

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Third Sunday After Trinity, July 7, 2019

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 278, 198:4, 427, 437, 447:4.

Lessons: 1 Kings 18:21-40, 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, John 14:7-14.

Sermon Text: Psalm 49:5-15.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Many years ago in a time of great difficulty, the President of the United States, told the nation in a speech ‘The only thing we have to fear is fear itself’. He was trying to offer comfort to the nation. But the child of God, doesn’t even have that to fear. We have nothing to fear, for God is with us, and this morning God asks and encourages us with the words

“WHY SHOULD I FEAR?”

1. ***“No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him.”***
2. ***All can see that the wise, the rich and famous all die.***
3. ***“But God will redeem my life from the grave, he will surely take me to himself.***

All of our hymns this morning contain this idea: “Fear not, I am with Thee, oh, be not dismayed; For I am thy God and will still give thee aid; I’ll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand, Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.”

“Fear not!” “Don’t be afraid!” We find those words again and again in Scripture. Whether an angel appears and to comfort the people says ‘Don’t be afraid – I’m just God’s servant’; or whether the children of God are in great difficulty and God speaks to them in one way or another and says “Don’t fear!”; God tells us many times in His Word that we are not to be afraid.

The child of God has help for his fears -- For all of his fears. God asks you today and tells you today: ***“Why should I fear?”***, and he gives some specific instances of fears, and he tells us why we should not fear. There are many things that could cause us to fear; whether it is things that we imagine could occur in the darkness, at night; whether it is those kinds of things that weigh upon us so that we wake up in the middle of the night, and wonder ‘what now?’; or whether it is the kinds of things that trouble us during the day and we wonder “What’s going to happen next?” For all of those fears God says ***“Don’t!”*** Don’t be afraid!

But what is perhaps the greatest fear of all mankind that we, the children of God, don’t need to be afraid of is the fear of death. Oh, yes, we do fear death, in the same way that probably all of us are afraid of getting physically hurt. We don’t want to be hurt, and we don’t want to die. We want to stay here with those people who love us. Yet there is a certain amount of fear of death in everyone, even the child of God. But that’s the special fear that I want to encourage you to ask – and answer for yourself – the question ***“Why should I fear?”*** This morning we will see from the Word of God that the Lord is going to provide for you – and for everyone who believes in him as Savior – eternal life so that after death you will receive only the blessedness of heaven.

“Why should I fear when evil days come, when wicked deceivers surround me – those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches?” Why should I fear when those things happen? There are wicked deceivers all around us. The wickedness of deceivers is all around us. The iniquity of sin is all around us. They press us hard on all sides from outside of us; and because of our sinful flesh, as Saint Paul tells us: ***“The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do.”*** Romans 7:19 I know that I am sinful. I have my sinful nature and can do nothing at all good. Because of that, I would, without Jesus Christ, have a great deal to fear. I then would and should fear eternal death, just as I would fear temporal death, thinking ‘That’s the end -- there is nothing more’. But the child of God says ‘Why should I fear? Look at the wealthy – those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches. They, too, die.

“For all can see that wise men die; the foolish and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others. Their tombs will remain their houses forever, their dwellings for endless generations, though they had

named lands after themselves. But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish. This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings.”

Sometimes here on earth we can see an excellent example of exactly what the Psalmist is talking about. A rich man can fight accusations against him using every possible legal tool when much of the public information about a case seems to show that he really is guilty. In many nations and at many times in history (as one writer said) “Wealth is a great advantage in earthly power struggles. The rich can hire the best lawyers. They can influence public officials. They can hire ruthless men to enforce their will. But the power of riches is limited. Although riches can buy much land, the only real estate the rich can occupy permanently is the grave. Even though riches can buy the best medical care, money cannot buy an extra day of life on earth. When God summons them from this world, the rich must come without delay. Their wealth will do nothing for them in eternity. They cannot take it with them. They cannot bribe their way into heaven or escape hell by making advance payment for their sins while they are still on earth. They cannot hire a lawyer who will get them through the judgement on a technicality.” (Brug, The Peoples Bible, Psalms vol. I, pp 200-201)

The wealthy will stand before God on judgement day just like everyone else. The rich will stand before God on judgement day just like the poor. The foolish, the senseless, they all die, and when they leave this earth, all of their wealth is given to others. Scripture says that wise men die, the foolish and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others.

Their tombs will remain their houses forever though they had named lands after themselves. But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish. This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings. Like sheep they are destined for the grave and death will feed on them. The upright will rule over them in the morning, their forms will decay in the grave, far from their princely mansions”.

What happens to a man’s wealth when he dies? His mansions? All his possessions? His property? It goes to someone else. Even though they were so important that they had named lands after themselves, they, too must die. If that were all there is, then truly everyone would have nothing to look forward to. The rich and poor alike would be destined to ‘nothingness’ after death. Death will ***‘feed on them!’*** Their bodies will decay in the grave, no matter how much they possessed here on earth.

But this Psalm was written by one who believes in Jesus Christ. This is God’s word speaking to you that says ‘Why fear? Why should I fear when evil days come?’” We live in such evil days. We are surrounded by wickedness and we are surrounded by wicked people. And it seems that anyone who does try to stand up for what is right is viciously attacked on every side. If people trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches, what is that going to gain them? The Psalmist tells us ***“No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him -- the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough -- that he should live on forever and not see decay.”***

One of the great themes of fiction is that people can prepare to live forever. As an example, man fantasizes about freezing a body that has a disease and being brought back to life after that disease has been conquered. Man dreams of some kind of a time machine in which he can travel through space to a ‘better’ time. It is a great fantasy of human beings to be able to live forever.

It is even a great fantasy of humans to be able to totally conquer diseases such as AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, so that they may continue to indulge their sinful flesh. Such is not likely to happen because God is totally controlling all things and all things that happen work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

But the Psalmist correctly points out what the world wants to forget. No man can give God ransom for a life. When God calls upon someone and says ‘Now your time is up’, your time on earth is ended, men can do nothing about that.

The ransom for a life is costly. What does it cost to save a life? Debates about health care try to address this question. How much do we dare spend to save one person’s life? And if medical facilities are limited, how do we budget, or apportion, or ration those medical facilities and dollars to save one person’s life, and decide we can’t spend any money to save another person’s life? It is not unusual to find stories in the news of an individual, perhaps even a very young individual for whom hundreds of thousands of dollars, or even more than a million dollars has been spent to keep someone alive for several years.

The world, it seems, has much of the technology, and many people, it seems, have enough wealth so that if they could, they would buy themselves eternal life. But the simple fact is that no man can redeem his own life or the

life of another before God. ***“The ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough -- that he should live on forever and not see decay.”*** No payment is ever enough to keep any person from seeing eternal death and decay. Everyone dies. ***“Man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.”***

In one sense, the death of a man closely resembles the death of an animal. The bodies of men and of animals are made of the same elements. Both decay and return to the ground from which they come. Without faith man is no better off than an animal when he dies. In fact, he is much worse off, because unlike animals, he must face judgement and damnation. No amount of riches will do him any good then. ***“This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings.”***

There is no hope for those people. All people must face death, and with death, they must face God. The fate of the unrighteous is like sheep who are going to die. They and those who follow them and approve of their lives and lifestyles are also destined to decay in their graves. So wealth and power in this world can do you no good when it comes to eternal life.

But in the last verses of our text, we have one of the clearest and most beautiful promises in the Old Testament about the resurrection from the dead. ***“But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.”***

This is one of the high points of the Old Testament in its confession of the resurrection and eternal life and a belief in everlasting life. It is not the only place in the Old Testament that eternal life and the resurrection are spoken of, but it is one of the clearest prophecies. Some liberal ‘theologians’ would claim that the Old Testament doesn’t teach everlasting life. Some would also claim that any references to everlasting life are found very late in the Old Testament. If you want to deny God’s promise of eternal life to believers and his promise of eternal damnation to unbelievers, you can do anything you want with the Word of God. Yet even Christ himself in Matthew 22: 29-32 affirms that Moses taught about the resurrection from the dead in Exodus 3: 6!

Although everyone dies an earthly death, the Child of God is confident that God will redeem him from the grave and give him everlasting life. How does that occur? Because of what Jesus Christ did. Our text said no man can redeem another. But God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. God sent his only begotten son for us. The Holy Ghost worked faith in us so that we might believe that Jesus Christ died to take away our sins. That Jesus Christ is not merely a man, but is truly the Son of God and the son of man, he could redeem the life of everyone who believes in him. In fact, Jesus Christ died to redeem the lives of all men. Unfortunately, only those who believe in him will receive the benefit of that death and the ransom that was paid for sin. Jesus Christ came to earth to give God a ransom for all men so that we should live on forever, so that we should not see death eternally.

The upright, the righteous, are those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior. They are upright because they believe in Jesus Christ. They believe the fact from the Bible which teaches that the merits or ‘good works’ of Jesus Christ will be imputed to them. Because of that they believe the fact that they will live forever. We have that promise of everlasting life.

Jesus promises that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. And so Jesus Christ, who is not merely a man, but is, as we confess ‘Son of God and Son of Man’, that is, true God and true man, came to suffer and die for us. He paid the price. He paid the ransom. The Psalmist was looking forward to that and said ***“God will redeem my life from the grave.”*** We look back on that as an accomplished fact. He has redeemed us, so what do I have to fear?

All of the things that we worry about, and that greatest fear, the fear of death can be taken away from us. Death itself has been conquered by Jesus Christ. And with that victory, the fear of death has been conquered by Jesus Christ and that confidence is given to us in the Word of God! But we still must struggle with those doubts because of our sins and the devil wanting to take that comfort and joy away from us. And when those doubts, those fears assail us where are we going to turn? We must turn to the words of Jesus Christ, to the Words of God that say ***“God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.”*** Yes, we have a daily struggle with our sins. But we must rely upon God. We have words of confidence such as we sang and heard a few minutes ago:

“Fear not, I am with Thee, oh, be not dismayed;
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid;
I’ll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.” The Lutheran Hymnal 427:3
What do I have to fear? Amen.