

## For our Day in Halle, Eisleben, and Erfurt

*Today, since we will be at both the place of Luther's birth and death, I want share an excerpt from his last sermon in Wittenberg and also his actual last sermon in Eisleben and a little about his death from Martin Brecht's great three volume biography. Luther had traveled back to his home town to help resolve a conflict between two civil magistrates/Counts.*

*From Luther's last Sermon in Wittenberg ...*

Here he is teaching concerning the works of Christians. Now, he is saying, now that we have been made rich through Christ the Lord, transferred from the dominion of the devil and the world to his kingdom [cf. Col. 1:13], that is, into the church of Christ; now that we have the Word and the sacraments, now that we have been baptized, now that we are sons and heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ the Son of God [cf. Rom. 8:17], who has given us eternal life, now it is necessary that we look to and really devote ourselves to the glorious calling and gifts.

After baptism there still remains much of the old Adam. For, as we have often said, it is true that sin is forgiven in baptism, but we are not yet altogether clean, as is shown in the parable of the Samaritan, who carried the man wounded by robbers to an inn [Luke 10:30–37]. He did not take care of him in such a way that he healed him at once, but rather bound up his wounds and poured on oil. The man who fell among robbers suffered two injuries. First, everything that he had was taken from him, he was robbed; and second, he was wounded, so that he was half-dead and would have died, if the Samaritan had not come to him. Adam fell among the robbers and implanted sin in us all. If Christ, the Samaritan, had not come, we should all have had to die. He it is who binds our wounds, carries us into the church and is now healing us. So we are now under the Physician's care. The sin, it is true, is wholly forgiven, but it has not been wholly purged. If the Holy Spirit is not ruling people, they become corrupt again; but the Holy Spirit must cleanse the wounds daily. Therefore this life is a hospital; the sin has really been forgiven, but it has not yet been healed.

So there must be preaching and everyone must also take care that his own reason may not lead him astray.<sup>1</sup>

From the end of Luther's last Sermon in Eisleben

When, therefore, the great lords, the emperor, pope, cardinals, and bishops are hostile and wrathful toward us because of all this, excommunicate us, and would gladly burn and murder us all, we must suffer it and say: We did not start this on account of the pope, the bishops, and the princes, nor shall we stop it on account of them. Christ says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden" [Matt. 11:28], and it is as though he were saying: Just stick to me, hold on to my Word and let everything else go. If you are burned and

---

<sup>1</sup> Luther, M. (1999). [\*Luther's works, vol. 51: Sermons I\*](#) (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.; Vol. 51, pp. 372–373). Fortress Press.

beheaded for it, then have patience, I will make it so sweet for you that you easily would be able to bear it. It has also been written of St. Agnes that when she was led to prison to be killed, it was to her as if she were going to a dance. Where did she get this? Ah, only from this Christ, from believing this saying, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” That is to say: If things go badly, I will give you the courage even to laugh about it; and if even though you walk on fiery coals, the torment shall nevertheless not be so severe and the devil shall nevertheless not be so bad, and you will rather feel that you are walking on roses.<sup>6</sup> I will give you the heart to laugh even though Turk, pope, emperor, and everybody else be filled with horrible wrath and rage. Only come to me; and if you are facing oppression, death, or torture, because the pope, the Turk, and emperor are attacking you, do not be afraid; it will not be heavy for you, but light and easy to bear, for I give you the Spirit, so that the burden, which for the world would be unbearable, becomes for you a light burden. For when you suffer for my sake, it is my yoke and my burden, which I lay upon you in grace, that you may know that this your suffering is well pleasing to God and to me and that I myself am helping you to carry it and giving you power and strength to do so. So also say Ps. 31 [:24] and Ps. 27 [:14]: “Let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord,” i.e., all you who suffer for his sake. Let misfortune, sin, death, and whatever the devil and the world loads upon you assail and assault you, if only you remain confident and undismayed, waiting upon the Lord in faith, you have already won, you have already escaped death and far surpassed the devil and the world.

Lo, this means that the wise of this world are rejected, that we may learn not to think ourselves wise and to put away from our eyes all great personages, indeed, to shut our eyes altogether, **and cling only to Christ’s Word and come to him**, as he so lovingly invites us to do, and say: Thou alone art my beloved Lord and Master, I am thy disciple.

This and much more might be said concerning this Gospel, but I am too weak and we shall let it go at that.<sup>2</sup>

---

Even as a young Erfurt master, thoughts about his own death had not been foreign to Luther. Thereafter he had always thought he would soon die from illness or martyrdom. With his faith he had overcome his original anxiety about death and the following judgment. He first found himself in acute danger of dying as a result of his heart trouble in 1527. Ten years later in Schmalkalden, he seemed to be facing imminent death because of his kidney stones. From at least this time onward, the old Luther constantly anticipated that death would strike soon. He believed the peace mission to Mansfeld, which he undertook despite his poor state of health, would be one of the last tasks he would accomplish.

There are numerous reports and accounts of Luther’s death, the most important of which are the ones offered by the eyewitnesses Justus Jonas and the Mansfeld castle preacher, Michael

---

<sup>2</sup> Luther, M. (1999). [\*Luther’s works, vol. 51: Sermons I\*](#) (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.; Vol. 51, pp. 391–392). Fortress Press.

Coelius. They were aware that the reformer's death would also have an impact on the controversy between the parties, and therefore they took care to present accurate information.

Luther had not participated in the final negotiations on 17 February 1546 because he had not felt well. But he did take supper with his companions that day. The conversation turned to the question of whether they would recognize one another in the life to come. For Luther this was not a banal question. He thought that those who were renewed in Christ would know one another spiritually better than did Adam and Eve in Paradise. After the meal, he went as usual to his room at about eight o'clock to pray at the window. Shortly thereafter he suffered pains and tightness in his chest, undoubtedly symptoms of an attack of angina pectoris. Aurifaber obtained, from Count Albrecht, a medication made of grated unicorn. Thereafter, Luther was able to sleep for an hour on the day bed. At about ten o'clock, he wanted to lie down in his bed in the bedchamber adjoining the room. He committed his soul to God with the words of Ps. 31:5, which were often used by those who were dying. With supreme irony he exhorted those present to pray "for our Lord God and his gospel, that all might be well with him, for the Council of Trent and the accursed pope are very angry with him."

At about one o'clock Luther awakened with another attack of pain. He expected matter-of-factly that he would die in the city where he had been born and baptized. He moved again from the bedchamber to the day bed in the room and once more commended his soul to God.<sup>3</sup> (*Will tell you the rest later today!*)

*Since we've learned a lot about Luther's wife Katy, here is what she wrote to her sister in law two weeks after Luther died,*

"For who would not be sad and afflicted at the loss of such a precious man as my dear lord was? He did great things not just for a city or a single land, but for the whole world. Therefore I am truly so deeply grieved that I cannot tell a single person of the great pain that is in my heart. And I do not understand how I can cope with this. I cannot eat or drink, nor can I sleep. And if I had had a principality or an empire and lost it, it would not have been as painful as it is now that the dear Lord God has taken from me this precious and beloved man, and not from me alone, but from the whole world."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Brecht, M. (1999). [Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1532–1546](#) (J. L. Schaaf, Trans.;; pp. 375–376). Fortress Press.

<sup>4</sup> Brecht, M. (1999). [Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1532–1546](#) (J. L. Schaaf, Trans.;; pp. 377–378). Fortress Press.