever.

I pray that God will keep each of you in His care, that He will strengthen you for every tough thing on your journey. Let us thank God for His care and all that He gives us. ~

The Revelation of God

Pastor Travis Seppala
Greer, South Carolina

Where there is no vision, the people perish...

Proverbs 29:18

THIS IS A POWERFUL STATEMENT. It's not talking about vision in terms we understand today. It's not speaking of a vision for the future, of the church, of a marriage, of how life is going to turn out, of how a business is going to exist, and it's not speaking of developing some vision of who God is. Rather, it's saying that if God doesn't give vision to His people, if He doesn't provide prophetic vision, they perish. This is very powerful, because we tend to think of prophetic vision as something that is pointing toward the future.

That's not what we find in the Scripture. Prophets weren't necessarily people that had the ability to foretell future events. Rather, prophets were messengers who were sent to God's people to give them a message from God. They were messengers. They were given the Word of God, and they brought this Word of God to the people. Prophetic vision was God making sure that the people knew what His Word was, and what His desire was. What this says is if the Lord does not reveal Himself, the people perish. Without the Lord making Himself known to the human race, the human race is undone and has no hope. I am overjoyed to announce that that's not the case, because we are not without vision. When we were in our fallen state, God did not abandon us in that fallen state. He did not forget us. He did not remove Himself from us, but rather He made Himself known. We read in the gospel of John of this very truth:



When [God] looks upon the earth, it trembles. When He touches the mountains, they smoke. And somehow, in some way, He is walking upon the earth in the person of Jesus Christ, and it's not falling apart.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (John 1:1-18)

John says to us that God has made Himself known. He has revealed Himself to the human race in the most unexpected

way, not in all of His glory and His power. Instead, He reveals Himself in the person of Jesus Christ, who was with Him from the very beginning. When John references *in the beginning* he's not speaking of before Christ got here, or at the beginning of their ministry, he's speaking of *in the beginning* in the same way that we read in the book of Genesis: *in the beginning*. Before anything was, there was the Word, and it was present with God and it was God. In the person of Christ, God entered the human race. He became a human being, and as a human He made Himself known to us. As the writer of Hebrews says, in diverse times and different ways God spoke to us through the Law and the Prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us through His Son Jesus Christ. He has revealed who He is. He has revealed His nature. He has revealed His identity in a human being—Jesus Christ, fully God and fully human. Jesus Christ is the One who actually formed the universe. He was present at the creation of this universe—not just present while it was going on, but He was actively involved with it. Nothing was made that exists

without Him. Creation itself is held together by Christ. This is who we encounter when Christ entered into creation. It's amazing that the God of this universe dwelt among us, that the Word became flesh—became a human being, and lived with us as a human, and spent time with us.

And He did the most unexpected things. In the Psalms we read of God and His power. When He looks upon the earth, it trembles. When He touches the mountains, they smoke. And somehow, in some way, He is walking upon the earth in the person of Jesus Christ, and it's not falling apart. Had He wanted to, He could have made the stones cry out for Him, the trees bow down, the mountains and valleys crumble in His midst. Choirs of angels would have followed wherever He went, if this is what He desired. People would have quaked at His presence and run in terror, understanding that they were in the presence of the living God. He doesn't do this. Rather, He enters this creation and ministers to us. He finds people who are blind and gives them sight. He finds people who have been marginalized by society—the sinners, the tax collectors, the sick—and heals them. He eats with them; He spends time with them. He communes with them. He treats them like brother and sister. Everything He did on this earth was the will of His Father in heaven. He ate with sinners and publicans because that's what God desired Him to do. He healed the broken and sick, and had compassion on them, because God desired Him to. This is what His Father desired.

And God reveals Himself, time and time again, throughout the life of Jesus. He reveals Himself as a loving Father who has not held our iniquities against us, who has not held our faults and failings against us, but has sent His Son to rescue us. Jesus Christ entered into the world, and the world didn't realize or recognize that they were in the presence of the living God. They rejected Him, and were not



rejected by Him. God did not rain down retribution for their treatment of His Son. In fact, for anybody who believed in Him, He gave them the power—the right—to become the children of God. This is what God was doing! He sent His Son Jesus Christ so that we become children of God. We have the right to be children of God because God has given us this right. It is a divine right, etched in eternity, and no power in heaven or hell ever has the right to question it. Our identity has been sealed by the work of this Man. This Man was not simply making God known in an intellectual way, so people could know who God was. He was showing us who God was, because He was the very face of God.

With Him comes grace for grace, grace upon grace, more grace than we know what to do with. Through Moses, we have the Law, but through Jesus Christ we have been given grace and truth. We live out our existence understanding that that's why we can celebrate. We can be overjoyed, not because we know who God is, not because He has revealed Himself, but in the miraculous way in which He has revealed Himself. He has made known to us that He loves us, that He cares for us, that He has not abandoned us. He is willing to go to a place that none of us are willing to go to rescue the

human race. The love that God has for us goes beyond our comprehension, and can only be trusted by faith. People say that God is reasonable and logical, but that's not true. There's nothing reasonable, nothing logical, about Him sending His Son to die on our behalf in the midst of our hatred for Him. And yet, He does it. And in so doing, He demonstrates His divine nature and grace and truth to us, and makes known to us that we are His children. We have been bought with a price. We bear that identity with the full knowledge that our sins have been forgiven, that righteousness is ours by faith, that God has sent His Son into the world and He has redeemed us.

If this message becomes boring to us, the problem is not with the message; the problem is with us. This should never get old. The Gospel is something we should never tire of. We should never get tired of knowing that the One who created this universe loves us. He's aware of our circumstances, of our frame, of where we are in our lives, and He has not abandoned us. He has sent His Son to die for us. Because of the work of Jesus Christ, because of His death, Jesus can make this incredible promise: If someone believes on Him, they can never die. We have been given victory through the power of His resurrection. ~

Be Reconciled to God

Paul Kretzmann



Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

PAUL, THEREFORE, FILLED WITH THE GLORY of these divine facts, sends forth his ringing invitation: In behalf of Christ, then, we are ambassadors, as though God were entreating through us. Christ's representatives they are, bringing the Word, the offer of reconciliation to men, the earnest entreaty of God to accept His mercy and grace in Christ Jesus: We pray you in behalf of Christ, Be reconciled to God! What a strange situation: The holy, righteous God, who has been insulted times without number by the countless sins of the men of all times, begs for reconciliation; the almighty, jealous God, who is able to punish every sin with the condemnation of hell, offers instead the fullness of His love and everlasting life and bliss! That surely is a mystery of the Gospel beyond all understanding; that is a message which should impress the most hardened sinner with the unutterable glory of the love of God. And lest anyone have doubts as to the fact of reconciliation, as to the possibility of a full and complete atonement under such conditions, the apostle explains the miracle in one sentence: Him who knew not sin for us He made sin, in order that we might become righteousness of God in Him. In this way was the miracle of the atonement brought about. God Himself sent His own Son, who was perfectly sinless and holy, to whose nature all contradiction and opposition to the will of God was utterly strange, who was pure and holy also in the sight of God, and laid upon Him the iniquity of the whole world (Isaiah 53:6), He made Him to be sin on our behalf. The transgressions were laid upon Him, the guilt was imputed to Him; He was the representative of the whole world's sin, the greatest malefactor that ever lived on earth, all by virtue of His vicarious work. And so perfect was the expiation, so complete the propitiation, that we have become, in turn, the righteousness of God in Him. For the sake of Christ we are now looked upon as being as holy and perfect as the very Son of God Himself, with not a single fault or flaw to condemn us, with not a single transgression charged to our account. That is, in brief, the wonderful summary of the message of reconciliation, that is the Gospel which the ministers of the Lord are to proclaim in the fullness of its beauty and glory, that is the invitation they should extend to all men without the slightest restriction. And we, in turn, should accept the glorious news in the spirit in which it was offered, and be sure, on our part, henceforth not to live unto ourselves, but unto Him that died for us and rose again. ~

He Was Forsaken

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

*Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. 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?** (Matthew 27:45-46) And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, **My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?** (Mark 15:33-34)*

The gospel writers Matthew and Mark each record the words of Jesus from the cross when He cries loudly the opening words of Psalm 22: **My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?**

FROM ETERNITY PAST, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one God in three Persons—had been in constant communion. Jesus told Philip that whoever sees Him has seen the Father, and in the high priestly prayer Jesus said that He and the Father were one. The union of the godhead was complete and perfect from forever ago.

God was pleased with His Son. At the Baptism of our Lord, the voice of the Father proclaimed from heaven, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” and the Holy Spirit descended as a dove to rest on Jesus. At the Transfiguration, the brightness of God’s glory overshadowed the witnesses, and the voice of the Father again declared His pleasure in His beloved Son.

But at the cross, the Son has taken upon Himself the sin of the world. He is no longer innocent. He had never sinned, but the sin of all humanity rests upon Him now. The judgment of the Father is poured out on His only Son, His beloved. Jesus drains the cup of the Father’s wrath, the cup that is rightfully ours.

Creation itself can’t abide this desecration. The sun hides its face in the middle of the day; the darkness is complete.

To be forsaken of the Father is to be more alone than anything we could imagine. It is to be cursed, damned,

without hope. This is the horror of standing before the righteous God as a condemned sinner. This agony drags the cry from lips that had only ever spoken truth, from the depths of the Redeemer’s heart, **My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?**

Why? Because of you. Because of me. Because without a Mediator, without a Redeemer, we would stand before the righteous God, condemned and alone. We would be forsaken of God, rejected, without hope, bearing the curse of our sin.



Jesus Alone on the Cross James Tissot
Wikimedia Commons

And God was pleased with the sacrifice of His Son. The debt of sin was paid and the Father’s wrath was satisfied. The prophet Isaiah wrote: *Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any*

deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:4-12)

Jesus was forsaken so that we would never be forsaken. Because of the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising its shame. You and I were the joy that was before His eyes. ~

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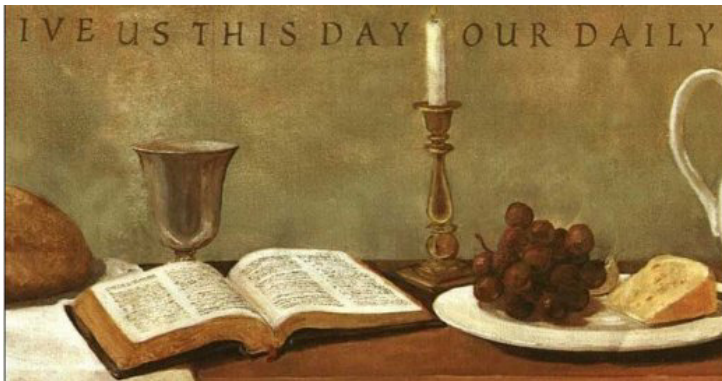
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Daily Bread

Pastor Jason Salmi
Vancouver, Washington



THERE'S AN OLD SAYING WHICH is generally accepted that, "familiarity breeds contempt." That is to say that we can lose respect for someone or something because we know them so well. And this seems to be a universal condition that, as people, we diminish the value of something when it's always there. We just come to expect it. We tend to take notice of the new, the exciting, the unexpected.

Even when we read God's Word, we tend to be more interested in the unusual ways that God works. For instance, there are stories of unexpected ways that God provided for people.

When the people of Israel had come out of Egypt, they had

left behind their only means of securing food. As God led them through the wilderness, they had no homes, no gardens, no fields. In fact, there were so many of them that it would be impossible to hunt and forage enough food for them to eat. So they began to grumble that it would have been better if they had remained as slaves. At least then they wouldn't starve.

God heard their complaint and, rather than punishing them for doubting Him (even after they had seen the miracles that He had performed), He promised to feed them. When they woke up each morning, there was bread (manna) on the ground. They had only to pick it up to eat as much as they needed. It appeared as dew every morning and then melted as the sun grew warm. In this very unusual way, God fed His people for years.

Later, an evil king would rise to power in Israel. His name was Ahab and he sinned greatly against God and he led the people into sin. God sent the prophet Elijah to bring His word to Ahab. God had decreed that, at Elijah's word, there would be no dew or rain. And the rain would not fall again until Elijah spoke. Needless to say, this didn't sit well with Ahab, so the Lord brought Elijah out into the wilderness to protect him.

Elijah was brought to a brook where he would have all the water he needed. But, like the people of Israel in the wilderness, he had no means of getting food for himself. God had foreseen this and commanded ravens to bring bread and meat to Elijah every morning and evening. Imagine having birds bring food to you!

Still later, Jesus and His disciples would cross the Sea of Galilee to have some respite from the crowds that followed wherever He went. But the crowds found Him even there. And once more people were in the wilderness with nowhere to get food. And just as He had before, God provided. Jesus took a few loaves and a couple of fish and proceeded to give food to thousands of people, until everyone had all that they could eat. And when they all had their fill, there was more food left over than when they had begun!

Each of these stories hold our attention because we can see God working in ways that we can't understand. In ways that people did not expect. However, this is not the only way that God works. Sometimes God works through miracles that grab our attention. Sometimes He works in the most ordinary of ways. Ways that we see so often, that we take them for granted.

In the middle of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to ask for daily bread. Now I'd venture to guess that none of us have had bread appear on our front lawn with the dew. Nor have we had ravens deliver it to us. And Jesus is not dividing loaves and fishes for us. But God is still the One who provides what we need.

It's helpful to understand that, when we pray for daily bread, we are asking for more than just bread. In our Catechism, we learn that, "Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like."

These are the things that God uses to sustain our lives. But these things are so familiar to us, that we can easily lose sight that they have been given by God. It would be easy to remember to praise God and thank Him if He provided for us in some miraculous way. But we must also remember to thank Him when He provides in these very common ways.

Praise God for His bountiful blessings.