

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.

October 2017

The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

The Reformation #5*

Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller

THE REFORMATION IS A MATTER OF GOD'S WORD. Really it is nothing more (and nothing less) than the Word of the Lord ringing out clearly in Law and Gospel, and our celebration of the Reformation today is meant for us, that we would continue to rejoice that God's Word is preached and taught clearly, and that the Gospel is heard in all of its comfort and peace.

Reformation
Five Hundred Years 1517-2017

So here's a question to get us started: Which Scripture passage best encapsulates the teaching of the Reformation? Think about it a bit. If you were asked what passage in the Bible best explains Lutheran teaching, which one would you say?

Perhaps John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Or (and I think this is the one most of you would pick) Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace we are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, that no man may boast."

Well, how about we try on this text, Habakkuk 2:4, for our first lesson today: "The righteous shall live by faith." It just so happens that this is the particular text in which the Reformation breaks loose.

The story is like this. Early in the 15th century there was an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther who was sure that God hated him, and he hated God right back. It wasn't that he wasn't trying to get on God's good side, oh he was trying; he just about killed himself trying, but he couldn't do it, and he despised this God who was supposed to be good, but demanded such perfection that he could never attain it. Let's have Luther tell us the story himself; he will be our preacher for a few minutes this morning.

(This comes from his introduction to his Latin Works.)

I had conceived a burning desire to understand what Paul meant in his Letter to the Romans, but thus far there had stood in my way, not the cold blood around my heart, but that one word which is in chapter one: "The righteousness of God is revealed in it [that is: in the Gospel]." I hated that word, "righteousness of God," which, by the use and custom of all my teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically as referring to formal or active righteousness, as they call it, i.e., that righteousness by which God is just and by which He punishes sinners and the unjust.

[You see that Luther thought that righteousness here was something God demanded, works. He continues:]

But I, blameless monk that I was, felt that before God I was a sinner with an extremely troubled conscience. I couldn't be sure that God was appeased by my satisfaction. I did not love, no, rather I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. In silence, if I did not blaspheme, then certainly I grumbled vehemently and got angry at God. I said, "Isn't it enough that we miserable sinners, lost for all eternity because of original sin, are oppressed by every kind of calamity through the Ten Commandments? Why does God heap sorrow upon sorrow through the Gospel and through the Gospel threaten us with His righteousness and His wrath?" This was how I was raging with wild and disturbed conscience. I constantly badgered Paul about that spot in Romans 1 and anxiously wanted to know what he meant.

I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: "The righteousness of God is revealed in it, as it is written: 'The righteous person lives by faith.'"

[Here comes our friend Habakkuk to the rescue. You heard it, right? Paul quotes Habakkuk here, and Luther, paying attention to these words, is now set free from thinking righteousness is something demanded, and begins to understand that righteousness is something given as a gift. Luther continues:]

I began to understand that in this verse the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous person lives by a gift of God, that is: by faith. I began to understand that this verse means that the righteousness of God is revealed through the Gospel, but it is a passive, i.e. that by which the merciful God justifies us by, as it is written: "The righteous person lives by faith." All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scriptures in a different light. I ran through the Scriptures from memory and found that other terms had analogous meanings, e.g., the work of God, that is, what God works in us; the power of God, by which He makes us powerful; the wisdom of God, by which He makes us wise; the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.

I exalted this sweetest word of mine, "the righteousness of God," with as much love as before I had hated it with hate.

This event is often called Luther's "Tower Experience." Why "tower"? I don't know. But did you hear how Luther himself told how he discovered the Gospel:

I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: "The righteousness of God is revealed in it, as it is written: 'The righteous person lives by faith.'"

This isn't a question of God showing up in front of Luther and giving him some new insight, or God speaking to his heart. No, rather he paid attention to the words of the Scripture, and there it was, right under his nose (Praise God, right under our nose as well): "The righteous shall live by faith." [Habakkuk 2:4]

Well, it's good for us, then, to understand what this verse means. It is answering the question: How is one righteous? How are they righteous? Are we made righteous by doing, by working, by earning God's favor?

This is what Luther thought when he hated God and despised His Word. This is also, by the way, the foundation of every false religion and false doctrine: that we are righteousness by doing and acting and working and earning, that it is our will and our own actions that make us holy and righteous. This is also the bane of our sinful flesh: we want to please God by our doing, keeping the law, all this. You guys have a sinful flesh like me; you know the drill. We always want to make ourselves pleasing to God by our own efforts, or by hiding our sin. But this leads only to pride or despair. The Scriptures teach another way: the righteous life by faith.

It is not our doing that makes us righteous, it is our believing, believing the promise that Jesus died for our sins, suffered in our place and took all the punishment and wrath and hell that we deserve. The righteous life by faith. Our faith, our believing, the Lord accounts as righteousness, He imputes His holiness, He declares us forgiven.

This, dear saints, is not a sermon about Martin Luther. Luther did not die for us. We were not baptized in the name of Martin Luther. This is not Luther's church; it is Jesus' church. It is He who put His name on you with His water; Jesus alone died for you. It is Jesus, and His blood, and His righteousness, and His living a perfect life and dying our death and resurrecting from the grave that gives us righteousness and peace and holiness and hope and eternal life.

And all of these things He promises and gives in His life-giving Word. The Reformation is a matter of God's Word. Really it is nothing more (and nothing less) than the Word of the Lord ringing out clearly in Law and Gospel, and our celebration of the Reformation today is meant for us, that we would continue to rejoice that God's Word is preached and taught clearly, and that the Gospel is heard in all of its comfort and peace, and that we would rejoice, world without end, that the righteous shall live by faith. Amen.

[*Editor's Note: This is the fifth in a series celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Previous articles told how the printing press allowed for greater distribution of printed materials, and how there was desperate need for reformation in the Church. The Lord led Dr. Martin Luther to the Word, planting a seed that would grow into a tree. Last month the Luther Rose was described, and three *solas* of the Reformation.]



The Sower Jean-François Millet
Wikimedia Commons

And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Matthew 13:3-9

WE MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO SEE THE SOWER as foolhardy and careless, but this is not true. The sower is generous, and he sows the seed liberally with the hope that the seeds will bear fruit. What a beautiful picture of the graciousness of our Heavenly Father! God desires that all people would come to repentance and faith in the person and work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. God does not view any seed as going to waste, because every life is precious to Him. We are so precious to Him that He sacrificed His Son Jesus, so that by His shed blood, we would have the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

*Pastor Chuck Bylkas
South Range, Michigan*

The School of the Holy Spirit

Dr. Uuras Saarnivaara
Excerpts, October & November 1947 CM

WE ARE NOT ABLE OF OUR OWN REASON and strength to believe in Christ and understand the will and ways of God; for that, we need the teaching and enlightening work of the Holy Spirit.

1. What does the Holy Spirit teach?

When the Spirit of God begins to teach a person He first teaches him to know his own sins and his lost condition, and works repentance in his heart. This He does through the Law. Then the Spirit teaches him through the Gospel to know Christ and the forgiveness of sins in His atoning blood and gives him a new, believing and obedient heart; and when the person has become a Christian, the Holy Spirit guides him and leads him to the knowledge of all the truth and of the will and ways of God. The Spirit also gives him understanding and power to testify for Christ and to work for the spreading of the kingdom of God through winning souls to Christ.

2. How does the Holy Spirit teach?

The Spirit of God teaches outwardly and inwardly. Outwardly He teaches through the Word which is written in the Bible and which is taught and spoken by Christians. He also uses the experiences of man himself. Inwardly the Spirit makes this outward teaching alive, and opens the heart to understand it and to put it into practice. The outward teaching is always the first thing, and then the inward one follows. The Holy Spirit does not give His teaching directly and immediately to the heart. He does not work knowledge of sin without the Law, neither does He work faith in the forgiveness of sins and the knowledge of the grace of God without the Gospel preached in the Christian Church. And the Spirit does not teach Christians to know the will and ways of God except through the Word of the Bible and the teaching given by other Christians. The Christian's own experience makes such teaching conceivable and practical to him.

Therefore all Christians should be diligent in studying the Scriptures and in speaking with other Christians of the Word of God and the wayfaring toward heaven, as well as of the work of the kingdom of God. We learn new things when we study the Word and discuss with our brothers and sisters in faith the things belonging to our Christianity.

The Holy Spirit has always used various kinds of schools in leading people to the knowledge of the divine truth. We know how much the Spirit has taught us in Sunday and Confirmation schools, and how much we have learned in Bible classes. Many Christians are thankful for the summer schools which they attended as children. All these schools should be cherished and cared for more than has been done.

Sunday School teachers and preachers can never think that they know the will and ways of God well enough, and that they are fully learned in the Word of God and sufficiently skillful in their work. They feel that they need more knowledge of the Word of God and that they also need help and guidance in order that they may be able to better perform their tasks. No Sunday School teacher or preacher, except one who is puffed up in his own mind, can think that he does not need such help. Of course, not all can acquire special training, and may God bless the work of those who serve as preachers and ministers without it. When a believing teacher leads others in their study of the Word of God and of

the things belonging to the work of the kingdom, the Holy Spirit is the inward teacher. He uses as His means the Word of God and the servant of God who is called to act as teacher, but at the same time the Spirit teaches inwardly. Such combination of outward and inward teaching is always present in the school of the Holy Spirit.

How to Read the Bible

The children of God have at all times loved to study the Scriptures, which is the Word of God for us. In the Scriptures,

God reveals to us His good and gracious will, and by studying we learn more of the blessed truths of the kingdom and our salvation. In order that you may receive more blessings from your study of the Word of God, we give here a few counsels derived from the experiences of many Christians.

1. Read the Bible every day. Make it your habit to dedicate a certain time every day for studying the Word of God. Go to your room and study it when alone. Stick to the rule to set apart at least half an hour a day for the study of the Bible, either in the morning before you do anything else, or in the night before you go to bed. If you do not stick to a definite time which you dedicate to the study of the Word, the devil will take care of making you so busy that you seldom will have time for it.

2. When you read passages in which God rebukes of sin, search your heart and life in the light of that Word. If you find out that you have sinned, confess it to God, ask for pardon in the name and blood of Christ, and pray God for His help that you may put away that sin and avoid it.

3. When you read the promises of God, ask for the help of the Spirit of God that you may be able to believe them; also pray that God may fulfill His promises in you. When God promises the forgiveness of sins, pray Him for His help to believe it. When He promises His Holy Spirit, ask Him to fulfill His promise in you; when God promises to lead, guide and keep, ask Him to do so in your life too, and so forth.

4. When you read the commandments of God, pray for the help of the Spirit of God that you may be able to obey Him and live according to His commandments. Say to God as Augustine did: "God, demand of me whatever Thou wilt, but give me what Thou demandest." We are not able by our own power and strength to live as God's believing and obedient children. We need that God work in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13) ~



Dr. Uuras Saarnivaara (1908-1998) was a prominent Finnish theologian, teacher and writer. He, together with Rev. Kenneth Hendrickson and Dr. Albert Saari, founded the Inter-Lutheran Theological Seminary.

Precious Daughter Rescued from the Devil

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children here at home, across this great land and in faraway lands,

Hello to you all. I pray your day is going well. Many families these past months have lost homes due to fire, flooding, tornadoes, etc., and forest fires are still raging. Many of you may have heard of Hurricane Harvey in the Gulf of Mexico, which destroyed SO many homes and businesses, and flooded much of the land in a few states. One thing is sure: God is in control even in this. It is a hard time for many and we must pray for these situations and for the safety of all the volunteers, firefighters, first responders, police, mayors, and the government, who are trying hard to help.

We should thank God also if we are not bothered by the elements of weather, or hunger, and if we have a roof over our heads and food to eat.

The Bible tells us in **Romans 8:18: For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.** When Jesus is our Savior we can have such amazing peace in our hearts and when we die we get to live forever with Him. NOTHING compares to that.

I want to share with you an account of one who suffered but was saved by Jesus, from *Mark 7:24-30*.

JESUS WAS OUT PREACHING TO THE PEOPLE and was at this time on the borders of Tyre and Sidon. He entered into a house hoping no one would know He was there (He probably wanted to rest), BUT He was found out. He just could not get away from the people.

There was a certain woman there who had a daughter, and this girl had an unclean spirit (a devil). The woman found Jesus and asked urgently of Him that He would cast the devil out of her daughter.

But Jesus said unto her, *Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs.* (This woman, being a Greek, was not considered as one of God's children but compared rather to a dog.) But Jesus could see she had faith and was testing her by what He said.

And she answered and said unto him, "Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs. (She agreed with Jesus, but added that she being so unworthy would even desire a little taste of Jesus' love and mercy for her daughter and for herself, even a crumb.)

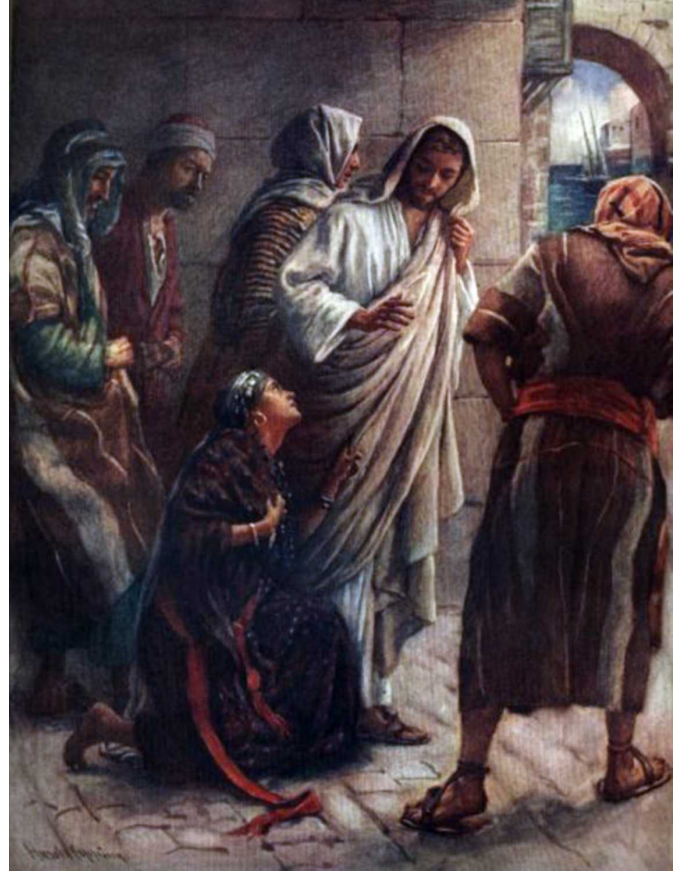
Seeing her unwavering faith and that she truly desired of Him that which she asked, Jesus said to her, "For this saying (about the dogs under the table) go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter."

Oh how happy that mother was to hear those words! I'm certain she went quickly to her daughter and when she went into her house, THERE was her daughter lying on a bed and the devil was GONE out of her.

Her daughter was whole, and just as normal as could be. Jesus' words were true and I know that woman grew even more in her faith at that moment. Oh, the joy that was in that home that day and for many days, months, and possibly years to come.

Just as Jesus saved this girl from the devil, He died to save all mankind from the devil and offered up His own life to

make that possible. He came into the world that all might have life eternal and no more did the people of the earth have to be separated from God and Jesus' love, if only one would believe in Him.



Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding.

He giveth power to the faint ; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall :

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings as eagles ; they shall run, and not be weary ; they shall walk, and not faint. Isaiah 40:28-31

I pray that each of you will always look to Jesus who is your strength; He will carry you. He loves you more than can be written on paper. Take the name of Jesus with you everywhere you go.

For those of you who have started yet another school year, I pray that you will ask Jesus to guide you every day and only serve Him with your life. The world out there would like to lead you away from Jesus, but keep praying to God for His strong hand to keep you safe.

God be with you today and throughout this school year.
God's peace.

Luther Speaks

Martin Luther

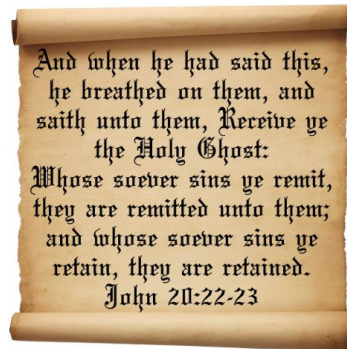
Submitted by John Matson; October 1959 CM

"...As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you ... Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."

John 20:21, 23

CHRIST DECLARES THAT HE SENDS His disciples in the same manner as He was sent. He entrusts to them the office of preaching, that it may remain in force even to the end of time, and He orders them to preach just as He preached while in the flesh. The disciples are instructed to preach no other doctrine than that which Christ Himself proclaimed. The functions of the office of the ministry are therefore these, to preach the Gospel of Christ and forgive sins to the penitent, despairing souls, but on the other hand, to retain them to the impenitent and unbelieving. Every apostle, and every minister of the Gospel, is authorized to proclaim unto the sinners who will not repent and are obstinately wicked, that they are in the clutches of the devil and will be surely thrust into the jaws of hell; on the other hand, it is equally a part of their office to assure the penitent and believers that, because of the sufferings and resurrection of Christ, heaven and eternal life will be theirs.

This privilege and authority which the apostles have, yea, which every Christian has, to pronounce judgment respecting sin, is of such vast importance that all the powers of emperors and kings are as nothing compared with it. For this declaration is as powerful and sure as if Christ Himself proclaimed it; for thus He says, *"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."* Yea, the sins of the whole world are thus under the control of the apostles and of all ministers of the Gospel, even of every Christian in case of necessity; so that we can be fully assured of the forgiveness of our sins when our pastor, or, in case of his absence, when any Christian declares it unto us in the name of Jesus Christ. Such a declaration will be as valid as if Christ were personally present to pronounce it...



It is not their own power which they exercise; they are simply servants of God to bring help to other fellow men, to rescue them from the mighty thralldom of the enemy of their souls' salvation. It is a great and glorious achievement when a man, himself a poor, miserable sinner, exercises this power and puts to flight an enemy so strong that otherwise the whole world combined could not route him. Christ says, *"... Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them;"* and again, *"... Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."* (Matthew 18:18) Since then these words, *"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you,"* are so plain, no one should doubt that his sins are really forgiven as soon as the absolution is pronounced.

For this reason we so frequently exhort you to apply these glorious gifts which Christ has left to His Church and never to despise them. Christ has instituted the office of the ministry to battle against sin and remit it wherever it really exists and is confessed in true faith.

Nowhere else but in the words of Christ our Savior can we find forgiveness of our sins. Go for this purpose wherever else you please; you will surely go amiss. Whoever now desires remission of sins, let him go to his minister or to some other fellow Christian who has God's Word, and he will surely find consolation there. He whose sins are not remitted by this Word, because he hears it not, has them retained by the same Word—for this is the only means whereby sins are effectively dealt with.

The Lord our God made forgiveness of sins contingent only on the great work which Christ accomplished when He died for the world, and for our benefit arose from the dead. The application of this, His work, He makes through the Word which He entrusted to the apostles, to the ministers of the Gospel, yea, to every Christian, authorizing them to declare unto all who seek it the remission of sins.

Thus we have pointed out the only way in which we can surely find remission of sins. If we seek it not there, our sins will be retained, do what we may—for there is no remission of sins except in the Word of Christ. ~

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And 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. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

Matthew 16:13-20

THE ANSWERS THAT [JESUS] RECEIVED to His question, "Who do men say that I am?" were good answers. They showed that the people revered Him, that they showed Him respect, but they were all wrong. The scribes and the chief priests and the elders did not believe who Jesus was; they didn't revere Him, they didn't respect Him. The people did, but they were wrong in their answers... Who do we say that He is? Do we say that He is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, our Redeemer? He is the Messiah, the One who came into this world and gave His life to pay the sin debt that no one else could ever pay so that we might live.

Doug Saukkola; Kingston, Minnesota

The Chastisement of the Lord

Pastor V. A. Juntunen
October 1995 CM

My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.

IT IS EASY TO SAY TO SOMEONE who is sorrowful, "Don't be anxious and worry. Do not weep." It is also possible to find an appropriate Bible passage with which to encourage a person undergoing trials and to tell him, "Read this and seek comfort in your difficulties." But it is much more difficult for us to appropriate to ourselves even the most glorious counsel in the Word of God. If something that seems like an irreparable loss occurs in our lives and our hearts are filled with deep sorrow, we then experience that which the apostle describes when he says: *Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous...* (Hebrews 12:11)

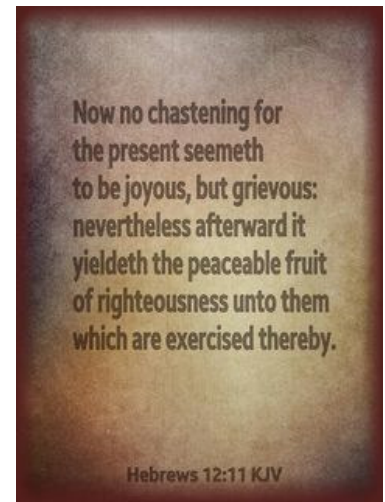
It is a common experience under difficult trials that we are not able to rise above our deep sorrows. Our heads are bowed down. We become dispirited and are inclined to give up. We are not able to see our heavenly Father's hand in our trials—that hand which then holds us even more securely than at other times in our lives. If only we could understand that the chastisement of the Lord is evidence of His boundless love. The Lord's apostle reassured the Hebrew congregation that whom the Lord loves, He chastens (Hebrew 12:6).

The Lord's loving chastisement belongs to the one who is traveling toward the heavenly rest. ...*What son is he whom the father chasteneth not?* asks the apostle, and then he answers ... *but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.* (Hebrews 12:7, 10)

Dear striving Christian, in many ways you may be anxious, tempted and tried by the Lord's chastisement. Lift up your eyes. Do not give up even though your strength appears to have reached its limit. Seek your Father in prayer and ask for His help. *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* (James 5:16)

By faith you will overcome and win the victory. When we persevere under trials, we will also exchange the cross for a crown. Jesus lives! He is the Author of our faith; He has worked faith in our hearts. He can strengthen us in faith, so that we may retain the hope of eternal life. He will also be the Finisher of our faith in the great day of His second coming. Then faith will be changed to sight.

Lord of love, lead Your children through the sufferings of this present time and into that victorious multitude which will praise You. ~



The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Psalm 23



THE SHEPHERD-CHARACTER OF OUR LORD Jesus Christ is delightful to contemplate. We were all as sheep going astray, until through grace we are returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (1 Peter 2:25). But we would never have returned at all unless He in His love had sought and found us (Luke 15:4-7). Now having made us His own, He undertakes to carry us safely home. He makes Himself responsible to supply all our needs; to guide us through this desert scene and to see that we have everything our souls require in order that we may grow in grace and glorify Him in all our ways. Surely the least we can do is to rely upon His love and wisdom and thus be able to say with happy confidence, "I shall not want."

H.A. Ironside

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Anders Sundqvist, Business Manager



Our Refuge and Strength

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

To the chief Musician for the sons of Korah, A Song upon Alamoth.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she

shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

Psalms 46:1-11

PSALM 46 WAS MARTIN LUTHER'S INSPIRATION when he penned the great hymn sometimes called "The Battle Hymn of the Reformation." This translation of *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* is slightly different than the one in our hymnal. Sometimes reading a different translation helps me ponder the words afresh.

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe; His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing; Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He; Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth; The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

Martin Luther

When the flood of mortal ills (our sin) threatens to devour us, God is our Refuge. Our Mighty Fortress protects us even from ourselves, giving shelter from the storms that threaten us within and without.

Our old foe (the devil) is crafty and strong, and he seeks our destruction, but God is our greater Strength. God is present HERE and NOW, at this very moment. Our own strength will not avail against the fiery darts of the devil, but the Right Man, Jesus the Christ, is on our side. He has paid our debt, purchased and won us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. The battle is won!

This world threatens to undo us, but our Bulwark is the Lord God; therefore we will not fear. He has overcome the world, and He will sustain us every day of our lives.

One little Word overthrows the prince of darkness. Jesus, the Word, has conquered in the strife, and His Spirit will abide with us forever. We need not live in fear, for the devil has been defeated. We feel the heat of his rage, but we can endure it because his doom is sealed. Our Lord, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, takes our side and gives us His good gifts.

Nothing in this mortal world can take away our peace. If we lose all earthly goods, family and friends, even our own lives, God's truth still remains. His kingdom is forever! A Mighty Fortress is our God, and we can trust His good care for us.

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

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HAVE YOU MOVED? Please notify the Book Concern of address changes. We must pay return postage on undelivered mail.

THE LYRICS OF MARTIN LUTHER'S most widely known hymn reflect his inmost trust in the faithfulness of God. The words are inspired by Psalm 46 that depicts all the earth crumbling but God remaining steadfast. This seems to be a concept that all who profess faith in Christ possess; they believe that regardless of their circumstance God remains faithful. It is this great trust that allows them to function in this world because they understand that God is capable and willing to direct their steps in this world, to keep them on the right path and to correct them if they go astray. God has used His marvelous trust to bring forth great things from ordinary people for many centuries and He continues to do so. There is no greater force on earth than a yielded vessel in His hand. He speaks this way of kings (e.g. Nebuchadrezzar and Cyrus), judges (Gideon), prophets (Amos), and apostles (Peter). All of these became great only because God so willed that they be and He used them for His purpose and led them by the hand. Thus God accomplished His will and made a name of all of the aforementioned people.

It is inspiring to see what God can and does accomplish through frail human beings, but it is even more important to realize what lies behind this trust. It is God. God by nature is trustworthy. One may place one's trust in God and know that He cannot fail. This is His promise as depicted in *Psalm 46:10*—



11: Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge.

Our difficulty comes when we begin to believe the mindless chatter about God in this world instead of growing silent before Him and hearing Him. This causes us to fear and despair every step and to grow distressed about what the future may bring because we are not hearing the reassuring voice of the Father who holds the future in His hand but trusting in our own thoughts. For this reason God calls us from our own imaginings to hearken to His voice. It is He alone that reigns; He is with us and He is our refuge. "Jesus calls us o'er the tumult." It is He that says, "Follow me." This alone gives us strength to abide, for it is He that is our fortress, our stay and our trust and He reigns forever. May God grant us so great a faith, for Jesus' sake. ~

*Pastor Jay Weidner
Laurium, Michigan*

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:51-57

Soon Thou wilt come—oh, blest anticipation!—
And we shall gaze unhindered on Thy face'
Our longing hope shall have its glad fruition,
And in those wounds we shall love's story trace.

O cloudless morn of heavenly light and gladness,
When God Himself shall wipe all tears away!
There shall be no more death and no more sadness,
No trace of sin through God's eternal day.

J.W.H. Nichols