

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HEAR AND KEEP GOD'S WORD

Our sermon that breaks through Lent's fast on this Feast Day is taken from our Gospel:

Then He said, "They remain blessed, the ones continually hearing the Word of God and guarding it."¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

When was the last time you reflected on the divine reality that, as you remain an hearer of God's Word you remain blessed by Him?

Perhaps you thought such when you heard this day's readings, or the theme verse stated moments ago. Maybe the blessedness that is yours, on account of the death of Christ Jesus, through no merit of your own, came into your consciousness during a Lenten meditation. It could be that you have recalled how blessed you are several times throughout the continuing 40 days of Lent, at times when you were tempted to break a fast you have promised privately to God.

The Word of the Lord stands, and He declares that those who continue to hear His Word and keep it are blessed. This does not mean that you will always feel blessed, or even remember that you are one of the blessed ones of the Father. The fallen human nature, with its sinful desires, often attempts to draw you away from recalling how blessed you are.

¹ Luke 11:28.

To help you in those times, the Church, through Dr. Luther, has given you the simple truths of the *Small Catechism*. In particular, this week when you are being reminded that the ones who are the continual hearers and guards of the pure Word are blessed of God, the seventh petition of the Lord's Prayer, "*But deliver us from evil,*" is restated and its meaning declared:

*We pray in this petition, as in a summary, that our Father in heaven may deliver us from all manner of evil, whether it affect body or soul, property or reputation, and that at last, when the hour of death comes, he may grant us a blessed end and graciously take us from this world of sorrow to himself in heaven.*²

That instruction is particularly fitting to be connected to the Lord Jesus' Word of warning in this day's Gospel reading. Jesus, having just cast out a mute demon from a man, turns to His hearers and says:

*When the unclean spirit might go out from the man, it goes about through dry places seeking rest, and not finding [any]. [Then] it says, "I will return into the house where I came out;" And coming, it finds it having been swept and put in order. Then, it will go and it will take with it seven spirits more evil than itself and going into (him) they will inhabit there; and the last state of that man will become worse than the first.*³

With those words, the Lord is calling those who have had the spirit of evil cast from them, we whom He has exorcized, to not leave our houses, the fleshly tents in which we dwell, empty of His blessed Word. This means that, when the devil is caused to flee from the hearer of Jesus' Word, particularly at the onset of blessed life in

²Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

³ *Luke* 11:24-26

the Water and Word of Holy Baptism, the Word needs to be placed into the newly cleansed one.

This is one reason why, almost five centuries ago, the truly evangelical (of the Gospel) reformers of the Church left the rites of exorcism in the rite of Holy Baptism. When the pastor, in His role as ambassador of Christ, speaks to the one to be baptized, “depart unclean spirit and make room for the Holy Spirit,” there is a reinforcement of the reality that a human person contains either the Spirit of God, or an evil spirit. It is also for that reason that the one to be baptized is given faithful, practicing, Christian sponsors at his or her baptism. We know that, from passages such as those read today, that the new believer is not to be left alone with Baptism, but that such must be accompanied by the regular hearing of the Word. Jesus makes it clear that it is not enough to command the devil to flee. The driving out of the unclean spirit is to be accompanied by the pouring in of the clean Spirit. Otherwise, the evil spirit which possesses every human from conception,

will go and it will take with it seven spirits more evil than itself and going into (him) they will inhabit there; and the last state of that man will become worse than the first.⁴

Only by remaining in the Word of God, having it come into the ears of the baptized, is anyone able to cling to the Faith once delivered. With the Word firmly planted, regularly heard, the baptized Christian can believe that the blessings of God

⁴ Luke 11:26.

are with him, and rightly pray the seventh petition of the Lord's Prayer. It is solid belief that comes from the Holy Spirit into a person through the regular hearing of the Word, which brings the Lord's blessing in the praying of the words, "deliver us from evil." It is the Faith of the Lord in His hearers that empowers them, you, to believe that our *Father in heaven* [will] *deliver us from all manner of evil, whether it affect body or soul, property or reputation*, until the mortal house, the body in which the human soul dwells, lies down in death's sleep.⁵

That you believe because you have been baptized, and are a regular hearer of the Word is God's blessed gift to you. But what of those who hear and do not believe? God, in His infinite wisdom, has granted the freedom to reject His blessed gifts to all humans. Even those who witness His miracles, who hear Jesus and see Him cure all manner of diseases, are not exempt from rejecting Him. This is as true today as it was almost two millennia ago. Consider the reactions of the witnesses to the enfleshed Word, Jesus, who cast out an evil spirit from a mute man:

Some from out of them said, "By Beelzeboul, the ruler of the demons He casts out demons."

And others were tempting Him for they sought (a) sign out of heaven from Him.⁶

What blasphemy. They are, on account of misbelief, naming the Son of God an agent of another god. The words used here either mean "Lord of the Dungheap,"

⁵Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

⁶ Luke 11:15-16

or “Lord of the Flies.” Either way, they are declaring Jesus’ authority to be of a god of this earth. Jesus responds with a very logical human argument:

But He, knowing their minds, said to them, “Every kingdom, upon itself having been divided may be laid desolate, and house upon house it falls. For if the Accuser upon himself is divided, how may his kingdom stand? (Because all of you say by Beezeboul I cast out demons.)”

“For, if I by Beezeboul cast out the demons, your sons by whom do they cast out? On account of this they will judge all of you. “

“But if by finger of God [I] cast out the demons, then has appeared to all of you the Kingdom of God.”⁷

Jesus declares that their exorcists, by contrast, also actually cast out demons – and they believe those exorcisms are done by God’s power. The judgment declared is against those who reject the clear signs and wonders of God in Christ Jesus. He declares His authority by contrast – “the finger of God” against the “Lord of the Flies.” Jesus then moves to another logical illustration.

ὅταν ὁ ἰσχυρὸς καθωπλισμένος φυλάσῃ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ αὐλήν, ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἐστὶν τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτοῦ. **22** ἐπὰν δὲ ἰσχυρότερος αὐτοῦ ἐπελθὼν νικήσῃ αὐτόν, τὴν πανοπλίαν αὐτοῦ αἴρει ἐφ’ ἧ ἐπεποιθεὶ καὶ τὰ σκῦλα αὐτοῦ διαδίδωσιν. **23** ὁ μὴ ὦν μετ’ ἐμοῦ κατ’ ἐμοῦ ἐστίν, καὶ ὁ μὴ συνάγων μετ’ ἐμοῦ σκορπίζει.⁸

Why, then, do people like those leaders of the Jews, even baptized Christians of our day, turn from the blessedness of God in Christ Jesus? Our confessions reference three other biblical parallels to today’s text when they declare:

The reason is that they willfully turn away from the holy commandment, grieve and embitter the Holy Spirit, become entangled again in the filth of the world, and

⁷ Luke 11:17-20

⁸ Luke 11:21-23

decorate their hearts as a tabernacle for the devil so that their last state will be worse than the first (2 Pet. 2:10; Luke 11:24, 25; Heb. 10:26; Eph. 5:3-11, 18).⁹

It is the willful rejection of the Gospel that causes hearers of the Word, even the baptized, to fall back into sin, and despise the salvation won for them on the cross. This can come so simple as a desire for another Jesus – “just give me the Jesus of the Resurrection, not the Jesus of the Cross” – that can lead anyone into temptation and fall.

Yet, thanks be to God that Jesus did not keep His eyes focused on the Resurrection – but upon the cup of God’s wrath that He had to drink to the full. He had set His face to go to the humiliation and shame of the cross – even for those who would reject Him. He would have the taunts of the enemy and his minions (those who had rejected the Good News of the Suffering Servant) come into His ears that you might have His loving Word come into yours. Jesus faced the horror of death without the Father’s loving gaze upon Him, that you will not, on your last day, be alone. The Christ, the Second Adam returned, dust into dust (Adam into the Adamah), that He might fully bear the weight, burden and complete cost of sin, for you. Jesus fell into the sleep of death after a relatively short life and extremely short earthly incarnate ministry, that you might have eternal life in Him with the Father and the Holy Spirit, that you might be numbered among those whom Jesus declared:

“They remain blessed, the ones continually hearing the Word of God and guarding it.”¹⁰

⁹Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Lent III (LSB One-year series)

Jeremiah 26:1-15; Ephesians 5:1-9; Luke 11:14-28

March 15, 2009

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

Luke 11:14-28

Καὶ ἦν ἐκβάλλων δαιμόνιον [καὶ αὐτὸ ἦν] κωφόν· ἐγένετο δὲ τοῦ δαιμονίου ἐξελθόντος ἐλάλησεν ὁ κωφὸς καὶ ἐθαύμασαν οἱ ὄχλοι. **15** τινὲς δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν εἶπον, Ἐν Βεελζεβούλ τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων ἐκβάλλει τὰ δαιμόνια· **16** ἄλλοι δὲ πειράζοντες σημεῖον ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἐζήτουν παρ' αὐτοῦ. **17** αὐτὸς δὲ εἰδὼς αὐτῶν τὰ διανοήματα εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Πᾶσα βασιλεία ἐφ' ἑαυτὴν διαμερισθεῖσα ἐρημοῦται καὶ οἶκος ἐπὶ οἶκον πίπτει. **18** εἰ δὲ καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς ἐφ' ἑαυτὸν διεμερίσθη, πῶς σταθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ; ὅτι λέγετε ἐν Βεελζεβούλ ἐκβάλλειν με τὰ δαιμόνια. **19** εἰ δὲ ἐγὼ ἐν Βεελζεβούλ ἐκβάλλω τὰ δαιμόνια, οἱ υἱοὶ ὑμῶν ἐν τίνι ἐκβάλλουσιν; διὰ τοῦτο αὐτοὶ ὑμῶν κριταὶ ἔσονται. **20** εἰ δὲ ἐν δακτύλῳ θεοῦ [ἐγὼ] ἐκβάλλω τὰ δαιμόνια, ἄρα ἔφθασεν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. **21** ὅταν ὁ ἰσχυρὸς καθωπλισμένος φυλάσῃ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ αὐλήν, ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἐστὶν τὰ

¹⁰ Luke 11:28.

ὑπάρχοντα αὐτοῦ· **22** ἔπᾶν δὲ ἰσχυρότερος αὐτοῦ ἐπελθὼν νικήσῃ αὐτόν, τὴν πανοπλίαν αὐτοῦ αἶρει ἐφ' ἧ ἔπεποιθεί καὶ τὰ σκῦλα αὐτοῦ διαδίδωσιν. **23** ὁ μὴ ὢν μετ' ἐμοῦ κατ' ἐμοῦ ἐστίν, καὶ ὁ μὴ συνάγων μετ' ἐμοῦ σκορπίζει.

24 Ὅταν τὸ ἀκάθαρτον πνεῦμα ἐξέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, διέρχεται δι' ἀνύδρων τόπων ζητοῦν ἀνάπαυσιν καὶ μὴ εὐρίσκον· [τότε] λέγει, Ὑποστρέψω εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου ὅθεν ἐξῆλθον· **25** καὶ ἐλθὼν εὐρίσκει σεσαρωμένον καὶ κεκοσμημένον. **26** τότε πορεύεται καὶ παραλαμβάνει ἕτερα πνεύματα πονηρότερα ἑαυτοῦ ἐπτὰ καὶ εἰσελθόντα κατοικεῖ ἐκεῖ· καὶ γίνεται τὰ ἔσχατα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκείνου χεῖρονα τῶν πρώτων.

27 Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ λέγειν αὐτόν ταῦτα ἐπάρασά τις φωνὴν γυνὴ ἐκ τοῦ ὄχλου εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Μακαρία ἡ κοιλία ἡ βαστάσασά σε καὶ μαστοὶ οὓς ἐθήλασας. **28** αὐτὸς δὲ εἶπεν, Μειοῦν μακάριοι οἱ ἀκούοντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ φυλάσσοντες.¹¹

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11:24-25: 623.42

In the same way many “receive the Word with joy,” but after that “they fall away again” (Luke 8:13). But the reason for this is not that God does not want to impart the grace of perseverance to those in whom he has “begun the good work.” This would contradict St. Paul in Phil. 1:6. The reason is that they willfully turn away from the holy commandment, grieve and embitter the Holy Spirit, become entangled again in the filth of the world, and decorate their hearts as a tabernacle for the devil so that their last state will be worse than the first (2 Pet. 2:10; Luke 11:24, 25; Heb. 10:26; Eph. 5:3-11, 18).¹²

¹¹Aland, B., Aland, K., Black, M., Martini, C. M., Metzger, B. M., & Wikgren, A. 1993, c1979. *The Greek New Testament* (4th ed.) . United Bible Societies: Federal Republic of Germany

¹²Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

It is to be considered diligently that God punishes sin with sin, that is, because of their subsequent impurity, impenitence, and deliberate sins God punishes with obduracy and blindness those who have been converted. This must not be misconstrued as if it had never been God's gracious will that such people should come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. God's revealed will involves both items: First, that he would receive into grace all who repent and believe in Christ; second, that he would punish those who deliberately turn away from the holy commandment⁹ and involve themselves again in the filth of this world (2 Pet. 2:20), prepare their hearts for Satan (Luke 11:24, 25), and outrage the Holy Spirit (Heb. 10:29), and that he would harden, blind, and for ever damn them if they continue therein.⁸⁴ Hence Pharaoh (of whom we read, "For this purpose have I let you live to show you my power, so that my name may be declared throughout all the earth")¹ did not perish because God did not want to grant him salvation or because it was God's good pleasure that he should be damned and lost. For God "is not wishing that any should perish," nor has he any "pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."²¹³

⁹ Most manuscript copies and the German printed text of 1580 read *Gebet* (prayer), but this is an obvious slip for *Gebot* (commandment), the reading of the Latin version (*mandato*).

¹ Ex. 9:16; Rom. 9:17.

² 2 Pet. 3:9; Ezek. 33:11.

¹³Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia