

The Faithful Confess Christ Faithfully

Matthew 10:32-42, Trinity Sunday VIII

July 21, 2013

Beloved of the Lord.....It has been a most difficult and trying week for our little congregation. Two of the sons of this congregation have gone to the hospital this week and one is still there. One daughter has been in and out of the hospital for months, and another beloved daughter God has called home to be with Himself in heaven. Just one week ago she sang here in church in our choir, and now she sings with the angels in heaven! And yet while God has changed her sorrows to joy, in this world we still have tribulation. This will be a very trying week for most of us and many tears will be shed, yet "Lord to whom shall we go, Thou hast the words of eternal life!" When the devil assaults you dear Christian, and he spins your poor weak mind around like a top so you are bewildered and confused, YOU MUST GO to that fountain of Living Waters, where the water of Christ flows freely. "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Drink in faith of those living waters dear believer, for Jesus really did die for you and rise again. Death was long ago conquered and now there is life everlasting. Therefore "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

I. Confessing or denying Christ before men. Overall the words of our lesson today concern persecution, and God's desire that we hold faithful in our confession of His name to the end. If we read the verses preceding our text today, we will see Jesus is warning His disciples of the persecution to come. Verse 22 says "ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved." If we are then to be saved, we must endure in the true and saving faith of Jesus Christ, and never deny Him even if they threaten our life. For "he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." This emphasis is necessary because we sinful mortals value the life of our body more than then salvation of our soul. "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."

Let us first emphasis those two words, "before men", for that is where we fall into trouble. When we fear men more than God, we fear what men may do to our bodies. Throughout history during those fiery trials of persecution, Christians have been imprisoned, beaten, stabbed, raped, sliced, dismembered, burned with fire, poisoned, peeled like an onion, lit up like a torch, fed to the lions, and tortured for hours until death. Many by God's grace held fast and

faithful, but not all. Though I can't remember his name, I once read of a certain Christian who was persecuted and threatened with death, and out of fear he signed a document renouncing his faith. By signing this document his life was spared, but his salvation was lost. His conscience burned. The Holy Spirit however moved him to repentance and faith and again he confessed Christ and again he was captured by the enemies. Again he was threatened with death by burning, but this time he faithfully confessed Christ to the end. They tied him to a post below which there was a large pile of wooden branches. When the fire was lit and the first flames came close to His body, he purposefully thrust his hand into the fire. This was the hand which once signed the document denying Christ. Shortly thereafter his whole body perished in the flames and His soul ascended up to heaven. Though we cringe at the thought of being burned to death by fire, we need the fires Christ endured on the cross for our own sins. He gave His body and soul as a living sacrifice for our salvation, and by His very blood heaven is now open before us. Therefore "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."

That is the character and essence of a true God-given Christ based faith, dear brethren. Jesus' undying and never failing love for us from the cross creates in us a new heart so we are filled with a bold and fearless faith which conquers all things, even death itself. And though our enemies are indeed strong and frightening to look at, more numerous than the sands of the sea, their hatred of Christ should not sway you who are redeemed by Christ. When persecuted, like the angels, we do always behold the face of our Father which is in heaven. This face is shining upon us and is gracious unto us.

This face of God then helps us to face our own fears and be fearless in the face of a hateful world. The perfect example of fearlessness is in Isaiah 50, where we find the prayers and meditation of Christ Himself when the soldiers abused Him. Jesus at that time prayed...."The Lord GOD will help Ne; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. *He is* near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who *is* mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who *is* he *that* shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up. Who *is* among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh *in* darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God." "God is faithful".

II. If you love your family more than Christ you deny Christ. We should then let nothing ever move us away from Christ, neither fear of enemy or love of family. We should also understand as long as we hold fast and faithful to

Christ, there will be war. Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." While it is very true that Christ does send and give peace to this earth whenever and wherever the Gospel is preached, this world makes war against the same Gospel, hence "a sword". There is nothing that our world hates more than this Gospel message of peace. While the world hates us when we rebuke and condemn the sins of drunkenness, fornication, gambling, homosexuality, selfishness, and lust, the world will hate us much more if we say "By the blood of Jesus Christ there is forgiveness for all your sins of drunkenness, fornication, gambling, etc." While the preaching of the law then agrees with every man's conscience, the preaching of the Gospel of forgiveness by the blood of Christ causes every unbelieving heart to foam and rage like a wild animal against their own Savior. To put it another way: it is rather easy to believe the law, but it is impossible to believe the Gospel, unless the Holy Spirit converts us.

And so, as Jesus said, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." We cannot then let our natural love for family overthrow our faith and love for Christ. We must never compromise the truth of God's Word, not one doctrine, for the sake of peace in the family or convenience. Don't compromise your conscience which rests upon God's Word, for earthly ties or bonds. That is only a superficial love. To love our earthly family more than Christ is to deny Christ. Just consider how the founding fathers of this congregation once left the LCMS, or WELS, or the OLC years ago. They saw false doctrine was being defended rather than forsaken. Their faith witnessed a departure from God's Word and their faith could not agree with that. Out of love for Christ they marked and avoided those heterodox churches, which meant a painful separation of fellowship from family. They took to hear the passage "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." We should be careful then with that word "love" and discern between what is a godly and true love of Christ, and a superficial and ungodly love which this world promotes. Where there is a true faith and godly love, there is a love which loudly says NO to all that is evil. As Paul said so say we, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

III. God promises a reward to the faithful. Our last point for the day regards those who hear and receive God's Word. If they receive you, namely the Word you speak, it is because they have received Christ, namely they believe in His saving name. "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and ... he that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward." These are sure promises from Jesus so His disciples would not be discouraged. All their work, all their suffering would bear good fruit, and God would also reward the faithful. So it is in our own life.

While each believer labors in a vineyard which is filled with weeds and thorns and even murders who hate and oppose our every move, God's Word does not return unto Him void, but it accomplishes all that He pleases. Let us not then worry if we are not very good at speaking God's Word, but let us have power in the Word of God itself. As the great Apostle Paul said, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." I Cor. 2

Finally beloved, understand well these words of Christ, "He that receives you receives me." If they receive you, His disciple well, if they treat you kindly and do good to you, this good deed of faith is not only seen by Christ but it is also rewarded. If you suffer for the glory of His name, do not think the Lord does not see or know, for "whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." In the eyes of the world, giving a mere child a cup of cold water to drink is nothing, but in the eyes of God this is a great and noble work which shall be rewarded.

Finally, what is this reward? Heaven is the eternal reward to all those who remain faithful to the end. Those who confess Christ here, Jesus will confess there in heaven before His heavenly Father. While heaven is indeed a reward of grace, freely given through the merits of Christ, our labors here are nevertheless rewarded. This means also all your sufferings here are worth it, This is why the Paul said, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together. 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."

Won't it be wonderful, even glorious, when our forgiven soul escapes the boundaries of our sinful flesh when we cross that Jordan and enter the promised land? What is it like when the angels carries us up? What joy fills the heart at the first sight of all the angels and saints gathered together in song around the throne of the Lamb who was slain? Many a Christian has already experienced this joy and know it now, and you will too dear Christian, if only you believe. It is just as Jesus said, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Amen.

...and now may the PEACE of God which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.