

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

“...The Scripture Cannot Be Broken.” — John 10:35



“I am the resurrection and the life.
He who believes in Me, though he
may die, he shall live.”

John 11:25

THIS BLESSED BROKENNESS

Poem by Teacher Chad Seybt • Okabena, Minnesota

*“Make me hear joy and gladness,
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.”*

Psalm 51:8

This heart of mine
keeps giving in
to hosts of sin
that live within.

I rage without.
I lie and doubt,
steal and kill,
cheat and hate,
blaspheme Your name,
and fornicate.

My heart grows cold;
my bones wax old
with grief; nights spent
with tears, eyes rent.

Your Word cuts through
my thoughts, my words,
the things I do;
my sins are known to You.

Your Word speaks, “Peace!
Be still, the storm
of sin and death
and hearts war-torn.”

Behold!
Your Victor
does appear
with prints of nails
and scar of spear.

He bids me eat
the Victor’s meal:
the body broken
for me to heal.

He bids me drink
from Victor’s cup:
the blood He shed
to raise me up.

You break me down
to build me up.
How sweet to drink
this bitter cup!

My sins confessed;
my heart at rest.
What joy ...
this blessed brokenness!



Easter Customs or Jesus?

Pastor Jay Hartmann • Corpus Christi, Texas

One gets concerned with all the baskets, eggs, and candy displayed before the eyes of our children this time of year. Long ago I tired of this blatant attempt to dishonor and discredit the most important day in the Christian church year, so my children and I used an old shoebox to make a replica of an Easter tomb. After the children had done some earth-tone painting on the box, I would painstakingly cut an opening in one side and then reseal the opening.

My children would wake up to see that during the night “miraculously” the tomb’s door would be open and the insides found EMPTY! It helped teach them a great lesson. Our Lord’s PHYSICAL resurrection is the crowning proof and assurance from the Father that all Jesus came to accomplish has been accepted as payment in full for the sins of the world. Therefore our salvation is certain. Our children were not confused about the Easter Bunny playing any part in our salvation.

Now, the Christian faith is lacking something that almost every other religion in the world has: a dead man’s bones! Whereas other religions have a grave or a tomb containing the bones of its “saint,” the tomb of Jesus Christ is empty! Other graves are filled with the bones of dead men, false prophets, and fools who knew not the Savior, while the tomb of Christ stands empty! Our Redeemer lives!

It has been rightly said that the Christian faith stands or falls depending on whether or not Christ’s tomb was empty on that first Easter morning. Fellow Christians, rejoice, dry your tears, chase away any unbelieving fears, for our Savior lives!

Since Jesus is alive, the victory is won, and He tells us, *“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine!”* (Isaiah 43:1) The devil and all his demons have been defeated by the King of Glory! Our Savior has conquered death and hell; we are unconditionally forgiven, and we stand holy and blameless

before our physically resurrected Savior. Because Jesus lives, salvation is ours!

When some in the Corinthian congregation doubted this historical fact, the apostle Paul countered: *“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.”* If physical resurrection is impossible, then Jesus did not rise physically, then He would be a fake, and we are blind fools to believe in Jesus as our Savior.

“But now Christ is risen from the dead.” Rejoice; He lives! *“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Corinthians 15:12-20).

We boldly confess the certainty of Easter’s fulfilled promise: *“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”* (Job 19:25-27)



2013 TOUR CHOIR OF IMMANUEL LUTHERAN COLLEGE



From March 23-31, 2013, the itinerary of the Tour Choir of Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, John Reim, Director, included sacred concerts at CLC churches in the following cities: Watertown, S.Dak., Rapid City, S.Dak., Cheyenne, Wyo., Loveland, Colo., Denver (Lakewood), Colo., Valentine, Nebr., Okabena, Minn., Inver Grove Heights, Minn., and Red Wing, Minn.

Witnesses of an Empty Tomb

Pastor Wayne Eichstadt • Mankato, Minnesota

“You are witnesses of these things.” (LUKE 24:48)

On that first Easter morning the soldiers guarding Jesus’ tomb saw the angel come and roll away the stone, but they squandered the opportunity to be powerful witnesses and took the bribe to remain silent.

Mary Magdalene’s heart overflowed with love for her Lord—first in weeping as she witnessed the empty tomb and then with rejoicing after she met her living Savior.

On Easter evening Jesus appeared to the disciples who were gathered behind locked doors. First of all, He assured them that He was not a ghost and then *“He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures”* (Luke 24:45). Jesus explained why it was necessary to suffer and to die. He explained that repentance and remission of sins should be preached to all nations. Then Jesus said, *“You are witnesses of these things.”*

These disciples and others continued to witness the living Jesus during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension. All were witnesses of an empty tomb and a full hope—witnesses of death swallowed up by life.

You too are Jesus’ witness. You have the eyewitness accounts of Jesus’ resurrection, and they have been given to you by none other than the Holy Spirit Himself through His inspiration of Holy Scripture. The Holy Spirit has opened your understanding so that you are able to comprehend the Scriptures. You know that Jesus matches the Old Testament prophecies of Christ, and that He fulfilled your salvation. You have been given the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19). Therefore you also are *“witnesses of these things.”*

As a witness of Christ’s empty tomb you are able to confess Christ and all that He has done for you. Unlike the soldiers, you can take advantage of the opportunity. Like Mary, you can confess and proclaim the Lord

whom you love. You can declare the forgiveness of sins that is found in Jesus, your living Lord.

As witnesses of the empty tomb you are able to share the gospel message with your words and also by how you live. You are able to live as if you have a living Savior—because you do! You are able to live confidently because Jesus *lives* to guide you, guard you, provide for you, and bless you day by day. You testify to Jesus' empty tomb by how you approach sickness, tragedy, and eventually death. You are a witness of the empty tomb as you demonstrate that you are living for a living Savior and no longer for yourself and what pleases you.

The day will come when you will be a joyful witness of your own empty tomb. *“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will 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 has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’”* (1 Corinthians 15:51-55)

On the Last Day when Jesus returns to judge all people, He will raise up all the dead. The unbelievers will be raised to the sorrow and never-ending misery of eternal judgment. As a witness of Christ's empty tomb and as a child of God you will be raised to live eternally with your Lord. Your body will be raised from whatever state of decay in which it is found. It will be raised in a perfected, glorified, and sinless condition. This glorified and perfected body will be inseparably joined with the soul for eternity and stand as a witness of the empty tombs—both yours and Christ's. Jesus promised this when He said, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die”* (John 11:25-26).

Job had the firm confidence that he would stand with his Redeemer and be the witness of his own empty tomb. He declared: *“I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another”* (Job 19:25-27). Every child of God can stand sure on the truth that our Redeemer lives, and because He lives we will live also! (cf. John 14:19)

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory! That victory is found in the empty tomb of which you are a witness.

The Tragic Results of a Denial of Christ's Resurrection

Pastor Nathanael Mayhew · Lawrenceville, Georgia

Can a person be a Christian but not believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead? The apostle Paul says that denying Christ's resurrection brings tragic results. We list three of them below.

Result #1) An Empty Faith and Preaching

"If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty" (1 Corinthians 15:14). Here is the first tragic result of denying the bodily resurrection of Jesus: our preaching and faith are in vain.

If Christ did not rise, we are wasting our time when we study His Word at home and in church and when we worship with fellow believers.

If Christ did not rise, then the Gospel writers Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the apostles Peter and Paul were all liars.

And not only would the New Testament writers be liars, but the Old Testament prophets had to be lying as well when they prophesied of the resurrection of the Messiah and of all those who believe in Him. If Christ is not risen, then our entire religion is based on a chain of deceptions.

However, to deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the basic lie. There were hundreds of people who witnessed the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus told them to tell the world that He was no longer dead but alive.

These people didn't keep it to themselves but passed the factual truth of the resurrection on to others. Our Christian faith is based on the words of those eye-witnesses. St. Paul says that if Christ is not risen, then *"we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up..."* (1 Corinthians 15:15).

Result #2) Still in Our Sins

According to Paul, *"If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are*

still in your sins!" (1 Corinthians 15:17) Our faith is futile—"good for nothing"—if it is based on a dead Jesus Christ.

Of course, faith in and of itself does not establish fact. Faith is only as good as the object one believes in. People have faith in Buddha, in Krishna, and other false gods; such a faith is not going to save them on Judgment day.

The same is true for Christians. If Christ did not rise from the dead, then His work for our redemption was not complete, and we are still in our sins. That means we would remain guilty before God and receive the just condemnation for our sins.

Result #3) No Life After Death

If Christ is not risen, Paul adds, *"Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished"* (1 Corinthians 15:18). If Christ did not rise, then there is no promise of eternal life.

Our bodily resurrection from death is based on Christ's resurrection. If Christ did not rise, then there is no hope in a life to come—neither for our loved ones who have died in Christ, nor for us.

"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (1 Corinthians 15:19).

But Now Christ IS Risen!!

Christianity without a risen Savior and without the sure and certain hope of our own resurrection from the grave is worse than no religion at all. If Christ is not risen, then we are the biggest fools who have ever lived, for our entire life is based on a fable.

"...But now Christ is risen from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:20). The truth of Christ's bodily resurrection shows the many and great blessings which are ours because of that resurrection. Our entire faith—living rests on the resurrection, and God has given us good reason to be confident in it. Christ is risen, and as a result our faith and preaching are not in vain, our sins are forgiven, the dead in Christ are living in heaven, and we are of all people the most blessed!

Thanks be to God that Jesus did rise from the dead—and for all the blessings which we receive along with His resurrection.

"But now Christ is risen from the dead!" Yes, He is risen indeed! †

**Our bodily
resurrection from
death is based on
Christ's resurrection.
If Christ did not rise,
then there is no hope
in a life to come...**

“The Good Shepherd”

Pastor Andrew Schaller • Watertown, South Dakota

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”

(JOHN 10:11)

A name is more than a title, for nearly every name has a meaning. A name is more than a title when actions are joined with that name. A name can also describe a person, telling us something about him.

In the Holy Scriptures we are given many names that describe the Savior Jesus. Each of these names comforts us, each in its own way.

The Lord Jesus is called “*Christ*” (cf. Matthew 16:16). We understand that this isn’t Jesus’ last name but a name that means ‘the anointed one’ or ‘the chosen one.’ The name indicates to us that Jesus was anointed by God—chosen to be our Prophet, our Priest, and our King.

The Lord Jesus is called “*the Alpha and the Omega*” (cf. Revelation 1:8, 22:13ff). This name reminds us that Jesus is the eternal God. He is pictured as the Alpha and the Omega in the Greek alphabet (A and Z), for He was there at the beginning (cf. John 1:1), is with us at all times (cf. Matthew 28:20), and will be there at the end (1 Corinthians 15:24).

There are other names given to the Savior that comfort sinners (for example, “*Jesus*” – Matthew 1:21), but the one that stands out for me is the one Jesus used of Himself when He called Himself “*the good shepherd*.”

Jesus didn’t describe Himself as the “the warrior of Calvary” or “the conqueror of evil” but used the rather pastoral term, “*the good shepherd*.”

In What Ways Is Jesus the Good Shepherd?

He is the Good Shepherd because He gives His life for the sheep (John 10:11). In this context Jesus contrasts Himself to hired shepherds (John 10:12ff) who, when push comes to shove, don't put the needs and protection of the sheep as their primary concern. Hired shepherds run away, leaving the sheep to fend for themselves when they are in danger; by contrast, the Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

We understand that we are the sheep—we and all those who believe in Him, who rely upon Him for forgiveness of sins and entrance into the Father's House (He is also "*the door of the sheep*," cf. John 10:7ff).

We see Jesus as the Good Shepherd when we realize and confess that He died for ME!

He is the Good Shepherd also because He watches out for both our body and our soul. He provides for the needs of our body, and in His Word He gives food for the soul. He sends His angels to guard and defend us (Psalm 91:11-12, Hebrews 1:14), and He makes even the things we consider evil work out for our eternal good (Romans 8:28).

Jesus' love for us extends beyond this life. He didn't lay down His life merely to remove the consequence of sin that looms over us because of the curse of the law—eternal death, but He died also that we might live with Him forever in Heaven, a place without sin, sorrow, or crying.

Our eternal inheritance is assured by His resurrection from the dead (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-5ff). He is the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep. He is also the Good Shepherd who took up that life again on the third day—as He promised (cf. John 10:17-18)—to rule forever as the Good Shepherd.



**Now may He who
from the dead
Bro't the Shepherd
of the sheep,
Jesus Christ, our
King and Head,
All our souls
in safety keep!
To that dear
Redeemer's praise,
Who the cov'nant
sealed with blood,
Let our hearts and
voices raise
Loud thanksgivings
to our God.**

Amen!
(TLH #51:1,3)

The Final Word

Pastor Michael Eichstadt • Hales Corners, Wisconsin

Each weekday at noon a local TV station poses a “sound-off” question. It might be “Should city crews use more salt on the streets?” or “Would you like to see flu shots mandated for all residents?” or “Could stricter gun laws curb violence?” Viewers are encouraged to “sound-off” by texting or emailing their comments, which are then broadcast later in the day.

While people may appreciate the chance to have their voices heard, it doesn’t really change anything. The opinion I submit has no particular expertise or authority of law behind it. The fact that I or someone else in the community states something, doesn’t make it so.

While people may appreciate the chance to have their voices heard, it doesn’t really change anything.

I imagine that if our TV newscasters invited comments regarding Easter, the responses would range from talk of egg hunts, spring weather, and new clothes to sharp criticism of those who still firmly believe that Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead.

The bodily resurrection of Christ has always been the objectionable part of Easter to the unbelieving world. Remember the reaction to the apostle Paul’s preaching in Athens: “*When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter’*” (Acts 17:32).

What ultimately matters is not human reason or popular opinion but the word of Him who possesses all knowledge, power, and authority in heaven and on earth. People can have all kinds of opinions, but there is only one God and one truth.

What is Easter all about? God doesn't leave us wondering. He delivered the news to the women at the tomb through His holy angel: *"He is risen!"*

That says it all.

"He is risen!" (Matthew 26:8) That event silences once and for all those who argue that Jesus could not have been more than a gifted prophet and a loving teacher. If He had been merely a man, as is claimed, He would

have remained in the grave. God's final word sweeps away all doubts which Satan tries to plant in our minds regarding Jesus' identity, for He was *"declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead"* (Romans 1:4).

"He is risen!" That is the confirmation of the Lord's cry from the cross: *"It is finished!"* Jesus drank the foul, bitter, poisonous cup of suffering down to the last dregs. He bore all our sins and absorbed in His own body the full penalty of eternal death in our behalf. Therefore God has pronounced His verdict of "not guilty" upon the entire world of sinners. *"He was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification"* (Romans 4:25).

"He is risen!" That is the final word of glorious hope from the Lord when we face our inevitable death and grave, for our Savior went ahead of us, defeated death, and promises, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die"* (John 11:25-26).

God's final word to His saving plan formulated from eternity is: *"He is risen!"*

Faith replies, *"He is risen indeed!"*

**God's final word
sweeps away all doubts
which Satan tries to
plant in our minds
regarding Jesus'
identity...**



*He is
RISEN
indeed!*

GOOD FRIDAY 2013

Pastor Em. Daniel Fleischer • Oakdale, Minnesota



Following the question “*Whom do men say that I am?*” Jesus turned to His disciples and asked, “*But whom do You say that I am?*” Peter responded with his sterling confession, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matthew 16:13–16). The word of Jesus and His ministry had left a mark on Peter’s heart. On Calvary the word and cross of Jesus also made a mark on the heart of the Roman centurion who concluded, “*Truly this was the Son of God*” (Matthew 27:54).

As we observe the Passion culminating in Good Friday, we ask with the hymnwriter:

**Do we pass that cross unheeding,
Breathing no repentant vow,
Tho’ we see Thee wounded, bleeding,
See Thy thorn-encircled brow?** (TLH #145:2)

After his fine confession, Peter manifested a not-so-sterling confession as he “rebuked” Jesus for saying that “*the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.*” Peter then demonstrated that he had not been listening well or that perhaps he was not ready to accept what he heard. He said, “*Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You*” (Matthew 16:22).

Does this not happen to us frequently? We fail to listen or do not want to believe what we have heard. Somehow the conclusion of Jesus’ statement—“*and after three days rise again*”—failed to register with Peter.

But consider what our circumstance would have been if Jesus—true God manifested in the flesh as true man—had not died on Calvary. We would still be dead in trespasses and sins and thus cast out from the kingdom of God.

Our society is obsessed with fairness. At times we hear the

plaintive cry from someone whose reaction to a circumstance or event is, “But that’s not fair!”

If anyone could have made that complaint, it is Jesus, the perfect Son of God in whose flesh there was no sin and upon whose lips there was no evil. He might have said, “Why, Father, must I die for something I did not do? Why must I bear the sins and the condemnation that was pronounced upon man? Why should I die for people who had been told the consequences of sin and disobedience, but nevertheless choose to do what they were told not to do? It is not fair that I should suffer and die for them.”

When we contemplate that, does not the Savior’s willingness to go without complaint make an imprint on our hearts? Surely it must unless our hearts are hearts of stone!

We have heard the account of Jesus’ trial many times and how it concludes: “*And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him...*” (Luke 23:33). And why? Because it had been foreordained that innocent Jesus should die the death of the guilty. The wrath of God against ungodliness was meted out upon Jesus.

Make it personal! Say it for yourself, “He who knew no sin took my sin, and paid the penalty for me! When Jesus commended His spirit into the hand of the Father and died, He did it for me.” Does this not make an imprint on our hearts?

It was only through death that life could be restored—but not just any death. It took the death of an innocent Victim. If the Savior’s prophecy of His rising again was to come to pass, Good Friday had to happen.

Where the imprint of the Savior’s cross is on the heart, there will be a heart ready to fight the good fight against sin and evil, so that God may be glorified. And yes, there will be a penitent person who will look forward with yearning to the third day—the day of resurrection—as well as to the final call when all who believe will be with the Lord in the glory of heaven.

**Yet Thy sinless death hath brought us
Life eternal, peace, and rest;
Only what Thy grace hath taught us
Calms the sinner’s stormy breast. (TLH #145:2)**

MEDITATIONS ON JESUS' SERMON ON THE MOUNT:
MATTHEW CHAPTERS FIVE THROUGH SEVEN

WHAT ABOUT FASTING?

Pastor Thomas Schuetze • Coloma, Michigan

When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

(MATTHEW 6:16-18, NIV)

When was the last time you fasted? Have you ever fasted?

In Old Testament times fasting—abstaining from food for a specified time—was a common religious practice. Even though there was no direct command from God to do so, voluntary fasting for religious purposes was regularly undertaken.

A main reason why believers of old engaged in fasting was that they wanted to show in an outward way the sorrow they felt within their hearts for having transgressed God's commandments.

Fasting was also practiced for a variety of other reasons—as a sign of mourning, as a way to express gratitude to God for His mercy, or as a way to show dependence on God for help in time of need.

Fasting was practiced frequently in Jesus' day too. Unfortunately, for many it had become a mere outward exercise with no inner spiritual content. The Pharisees, for example, fasted regularly but only because they wanted others to notice and admire their rigid self-discipline. Jesus roundly condemned such fasting as hypocritical. Instead, He taught His disciples to fast in such a way that only their heavenly Father would see them. He encouraged the people who chose to fast to do it in a way that was thoughtful and reverent—for the praise of God and not for personal glory.

What about today? Should we Christians be encouraged to fast? If so, how and when should we do it?

Fasting is a practice that Scripture neither commands nor forbids, so it falls into the category of things we are at liberty to do or not do. Some Christians may find that fasting serves a beneficial purpose—for example, as a devotional aid to focus their thoughts on the Lord and the blessings He offers in His Word. Others may not find the custom of fasting to be spiritually beneficial. They may decide to utilize other tools besides fasting as devotional aids.

In any case, whether we make the choice to fast or not to fast, the Savior would have us draw lessons from this portion of Scripture for our lives as His people. He teaches us to resist the natural tendency to merely "go through the motions" in our faith-lives.

For example, when we attend worship services, Jesus encourages us to do it for His sake—because we love Him who loved us first, and not for the purpose that others might see us and think well of us.

Or when the Savior's Word is presented in the Bible lessons and sermon, the Spirit prompts us to listen with ears attuned, seeking prayerfully to apply the Word to our lives and in this way to bring glory to His name.

And when we read our Bibles, we do so with the earnest plea that the Holy Spirit will use the words He inspired to fortify our faith in Jesus, to increase our love for Him, and to bless us with the strength we need to deny ourselves, taking up our cross and following Him.

Above all, what the Savior lays on our hearts in this section from His mountaintop sermon is that we keep in mind throughout our days of pilgrimage the "true fast" He looks for from His disciples on a daily basis: godly sorrow for sin and faith that He freely forgives sin for His mercy's sake.

In the words of the hymnwriter:

*Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfill Thy Law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.*

(TLH #376:2)

PART TWO OF A SERIES

“This is most certainly true!”

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

2) God is Maker of Heaven and Earth

Teacher David Bernthal • Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

Several years ago I watched an interesting program entitled *If Walls Could Talk*. The premise of the program was that buildings reveal much about their previous occupants and the activities that were carried on within them—if one “listens” to the houses.

The trouble is that many people don't seem to be listening. People who study ancient structures often overlook the fact that those buildings were designed with a special purpose and built for a specific function.

We may marvel at the complexity and engineering of the pyramids in Egypt, of Machu Picchu, of the Great Wall of China, and of modern skyscrapers—and if these man-made “walls” could talk, what would they say to us about their origins?

No rational person would try to convince us that a pile of lumber, bricks, mortar, pipes, electrical wire, and so on simply “flew together” to create a three-bedroom house with two baths and a garage. Since a modern house is just too intricately designed to have happened by chance, its mere existence raises the question, “Who built this?” The Lord instructs us, “*For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God*” (Hebrews 3:4).

In the Evolution/Creation debate some would have us believe that

The Five Installments:

- 1) God is my Father Almighty;
- 2) God is Maker of Heaven and Earth;**
- 3) God is my Preserver and Provider;
- 4) God is my Protector;
- 5) God does all this for me by His grace.

structures and organisms far more complex than our houses came into existence by random chance or cosmic accident. On our part, we as Christians have two great weapons in this debate. First, the very world around us cries out in testimony to an almighty Maker's existence and creative ability (see Psalm 19). Secondly, the Bible, the Word of God, clearly testifies that the Maker of heaven and earth is almighty God, whom we know also as our Father.

We are happy that scientists use their powerful microscopes to discover that living organisms are structured in complex and intricate designs, as if blueprinted by a masterful designer. Simply put, in our 21st century world not only the walls are talking! The flora and fauna around us, as well as our own bodies and the very heavens themselves, fairly shout the wonders of an amazing Creator full of power and creative ability.

Recently astronomers discovered what is being called the largest structure in the universe. It is an estimated four billion light-years across (as compared to the Milky Way galaxy which is estimated to be "only" 100,000 light years in diameter). This Large Quasar Group (known as U1.27 or Huge-LQG) is causing some problems for many in the space business who are saying that this discovery is calling into question the Big Bang Theory itself.

At the very least, their "cosmological principle" has been cast into doubt. This principle—which has been around since Albert Einstein—attempts to pinpoint the location of Earth in relation to the rest of the known universe. One observer described the "new" position this way, "It's a great big universe, and we're all really puny. Yes, humankind is probably even more insignificant than we could ever have imagined, thanks to [these] new findings...."

Interesting, isn't it? About 3000 years ago King David—through both observation and the guidance of the Holy Spirit—had the following to say about man and his relative position in the universe, "*O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens... When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him? And the son of man that You visit him?*" (Psalm 8:1,3-4)

This brings us to the most valid authority in the Creation/Evolution debate—God's Word. Since the question of "origins" belongs to the realm of of history rather than to observational science, wouldn't it be wonderful to have an eyewitness account of one who was there? As God put the question to Job, "*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its limits?*" (Job 38:4-5)

THE FIRST ARTICLE

(*About Creation*)

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean?

I believe that God has created me and all creatures. He has given me my body and life, eyes, ears, and all my bodily members, my mind, and all my senses and still keeps them for me. God also preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, spouse and children, land, animals, and all my property and all I need to support this body and life. He protects me from all danger. He guards and defends me from every evil. God does all this because He is my good and gracious Father in heaven, not because of anything I have done to earn or deserve it. For all of this it is my duty to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him. This is most certainly true. (*Martin Luther's SMALL CATECHISM, Sydow edition, 2000*)

How comforting to know that we have been given the eternal, living Word of God, which time and again emphatically declares that God is the Maker of heaven and earth (see Genesis chapters one and two)! “This is most certainly true!”

Fellow believers, isn't it a blessing to believe and trust in a biblical text which never needs to be updated nor rewritten to fit the latest discoveries or theories of man!? While mankind runs from hypothesis to theory and from conjecture to speculation—we are assured that nothing will change the fact that “*God said...and it was so!*”

Astronomers may have now relegated the Earth to a remote and insignificant corner of the universe, and it may be so—geographically speaking. But what joy and blessing that the Creator of the universe still knows *where* we are!

More than that, through His Word He has also given us the opportunity to know *who* we are. Our first parents were created in God's own image, but when they fell into sin (as Genesis chapter three tells us), so did all their descendants. Yet He has provided us with a Savior, His Son, the Good Shepherd, through whom God's image can be restored in us. It all takes place through God's grace, appropriated by Spirit-wrought faith in the innocent, shed blood of Jesus Christ which redeems us from all our sins.

And think of it—through Jesus we will be blessed to see the perfect new world, the New Heavens and New Earth which our Father is preparing for us!

The Beauty and Joy of Christian Fellowship

Pastor Em. David Lau • Eau Claire, Wisconsin

(Seventh of eight installments)

Already now in this sinful world believers in Christ are enabled to experience the beauty and joy of Christian fellowship. We certainly can appreciate those moments in our lives when God gives us such experiences as little glimpses and foretastes of future bliss. Consider a few such moments in the lives of some Old and New Testament believers. As we hear of their experiences of Christian fellowship, we can think of times when our gracious God has led us to experience similar moments of beautiful and joyous Christian fellowship.

In Genesis 50:15-21 we hear Joseph's brothers confessing their sin to him and Joseph saying to them: *"Do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones."* The text continues: *"And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."* Is this not a thing of beauty and a joy forever that believers in God's promises confess their sins and forgive one another!

Jump ahead to Exodus chapters 35 and 36 where God's forgiven people bring their offerings for

the erection of the tabernacle.

Christian fellowship is more than nice talk. It means working together for the cause of the gospel. What a joyful moment when the people reported to Moses: *"The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the LORD commanded us to do."*

In Joshua chapter 22 we read of a rumor that the 2½ eastern tribes were building an opposition altar next to the Jordan River. A number of leaders, including the priest Phinehas, made a journey to the Jordan to investigate this rumor. After very serious words of admonition the eastern tribes explained their actions satisfactorily, and a rift was avoided.

What joy was in Phinehas' words when he said: *"This day we perceive that the LORD is among us, because you have not committed this treachery against the LORD."* The account continues: *"So the thing pleased the children of Israel, and the children of Israel blessed God."* They were experiencing the beauty and joy of Christian fellowship.

Surely another such moment was when the magnificent Temple built by Solomon at God's command

was dedicated to the service of the LORD (as recorded in First Kings 8). Solomon spoke for all the people: *“Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses.”* As in similar circumstances in our day, the joy of the people was expressed in a banquet. *“At that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great assembly from the entrance of Hamath to the Brook of Egypt, before the LORD our God, seven days and seven more days—fourteen days. On the eighth day he sent the people away; and they blessed the king, and went to their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the good that the LORD had done for His servant David, and for Israel His people.”*

In Second Chronicles chapter 20 there was great joy among God's people which they celebrated with music. King Jehoshaphat and his people were facing a threat from three enemy nations at once: the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Edomites. The king led the people in humble prayer: *“We have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.”* God's people were united at this time of danger. *“Now all Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children, stood before the LORD.”* God sent a prophet with good news: *“Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's.”*

The people believed this word from God, and a choir of Levites *“stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with voices loud and high.”* The music continued on the next day as God gave them victory. When they returned to Jerusalem, the rejoicing continued. They went back to Jerusalem *“with joy, for the LORD had made them rejoice over their enemies. So they came to Jerusalem with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets, to the house of the LORD.”* Is anything on Earth more beautiful than the voices of God's people praising their God for the good things He has done? The joy of united worship is celebrated in many of the psalms.

But Christian fellowship includes more than joint prayer in time of need and joint praise in time of victory. It includes working together in the cause of the LORD, as in the time when Nehemiah led the returning refugees in Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city. When Nehemiah said to them, *“Let us build the wall of Jerusalem,”* they responded by saying: *“Let us rise up and build.”* *“Then they set their hands to this good work”* (Nehemiah 2:17-18), even though their enemies made fun of them and did all they could to hinder their work. But even in that time of joyful unity we are told of some who *“did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord”* (Nehemiah 3:5).

(to be continued)

Catchy One-liners Can be Dangerous

Pastor Paul Fleischer • Cheyenne, Wyoming

“We only believe as much of the Bible as we practice.”

This statement on a local church sign speaks a spiritually dangerous half-truth.

The implication that everything the Bible teaches is to be preached and taught is, of course, correct. In His Great Commission the Savior says, “...teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28). And since “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16), all its teachings (“the whole counsel of God”, Acts 20:27) are entrusted to Christ's disciples to be proclaimed, taught, and “practiced.”

But the sad fact is that much of nominal Christendom today is indicted by the statement. Rather than “believing” what the Bible says—and “practicing” those beliefs by preaching, confessing, and defending them—the pull of non-judgmental relativism and political correctness rules even in organized religion. If, as has been said, “practice is doctrine in action,” much of visible Christendom stands indicted as compromising and/or betraying Bible doctrine.

Put another way, though calling themselves Christian, churches and church members which allow a decadent society to dictate their public stance—calling good “evil” and evil “good” (see Isaiah 5:20)—cannot claim to “believe” the Bible, for they do not “practice” it.

Denied and/or compromised in many would-be Christian churches today are such Bible teachings as: God's Word is true in all things; faith in Jesus Christ is the only Way to eternal salvation; Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead; God created the world in six normal, ordinary days; man the sinner is unable to cooperate in his conversion; the homosexual lifestyle is condemned; the male headship principle in home and church is to be upheld. And the list goes on.

**If, as has been said, "practice is doctrine in action,"
much of visible Christendom stands indicted as
compromising and/or betraying Bible doctrine.**

As the church sign implies, Christians indeed are to *"be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves"* (James 1:22). The apostle says that *"thus also faith, by itself, if it does not have works, is dead"* (2:17).

Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount says, *"By their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven...."* The Lord proceeds to call that one "wise" who hears God's Word and "does" it, even as He calls one a "fool" who hears the Word but "does not do" it (cf. Matthew 7:21-28).

So Where Is the Danger?

On the other hand, the same sign-saying comes dangerously close to misrepresenting the heart of Bible teaching—the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If what the sign announces is so, what is to be made of the apostle Paul's remark, *"For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.... For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice"* (Romans 7:15,19)?

Does the apostle admit to not believing the Bible because he admits to not practicing it? Hardly. He is saying that when it comes to the law of God and what that holy law says to each one of us, the fact is that all people alike fail to "practice" God's holy law (*"For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."*, Romans 3:23f)!

In other words, that very failure puts all alike in desperate need of a Savior. Recognizing that fact, God the Father sent His only-begotten Son to redeem law-breaking sinners. *"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus Christ "practiced" the law of God perfectly in thought, word, and deed—something mere humans can never do—and then offered His holy life as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world.

As Christians recognize and confess their inability to "practice" the law perfectly in thought, word, and deed, they exclaim with St.

Paul: *"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"* Yet in the midst of their wretchedness the penitent find peace of heart and mind where the apostle did, as he exclaimed: *"I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* (Romans 7:24f)

Catchy one-liners can be spiritually dangerous. For one thing, if the purpose of God's holy law is muddled (*"By the law is the knowledge of sin"*, Romans 3:20), passers-by can be deprived/robbed of the comfort of the full and free forgiveness of all sins through the Redeemer, Jesus Christ (*"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"*, 1 John 1:7).



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LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

"... THE SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN." — JOHN 10 : 35

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