

TABLE TALK

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 ...these words... shall be upon your heart; you shall
 teach them... and talk of them... Deut. 6:6,7



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THE ANNUAL LMS CONFERENCE AND CONVENTION REPORT

by Rev. Mark
Dankof



The Annual Conference and Convention of the Lutheran Ministerium and Synod-USA opened with public worship at Christ Lutheran Church in Chetek, Wisconsin on Friday, June 22, 2013. The Reverend Robert Bibbee's sermon on Matthew 28:18-20 effectively brought the Word of God to the Biblical faithful who gathered for the worship of the Triune God and for fellowship with one another.

The National Conference and Convention theme was "***Chosen by God.***"

Saturday, June 22, began the se-

ries of five (5) presentations which concluded on Sunday, June 23rd. These included the **Reverend Doctor John Erickson's** address entitled, *The Sovereignty of God: Who is in Charge?*; **Reverend Doctor Ralph Spears** on *How Do We Respond? What Shall Man Do To Be Saved?*; **Reverend Jeffrey A. Iverson's** *The Lutheran Understanding of Chosen: The Election Controversy in Midwestern Lutheranism and its Lasting Ramifications*; **Reverend Tylan Dalrymple's** *A Practical Application: My Faith Experience in Being*

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'Chosen'; and Sunday's final seminar module by the **Reverend Donald Thorson**, entitled *Words and Works of Jesus*, a compelling comparison of the understanding of the Word of God found in the Minneapolis Theses (1925) with that of 19th and 20th century advocates of higher Biblical criticism.



Rev. Robert Bibbee, the preacher for our gathering's opening service of Holy Communion.

Pastor Erickson's Presentation

One (1), emphasized that **"from the Biblical viewpoint, 'it is impossible to give a strict definition of the idea of God. To define means to limit. . . . the Biblical God is unique and incomparable'** [Robert L. Saucy's *The Doctrine of God the Father*]." The Biblical Christian, for Erickson, turns to the Biblical narrative for his or her information about God and His identity and actions in history, as the Synod President described it in the opening presentation by stating that, **"In the Bible - God's self-revelation to man - God has put into human language, and He has put enough into human language, that we can know all we need to know about Himself."**

This self-revelation includes the disclosures that God is Holy, and concurrently Sovereign and Transcendent. In this regard, Erickson warned the LMS-USA faithful about the **"open theism" movement** within Protestant Evangelicalism in the last quarter of a century, and its linkage with the older **"process theology"** in an alliance designed to challenge the conventional, historic understanding of God. Both of these movements are fueled by **evolution-**

ary dogma, and contradicted by the self-disclosure of the Biblical God that He is in control of all things, including Creation, earthly



Synod president, Rev. Dr. John Erickson, presenter, session one.

rulers, human affairs, the invisible and visible worlds, and even human decisions.

This sovereignty of God includes **the Gospel of God**, the declaration of God that sinners are

righteous because of the passive and active obedience of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. In this regard, Pastor Erickson focused on the key question in all of humanity history: *"How can God be true to His own nature, and how can God, without compromising His own holiness, justice, and truth - and as our judge - pass a sentence of acquittal, and accept us as sinners . . . by declaring us to be perfectly and absolutely righteous in His sight?"*

The key for the LMS-USA Synod chief is that, "If you **know** the answer to this question, you know the Gospel. If you have **experienced** the answer to this question, you have experienced the Gospel. Insofar as you **compromise** on the answer, to that degree you are **in ignorance** of the Gospel." The fact that God has made Salvation possible for all in His Son, Jesus Christ, is linked to His sovereignty. And His sovereignty eliminates any synergistic cooperation on the part of man, in the plan of God for individual salvation and eternal life.

LMS Ministerium President Ralph Spears followed in Presentation Two (2) with a seminar billed

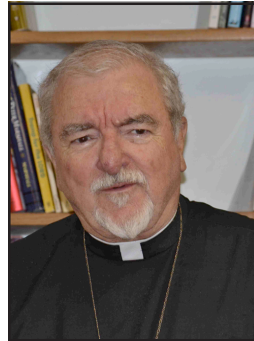
as, "How Do We Respond: What Shall Man Do To Be Saved?"

In the Spears analysis, the theological categories and Biblical mysteries inherent in Creation, prophecy, eschatology, resurrection, foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, sanctification, glorification, election, free will, tongues, the nature of Christ's presence in the Sacrament, grace, and forgiveness, were analyzed with relevant Biblical passages and developments in the debates of the centuries in church history.

But the Pastor of St. Matthew's Lutheran in Indianapolis insisted that **the key** to understanding the passages and the debates in history involves **the concepts of time and space**. He stated in his opening that:

*"Time was when there was no time, no space. Time which seems absolute, inevitable, fixed, and unyielding, is a dimension of creation; it is, in fact, only a dimension. It is cyclical, that is, subject to being repeated in some form or manner. Extrapolated from time is a sequential quality of 'events in order,' which seem to build one upon the other. **Time and space then are subject to various distortions and misunderstandings.** The dimension of time was penetrated by the great prophets who saw through its constructs and reported their observations as the Spirit of God gave them utterance.*

*"One of the best explanations of time and prophecy suggests that those Prophets could view things from **the center of the 'Wheel of Time'** from which God would allow them to look backward or forward [Ezekiel 1:15, 10:6ff; Isaiah 6:8ff; Jeremiah 1:4ff; Daniel 2:20-23; most of the Minor Prophets 1:1; James 1:17; Revelation 1:10-20]. Sometimes in reading their accounts it is not always clear whether they were viewing the past or the future*



LMS president, Rev. Dr. Ralph Spears, presenter, session two.

*from their perspective (or ours), because **they were standing outside of the 'events in order' factor of time.***

"One of the best theories about time is

*that it is a means of slowing down reality into smaller, bite-sized segments. Otherwise, everything would 'happen' at once. **In God's reality, there is no time and space.**"*

He closed with the offering that, **"Our Father** - the Creator of Time who **stands outside of time** - calls to us - in time to do his bidding. As we hear and respond, we are variously Called, Justified, Sanctified, Glorified, and therefore Predestined and even Postdestined. That is all we really need to know. **We transcend time and space through Him.**"

Pastor Jeffrey A. Iverson's Presentation Three (3), was unveiled for seminar attendees as *"The Lutheran Understanding of Chosen: The Election Controversy in Midwestern Lutheranism and Its Lasting Ramifications."* The paper underscored how the Election Controversy of the 19th and 20th century impacted schisms and mergers in American Lutheranism and continues to impact theological de-



Rev. Jeffrey Iverson, presenter, session three.

bate in the 21st century. Items considered included the Synodical Conference of 1872, the Norwegian Lutheran Church of 1917 and its Madison Agreement of 1912, and the development of present day Lutheran Synods and their predecessors.

The Iverson paper contained an excellent Appendix A, which provided a chart of the **key difference** on the **Doctrine of Election** in the history of American Lutheranism. The "**First Form**" within Lutheranism emphasizes that **Election Precedes Faith**. The "**Second Form**" posits the idea that Election is "**In View of Faith**" [*intuitu fidei*]. The "**First Form**" stresses that it is **God Alone Who Acts in Election** (the Doctrine of **Divine Monergism**). The "**Second Form**" underscores that **Man Participates in Election** (the Doctrine of **Synergism**). While this difference would be the pivotal point around which the splits in American Midwestern Lutheranism would occur in the 19th and 20th centuries, the Iverson Appendix and accompanying chart underscore that **both the First Form and Second Form positions adhere to the Doctrine of the Grace of God in a Universal Atonement**, in contrast to **Calvinistic Christianity and Arminian Christianity** which espouse a **Limited Atonement**. In the case of Calvinism and its understanding of the Sovereignty of God, the Limited Atonement is efficacious only for God's elect. In Arminianism, the Limited Atonement is efficacious only for the person who "chooses" faith.

Reverend Tylan Dalrymple of Christ Lutheran Church in Chetek followed the Iverson survey of the Doctrine of Election in American Lutheranism with thoughts in Presentation Four (4) on "*The Bondage of My Will*." The climactic paragraph in the paper quoted Luther:

"There is Biblical evidence for both free will and predestination. A focus on free will is a focus on what 'I' have done. When I think about what I have done, I can only think of the failures in my life. A focus on predestination is a focus on God's will... A focus on what God has

done in my life. When I think about what He has done, I only find success. When I inquired, I received an answer. If free will and predestination both

somehow exist in a way that is beyond human reason, which of these would be most important? Would it be the free will of the creature or the sovereign authority of the Creator?

***Luther believed sovereign grace crushes the pride of man** in saying that, 'Those things, therefore, are openly proclaimed for the Elect: that being by these means humbled and brought down to nothing, they might be saved. The rest resist this humiliation; nay, they condemn the teaching of self-desperation; they have a little something that they may do themselves. These secretly remain proud, and adversaries of the grace of God.'*"

Presentation Five (5) was undertaken by the Rev. Donald Thorson in "*Words and Works of Jesus*" a treatise which examined the destructive effects of Higher Biblical Criticism on Protestant Biblical scholarship generally, and Lutheran Biblical scholarship specifically. Pastor Thorson contrasted the radical views of **modern textual critic Robert Grant**, who stated that textual variants in the ancient texts prove that the "*original text of the Bible cannot*



Rev. Tylan Dalrymple, presenter, session four.

be recovered," with the traditional view of the Bible as authoritative and reliable as expressed in the first **Minneapolis Theses (1925)**. Pastor



Rev. Donald Thorson, presenter, session five.

Thorson proceeded to demonstrate with the **Bible Works 9** program in a comparison of **sixteen (16) sample Bible verses**, that the **four (4) key Bibli-**

cal text pathways, the Greek, the Latin Vulgate of Jerome (382 A. D.), the ancient Peshitta in Aramaic, and the Critical Text of Westcott-Hort's English Revised Edition of 1881, are in **basic congruence**. The differences in the four (4) texts, as an examination of Matthew 5:17 illustrates, are simply lexical.

Devotional time in Presentation Five (5) was based on Pastor Thorson's use of sound Greek exegetical methods to provide an English language translation of **I Peter 1: 22-25**. He concluded by observing that in personal Biblical study, he would employ **Robinson-Pierpoint's Byzantine Greek Text (2005)**, the **New King James English Translation (1979)**, and **Wilbur N. Pickering's** online translation of Scripture.

The Annual Conference and Convention of the Lutheran Ministerium and Synod-USA concluded on Sunday, June 23rd with Festival Worship on the Fifth Sunday After Pentecost. Prelude music was provided by Diane Pecha on organ, Pat Hinrichs on piano. Offertory music was offered in praise and worship of God by Nancy Cook on flute, and Diane Pecha on organ. The convention choir sang the moving, F.

Melius Christiansen's arrangement of *"Beautiful Savior."*

The closing message of the Conference and Convention was brought forth in the Festival Worship service by Pastor Mark Dankof of Immanuel Lutheran in San Antonio in a proclamation entitled, *"The Chosen People of God: Who Are They?"* and based upon **I Peter 2:9-10** (full text of the message available online). Pastor Dankof emphasized **three (3) principles** in I Peter 2:9-10 for God's people, **first that God chooses great people in history to minister to His saints in times of global oppression and evil** (e.g. Peter); **second, that God chooses to deliver on His promises**; and **finally, that the Chosen People of God, believers in Christ from every walk of life and racial background, have an Inheritance that is imperishable** (I Peter 1:4), ready to be revealed in the Last Time.



Preacher for the Sunday closing worship service, Rev. Mark Dankof

Convention Business successfully concluded with the election of the Rev. Dr. John Erickson as President of the Synod; Jan Jerabek as Synod Treasurer; Maureen Tullis as Secretary of the Synod. The Rev. Doctor Ralph Spears was elected President of the Ministerium; Pastor Mark Dankof as Vice-President of the Ministerium; and the Reverend Robert Bibbee as the Secretary of the Ministerium. A motion was successfully passed to provide a gift of \$2000 to the **Luther House in Wittenberg, Germany**, to serve as new headquarters, as well as space for other functions, for the **International Lutheran Council (ILC)**. Ω

TWO SURPRISING THINGS TO KNOW

by Rev. Dr. Ralph Spears

THERE ARE AT LEAST TWO THINGS THAT WOULD BE SURPRISING FOR US TO KNOW ABOUT GOD, THE FATHER, PRINCIPAL PERSON OF THE HOLY TRINITY.

First, how pervasive and powerful, wonderful and unfathomable is the Almighty. From all that we learn, read and imagine of The Father, it is simply far beyond our imagination, the Magnificence of God! Just think of a Being who can be everywhere at once and be possessed of all knowledge, for openers.

In a moment of inspiration, St. Paul took a stab at describing in mere words – God’s Majesty:

O the depth of the wisdom and riches and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable are His judgments, and how inscrutable His ways!

And then Paul borrows a bit from Isaiah and from Job as he continues.

For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor? Or who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.

And in final tribute he adds!

To Him be glory forever. Amen.
(Romans 11:33-36)

Moses knew God in the mysterious bush that burned but was not consumed, and in the enigmatic words, “I am that I am!”

Jesus described God most often simply with the word, Father, The Father, My Father, Our Father. God, who is uncreated, simply IS, without beginning or end and is unlimited in any category.

The second remarkable thing about God is how very close and

available He, the Father, really is. God is a force – God is The force of the universe – of our world. “God is Spirit!” How often we think of Him as just the opposite in fact; remote, far away, and in a universe of worlds, not caring, perhaps not even aware of my plight or me. “Alone and afraid in a world I have not made” as one poet put it, we are given to all sorts of isolated thoughts, even to despair. All of this

misunderstanding happens because we have not read His manual of definition and description, designed to dispel all unenlightened and distant thinking. So then the simple problem caused by just not reading the directions!

We live in a world where so many are in awe of the latest computer or I-gadget, but have less than a pedestrian idea about the power of the Author of the Universe!

The First problem then is that our God is too small, becoming almost insignificant in our mind. Occasionally we hear that a rather large percentage of Americans - some 90% - believe that there is a god in some form. He may be just a mysterious being lurking somewhere in the concepts of the mind, but that’s about all. A far smaller number carry the belief of God forward into a mature Faith. Instead of God being **Father**, God is relegated to a position of a lesser-known stepfather.

The Second problem is closely related to the first. God’s power and might are more or less impotent in the mind of man rather than Omnipotent! What about “the mind of God” as mentioned above by Paul?

If that is not bad enough, some religious types speak about God - even

speak to God - as though He is their lackey to be somehow ordered about. And these are the folks that are supposed to know their way around religious thinking. This is Not the **God** of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or even of Moses. And this is most certainly not the God that has been delivered to us – The **God** of our Faith. We live in a world where so many are in awe of the latest computer or I-gadget, but have less than a pedestrian idea about the power of the Author of the Universe!

Presently, there are those who use the term “a God thing” for a happening in their lives which has worked out so well that they can attribute it only to God; if and when we just get ourselves ‘out of the way’ and keep from mucking it up in thought word and deed, everything, but everything is a God thing! And yes, technology is a large part of the problem. What else can we compare God to? Problem is, we have updated technology but have not updated our concept or definition of “The Ground of all being” **God**.

Computers are fast and getting faster – but how about;

Even before a word is on my tongue, Behold O Lord, You know it altogether. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is

high, I cannot attain it. (Ps. 139)

Even so – the remarkable thing is that God knows **me** inside out.

The personal **me**, God knows like nothing else or anyone else can, certainly not an impersonal computer, Ibot or smart phone. Or what bit of technology can say to us, “I am that I am - there is no other” as this God said to Moses?

That which we call God, is of the highest, is Lord, in control of us and ever present. We allow God in our minds to be remote and think of Him as distant. God is made personal and real in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the “Image of the Invisible” – real, ever available and personal.

*God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help even in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear though
the earth be removed, and the
mountains be carried into the midst
of the Sea.... Be still, and know
that I am God!”*

(Psalm 46)

It is understood that Martin Luther was inspired by these words when he wrote, during some of the scariest days of the Reformation;

*A Mighty Fortress is our God, a
bulwark never failing;
Our Helper He, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.*

For us this is God most real and present, alive and active. Call upon Him for He is near. Ω

(Luther, conclusion, from page 16)

bors are lacking in faith, in love, in life, then he prays for them, and he is heartily sorry when anyone gives offense to God or to his neighbor. To sum up all, with him the root and sap are good, for he is grafted into a rich and fruitful vine, in Christ; therefore, such fruits must come forth.

21. But if one has not faith and is not taught of God--if he never eats of this bread from heaven--

he surely never brings forth these fruits. For where such fruits are not produced, there is certainly no true faith. St. Peter teaches us in 2 Peter 1:10 that we should make our calling unto salvation sure by good works; there he is really speaking of the works of love, of serving one's neighbor and treating him as one's own flesh and blood. This is sufficient on this Gospel. Let us pray for God's grace. Ω

THE GREATEST EVIL IS A FALSE PREACHER. HE IS THE WORST MAN ON EARTH. NO THIEF, MURDERER, OR ROGUE ON EARTH CAN BE COMPARED TO HIM. HE IS NOT AS WICKED AS A PREACHER WHO DOMINATES MEN IN GOD'S NAME, PUTS THEM TO DEATH, AND LEADS THEM INTO THE ABYSS OF HELL THROUGH HIS FALSE PREACHING. (Martin Luther)

With Feigned Words . . .

by

Agusta Harding

The apostle Paul gives this strong warning which the Church today better take to heart:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God which He has purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw disciples after themselves.

(Acts 20: 28-31)

“Of Your Own Selves”

In spite of recent political compromises, the Church in general is more aware that Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are aberrant groups that pose as Christianity. When shown their material, the honest Christian investigator is not reluctant to call them cults. Sadly, they are not the only type of cults.

There is a different “movement” about that makes it far more difficult to discern. Hundreds and thousands of their followers are gullible, biblically weak young Christians, who have been dazzled by the pried pipers from within the church. They go over land and sea with their dog and pony shows, preying even on people in Third

World countries, allegedly speaking “prophecies” in the name of God.

Parents, spouses, friends and relatives call us to get more information on these deluded men (and women), as their loved ones get caught in their blasphemous webs. The groups call themselves “**The Latter Rain Movement**”, “**The Kansas City Prophets**”, “**The Toronto Blessing**”, “**Joel's Army**”, “**The New Wave**” “**Ihop**” and many other names which seem to change almost monthly, as does the ever growing list of prophetic “superstars”.

No genre of false religions gives us more grief than these groups because they are so reluctant to clearly state any concrete doctrine. It is like chasing a glob of Jello on an icy pond. They flip Scripture upside down, twist and turn verses pouring out of their mouths - when they so conveniently choose. Many of them were raised in the Church, got rebellious and disenchanted and then decided that God was no longer “fun “. He is now supposedly calling them to a “new wave” of The Holy Spirit, far superior than the “old church” ever could. The message: “**Get wacked, stay wacked and don't turn back**” is their new and arro-

gant battle cry.

Manipulated Hysteria

One of these Latter-day gurus is **John Crowder** who calls himself “**a Christian Mystic**”. A former druggie, he purports to have seen “Jesus” while on an LSD high. He invites his followers to “Seer School” and alleges that anyone can be a prophet. All one has to do is exercise the abilities to “see” into the spirit realm. One can only imagine the danger this doctrine brings as thousands are being led astray by Crowder, thinking they are tapping into a realm of the “spirit” that will give them power, health, wealth and **ecstasy**.

Even though I have witnessed much spiritual quackery (incl. Mormon secret Temple rituals, New Age Earth healing ceremonies, mediums “channeling” spirits of animals, etc), I watched one of Crowder’s sessions thinking I was prepared to see the bizarre - I was not. He began by repeating the same idiotic mantra over and over as he worked his audience into a hysterical frenzy. “*Oy. Oy oynk oy ay, oynk, oy oynk, oy.*” Crowder cannot finish his rambling sentences without interjecting an “oye oynk” to his garbled nonsense every few seconds. The shamanistic drums beat faster than I have ever seen or heard, as people in the audience enter a hysteria called “being wacked”. In Haitian **Voodoo**, participants dance wildly and use lit cigars to enhance the demon possession experience. Crowder also uses actual drug paraphernalia and other objects, including crucifixes he sucks on.

The so called **Word of Faith Movement** brought us many “fruits and nuts” that are still with us today. Now wearing expensive busi-

ness suits on *TBN*, they continue hawking their books and tapes, promising followers great *health and wealth* if they give them “**seed money**”. Great displays, and theme parks are also built and promoted by TBN, geared to give the visitors an “experience with God”. (It is actually a billion dollar industry run by hard-nosed businessmen, supported by needy people who hope for a miracle!)

From this type of “Christianity” has emerged “**The new Prophets**”. We now hear names like **Rick Joyner, Patricia King, James Goll, Mike Bickel, Francis Frangipane, Bob Jones, Rodney H. Brown** of “holy laughter” to name just a few. **Todd Bentley** is one of the biggest “superstars” on the dark sky of the “**signs and wonders movement**”. Todd, was supposed to give the world “**Fresh Fire**”. Unfortunately, he failed by becoming a drunk, a wife abuser and an adulterer instead. A slight embarrassment to the “Prophets”, because he was allegedly sent by God (who called him “*Tawd*”), Bentley is now being dusted off and is in the miracle business again with his new wife who has prophetic dreams. One is about a hanging elephant shown to her by the departed Oral Roberts! Tawd is now being excused for his crimes by comparing him to King David who was after all “a man after God’s own heart”. Bolstering each other in the unholy wave of apostasy, sexual deviation and fraud, the prophetic Brotherhood plays fast and loose with practiced, occult, hypnotic techniques. They unashamedly contribute them to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but mostly to “**the Ghost**” (as, blasphemously, they call the Holy Spirit of God.)

Alleged “joy”, dished out by

“Holy Ghost Bar-tenders”, people are made to imitate severely drunk men and women under the influence of alcohol. Staggering around making unspeakably evil noises (which I thought the human vocal chords could not produce), they are instructed to tap on each others’ jugulars, pretending to get a vein, then mimicking shooting Heroin to imitate its effects, “spiritually” of course.

I watched with a broken heart, as gullible youth and others stumbled around, sucked the fingers of whom ever they happened to slam into, danced and slithered like snakes on the floor. They oinked like swine, meowed like cats, barked like dogs and brayed like donkeys. All the while, “God’s Bartenders” were laughing and egging them on. Drug paraphernalia, like pipes for Marijuana were used, as a bona fide “high” was accomplished. This is known among followers of The Prophets as **“taking the Ghost”**. (Yes Christians, they are again referring to The Holy Spirit of God here.) “Trance Dancing”, “transporting” (appearing in two places simultaneously, as Crowder claims), levitating and many other occult manifestations are welcomed and encouraged by the Charlatans of Satan in Crowder’s School of the Mystics.

Christian friends, I urge you NOT to be silent about these men who are prophesied and warned about in Scripture! Do not be intimidated by “God talk”! Do you really think that false prophets don’t talk about Jesus and God? Consider the witch (psychic) who followed Paul and Silas and even said that they were bringing truth. Yet the Apostle Paul discerned her spirit and rebuked the demons inside her! (see Acts 16:16). The cults are making merchandise of our Christian youth

because their parents are often focused entirely on social issues, not teaching them anything about God’s Word. God warns: **“For there are certain men crept unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Jude 4). Also consider this warning: **“Thus sayeth the Lord God; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!”** (Ezek. 13:3)

Pray that the Church wakes up and gets the courage to make false prophets accountable!

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The previous article is from the February, 2013 newsletter of FAMILIES AGAINST CULTS OF INDIANA, INC, and is reprinted with permission.

Families Against Cults is the ministry of Dan and Augusta Harting. The Hartings were in the cult of Mormonism for fifteen years and worked in that organization in numerous capacities. Dan held the highest priesthood of Mormonism and served on the “bishopric” for years. Augusta held many positions in the Mormon Church, always in the area of teaching. The Hartings participated in the secret temple rituals.

Since the Lord brought them out of Mormonism in 1981, they have been involved in Christian outreach to those perishing in the cults and the occult. They have spoken in hundreds of churches of many denominations and have been guests on many TV and radio talk shows, both Christian and secular, in the United States and overseas. The Hartings have counseled hundreds of people and distraught family members involved in the cults and the occult. Ω

On Faith And Coming To Christ, And The True Bread Of Heaven

by
Martin Luther

The following sermon is taken from volume III of, *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, published by Baker Book House (Grand Rapids, MI). It was originally published in 1907 in English by Lutherans In All Lands (Minneapolis, MN), in a series titled *The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther*, vol. 12. The original title of this sermon appears below (preached by Luther in 1528). This text was scanned and edited by Shane Rosenthal for Reformation Ink, it is in the public domain and it may be copied and distributed without restriction. Original pagination from the Baker edition has been kept intact for purposes of reference.

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. John 6:44-55

1. This Gospel text teaches exclusively of the Christian faith, and awakens that faith in us; just as John, throughout his whole Gospel, simply instructs us how to trust in Christ the Lord. This faith alone, when based upon the sure promises of God, must save us; as our text clearly explains. And in the light of it all, they must become fools who have

taught us other ways to become godly. All that human ingenuity can devise, be it as holy and as luminous as it may, must tumble to the ground if man be saved in God's way--in a way different from that which man himself plans. Man may forever do as he will, he can never enter heaven unless God takes the first step with his Word, which offers him

divine grace and enlightens his heart so as to get upon the right way.

2. This right way, however, is the Lord Jesus Christ. Whoever desires to seek another way, as the great multitudes venture to do by means of their own works, has already missed the right way; for Paul says to the Galatians: "If righteousness is through the Law," that is, through the works of the Law, "then Christ died for naught" (Gal. 2:21). Therefore I say man must fall upon this Gospel and be broken to pieces and in deep consciousness lie prostrate, like a man that is powerless, unable to move hand or foot. He must only lie motionless and cry: Almighty God, merciful Father, now help me! I cannot help myself. Christ, my Lord, do help now, for with only my own effort all is lost! Thus, in the light of this cornerstone, which is Christ, everyone becomes as nothing; as Christ says of himself in Luke 20:17-18, when he asks the Pharisees and scribes: "What then is this that is written. The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner? Every one that falleth on that stone shall be 'broken to pieces; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust' (Ps. 118:22). Therefore, we must either fall upon this stone, Christ, in all our inability and helplessness, rejecting our own merits, and be broken to pieces, or he will forever crush us by his severe sentence and judgment. It is better that we fall upon him than that he should fall upon us. For this reason the Lord says in this Gospel: "No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day."
3. He must surely perish whom the Father does not draw. Thus it is decreed, that whoever does not

come to this Son must be condemned forever. The Son is given to us only to the end that he may save us; besides him, nothing saves us, either in heaven or on earth. If he does not help us, then nothing will. On this Peter says in the Acts of the Apostles (4:11-12): "He is the stone which was set at naught of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner. And in none other is there salvation; neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved." Where, in the light of this, are our theologians and professors who taught us that we become pious through our many good works? Here the great master Aristotle is put to shame, who proclaimed that reason strives for the best and always follows after the good. Christ says to this: No; if the rather comes not first and draws men, they must forever perish.

4. Here all men must confess their incapacity and inability to do the good. Should one imagine he is able to do anything good of his own strength he does no less than make Christ the Lord a liar; he would rudely and defiantly come to the Father and in all rashness ascend to heaven. Therefore, where the pure and plain Word of God goes, it breaks into pieces everything that is exalted of man, it makes valleys of all their mountains, and all their hills it makes low, as the prophet Isaiah (40:4) says. Every heart that hears this Word must lose faith in itself, else it will not be able to come to Christ. God's works do nothing but destroy and make alive, condemn and minister salvation. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, sings of the Lord: "Jehovah killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up" (1 Sam. 2:6).

5. Hence, a person who is thus smitten in his heart, by God, to confess that he is one who, on account of his sins, must be condemned, is like the righteous man whom with the first words of this Gospel God wounds, and because of that wound fixes upon him the band or cord of his divine grace, by which he draws him, so that he must seek help and counsel for his soul. Before he could not obtain any help or counsel from God, nor did he ever desire it; but now he finds the first comfort and promise of God, which Luke 2:10 records thus: "For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." From such promises will he ever continue to gain courage as long as he lives, and will ever win greater and greater confidence in God. Just as soon as he hears that grace is the work of God alone, he will desire it of God as from the hand of his gracious Father, who wishes to draw him. Now, if he is drawn by God to Christ, he will certainly experience what the Lord here says: "He will raise him up in the last day." For he has laid hold upon the Word of God and trusts God. In this he has a sure sign that he is one whom God has drawn, as John says in his First Epistle (5:10): "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him."
6. Hence, it must necessarily follow that he is taught of God, and that he knows now in truth that the meaning of God is nothing more than Helper, Comforter, Saviour, as we say of those who rescue us from danger: Thou wast today my God. From this it is now clear that God will be to us nothing less than a saviour, a helper, and a giver of all blessedness, who neither demands nor desires anything from us. He only gives, he only offers to us; as he says to Israel in Ps. 81:10: "I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." Who would not be kindly disposed to such a God, who approaches us so lovingly and graciously, and offers us his favor and blessings if we only acknowledge him as God and are willing to be taught of him? They cannot escape the severe, eternal judgment of God who ignore such grace, as the Epistle to the Hebrews (10:28-29) says: "A man that hath set at naught Moses' law dieth without compassion: of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing."
7. Oh, how diligent and earnest St. Paul is in all his Epistles that we may always grasp the knowledge of God aright! How often he expresses the wish for growth in the knowledge of God! As if he would say: If you only knew and understood what God is, then you would be already saved, then you would gain love for him and do only those things well pleasing to him. Thus he says to the Colossians (1:9-12): "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray and make request for you, that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to the might of his glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in

light." And in Ps. 119:34 David says: "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy Law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart."

8. Thus you learn from the first utterance in today's Gospel that this knowledge must come from God the Father; he must lay the firststone of the foundation in us, else we will never do anything. But this is accomplished in the following way: God sends us preachers, whom he has taught, to preach to us his will. First he instructs us that our entire lives and characters, however beautiful and holy they may be, are before him as nothing, yea, are as abomination, and displeasing; this is called a preaching of the Law. Then he offers us grace; that is, he tells us that he will not utterly condemn and reject us, but will receive us in his beloved Son, and not merely receive us, but make us heirs of his kingdom, lords over all that is in heaven and upon earth. This is called preaching grace or preaching the Gospel. But God is the origin of all; he first awakens preachers and constrains them to preach. This is the meaning of St. Paul's words when he says to the Romans: "So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). This truth the words of the Lord in today's Gospel also declares, when Christ says: "It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he that is from God, he hath seen the Father."
9. Now, under the first preaching, the preaching of the Law, namely, that we with all our works are condemned, man is restless and fearful before God, and knows not what to do with

his life and deeds. He suffers from an accusing and timid conscience, and if relief from some source were not to come quickly he would have to despair forever. Therefore, we must not long delay with the other preaching; we must preach the Gospel to him and lead him to Christ as the one whom the Father has given to us to be our mediator, that we should be saved solely through him, out of pure grace and mercy, without any works or merit on our part. The heart rejoices at this word and runs to such grace as a thirsty deer to the water. This longing David keenly experiences when he says in Ps. 42:1-2: "As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God, my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God."

10. Now, when one comes to Christ, that is, to his Gospel, he hears the personal voice of Christ the Lord, which confirms the knowledge God taught him, namely, that God is nothing but a very gracious Saviour, who wants to be gracious and merciful to all who call upon him. Therefore, the Lord adds:

Verily verily, I say unto you, He that believeth hath eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: yea and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world.

11. In these words the soul finds a well prepared table, at which it satisfies all hunger; for it knows for a certainty that he who speaks these words cannot lie. Therefore the soul falls upon the Word, clings to it, trusts in it, and also

builds its dwelling-place in the strength of this well-prepared table. This is the feast for which

the heavenly Father slayed his oxen and fatlings and invited us all to it.

SECTION II

The Bread Of Heaven

12. The living bread, of which the Lord here speaks, is Christ himself, of whom we partake. If in our hearts we lay hold of only a morsel of this bread, we shall have forever enough and can never be separated from God. The partaking of this bread is nothing but faith in Christ our Lord, that he is, as Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:30, "made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." He who eats of this food lives forever. Therefore, the Lord says, immediately following this Gospel lesson, where the Jews strove among themselves about this discourse of his: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."
13. The bread from heaven the fathers ate in the wilderness, as Christ says here, was powerless to keep them from dying; but this bread makes immortal. If we believe on Christ, death cannot harm us; yea, it is no longer death. The Lord utters the same truth in another passage when he says to the Jews: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my Word, he shall never see death" (John 8:51). Here he speaks definitely of the Word of faith, and of the Gospel.
14. But one may say, as did the Jews, who took offense at these words of the Lord: The saints, nevertheless, died, and Abraham

and the prophets likewise died. We reply to this: The death of Christians is only a sleep, as the Scriptures everywhere call it. A Christian neither tastes nor sees death; that is, he is never conscious of any death; for this Saviour, Christ Jesus, in whom he believes, has destroyed death so that he no longer needs to taste it and pay its penalty. Death is to the Christians only a transition of life, yea, a door to life: as Christ says in John 5:24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my Word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life., and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life."

15. Therefore, a Christian life is a life of bliss and joy. Christ's yoke is easy and sweet; the reason it seems to us galling and heavy is that the Father has not yet drawn us. and so we have no pleasure in it, neither does this Gospel lesson minister comfort to us. If we, however, rightly appropriated the words of Christ, they would be of much greater comfort to us. By faith we partake of this bread that has come down from heaven, Christ the Lord, when we believe on him as our Saviour and Redeemer.
16. In this light I now remind you that these words are not to be misconstrued and made to refer to the Sacrament of the Altar; whoever so interprets them does violence to this Gospel text. There is not a letter in it that refers to the Lord's Supper. Why should Christ here have in mind that Sacrament when it was not

yet instituted? The whole chapter from which this Gospel is taken speaks of nothing but the spiritual food, namely, faith. When the people followed the Lord merely hoping again to eat and drink, as the Lord himself charges them with doing, he took the figure from the temporal food they sought, and speaks throughout the entire chapter of a spiritual food. He says: "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life." Thereby he shows that he feeds them with the object of inducing them to believe on him, and that as they partook of the temporal food, so should they also partake of the spiritual. On this subject we will say more at some other time.

17. Now let us here notice that the Lord approaches us so lovingly and graciously, and offers us himself--his flesh and blood--in such gentle words that it should in all reason move the heart to believe on him; to believe that this bread, his flesh and blood, born of the Virgin Mary, was given because he had to pay the penalty of death and suffer in our stead the torments of hell, and, besides, to suffer the guilt of sins he never committed, as if they were his own. This he did willingly and received us as brethren and sisters. If we believe this we do the will of the heavenly Father, which is nothing else than that we believe on the Son. Christ says, just before our text: "This is the will of my Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (I John 6:40).

18. It is now evident that whoever has faith in this bread of heaven--in Christ, in this flesh and blood, of which he here speaks that it is given to him and that it is his--he also accepts it as his own, and has already done the will of God

and eaten of this heavenly manna; as Augustine says: What do you prepare for your mouth? Only believe, and you have already eaten.

19. The whole New Testament treats of this spiritual supper, and especially does John here. The Sacrament of the Altar is a testament and confirmation of this true supper, with which we should strengthen our faith and be assured that this body and this blood, which we receive in the Sacrament has rescued us from sin and death, the devil, hell and all misery. Concerning this I have spoken and written more on other occasions.
20. What is the proof by which one may know that this heavenly bread is his and that he is invited to such a spiritual supper? He needs only to look at his own heart. If he finds it so disposed that it is softened and cheered by God's promises and is firm in the conviction that it may appropriate this bread of life, then he may be assured that he is one of the invited; for as one believes, even so is it done unto him. From that moment on, he loves his neighbor and helps him as his brother; he rescues him, gives to him, loans to him and does nothing for him but that which he would desire his neighbor to do for himself. All this is attributable to the fact that Christ's kindness to him has leavened his heart with sweetness and love, so that he has pleasure and joy in serving his neighbor; yea, he is even in misery if he has no one to whom to show kindness. Besides all this, he is gently and humbly disposed toward everybody; he does not highly esteem the transient pomps of the world; he accepts everyone as he is, speaks evil of no one, interprets all things for the best where he sees things are not going right. When his neigh-

(Luther, conclusion, bottom of page 7)

The Reason for Hope

by
John Meador



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Why do you celebrate Christmas?
Are you sure of it?

The waters of our seasonal celebrations seem to get murkier every year. With "Happy Holidays" (instead of Merry Christmas) and the ever-increasing commercialism of Christmas by our friendly retailers, one can get lost in the reason for celebration. Parents struggle to help kids see past the gifts to the real Giver of Christmas. Individuals get to the end of the celebration and often feel a deep sense of emptiness. But Christmas should bring hope, and there is a reason for hope!

It is good to remember that we have a reasonable basis of belief for believing in Jesus Christ - and for celebrating Christmas. In this world of relativism - where everything is relegated to what one "wants" to believe - we must have something more solid than just a sincere faith. We also must have a reasonable faith. The apostles did not die for something they just sincerely felt. They died for what they knew to be true!

We are told to "*always being ready to make a defense* (reason-

able statement) *for the hope that is in you*" (1 Pet. 3:15). As we sit around the dinner table during this time of the

year, as we exchange gifts with one another or worship together with all the incredible beauty and pageantry of Christmas, we can ensure a true celebration by remembering why we can be confident that Jesus is the reason for the season. We celebrate Christmas - and Christ - because we know He is the Messiah sent from God.

The Apostle Peter knew the reason: "*Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow*" (1 Pet. 1:10-11). Peter does not exalt common sense or experience as the basis of His belief. He rather appeals to the prophets and the obvious fulfillment of their prophecies as his foundation. These words convey Peter's answer to why he knew

Jesus was the Messiah. This verse also gives our reason - your reason for celebration.

First, authentic prophecies of divine origin were recorded centuries in advance through recognized prophets. The Old Testament prophets were those who spoke directly for God. What's more, God spoke through them to tell of events that were yet to occur! He told them when to go to war, and who would win. He spoke to them about men he would heal, or allow to die. He also spoke to them, frequently, about the coming Messiah.

The reason we know these prophets were authentic was their accuracy. A prophet who spoke "from the Lord" but who spoke inaccurately about a coming event was stoned to death. A bad prophet was a dead one. That tends to demonstrate who is authentic and who is not, and the authentic prophets are recorded in Scripture.

Second, these prophets predicted in precise detail the birth, sufferings, and glories of the Messiah. These weren't just vague references to a general event. These prophecies were specific and time-sensitive. Listed below are only a few of the hundreds of Messianic prophecies.

A. His Birth

Given: *"The Lord... will give you a sign; Behold a virgin will be with child and bear a Son..."* (Isa. 7:14).

Fulfilled: *"...She was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit... Joseph... kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son"* (Matt. 1:18, 24-25).

B. His Ancestry

Given: *"A shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse..."* (Isa. 11:1).

Fulfilled: *"Jesus... (as was supposed) the son of Joseph... the son of Jesse..."* (Luke 3:23, 32).

C. His Birthplace

Given: *"But as for you... Bethlehem*

...from you One will go forth for Me to be a ruler in Israel... from the days of eternity" (Mic. 5:2).

Fulfilled: *"...Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea..."* (Matt. 2:1).

D. His Timing

Given: *"...from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah... there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks (of years)..."* (Dan. 9:24-26).

Fulfilled: *"...Jesus was born... in the days of Herod the king..."* (Matt. 2:1). Herod died in 4 AD, just after Jesus was born, according to scholarly consensus, while the 69 weeks of Daniel [after the Jewish and Gregorian calendars are reconciled] were completed in AD 33. This fulfills Daniel's prophetic dating.

E. His Sufferings

Given: *"...they pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me. They divide my garments..."* (Ps. 22:16-18).

Fulfilled: *"...And they cast lots, dividing His garments... and the people stood by, looking on"* (Luke 23:34-35).

F. His Glory

Given: *"You have ascended on high..."* (Ps. 68:18).

Fulfilled: *"...when... Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven..."* (Mark 16:19).

Conclusion: Coincidence or Hope?

Some say Jesus "engineered" all these things to be fulfilled. Now, that is a wild statement. How can one possibly control the day of his birth or his ancestors? How can a person determine exactly when he dies, or predict how many pieces of silver he was betrayed for?

Others say Jesus' fulfillment of over 300 Old Testament prophecies was "coincidental." Peter Stoner says that the odds of one man fulfilling just eight prophecies of this nature are one in 1017! That would be 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. I don't think "coincidence" cuts it, do you? Only God could have orchestrated an event of this magnitude.

Third, these prophecies were su-

pernaturally fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The apostle concludes that these prophecies were heard, fulfilled, and accepted as being fulfilled supernaturally: "...*these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven....*" (1 Pet. 1:12).

In other words, this is the witness of the Holy Spirit and heaven itself - an unarguable fact. It's what we preach, Peter says - and it is what we can believe this Christmas and throughout all time.

So, why does all this bring hope?

It brings hope to Christmas because it says that God orchestrated all these events, literally moving heaven and earth, so that we might have a Savior who would Himself bring us to God. And that, my friends, is hope. I'm sure of it. Ω

The Greatest Miracle

What can be said that is more marvelous than this, that the Son of God assumes the flesh of man and is born of a virgin? What is more astounding than this, that the Son of God, battling with death and the devil, allows Himself to be overcome, offers His life to His enemies, and overcomes while being overcome? And the miracle supreme is this, that the man Christ, who died on the cross, rises from death and from the sealed grave on the third day, and ascends to heaven and sits at the right hand of God with His flesh. What can possibly be said, nay, even conceived, that is equal to these miracles? - Luther

O holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels,
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Immanuel. Amen
- Philip Brooks -

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