

**The Christian's Shameless Trust under the Cross***Psalm 31*

Dear Christian Friends,

During our observance of Lent, we have been privileged to consider the Psalms which speak of our Lord's passion. We remember the words of Jesus, which He spoke to His disciples after His resurrection as he sat down with them and ate fish and honeycomb around a fire on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me." Therefore we learn from our Lord to find Him in all of the Scriptures, and not to be so blind or historically bound as to believe that the things which we hear in the Psalms must only be true of David, and only by coincidence of Christ. Today we consider Psalm 31, where we find the last words of Jesus, which he spake before His death, "Into thy hands I commit my spirit."

My friends, I would that you would hear the words of this Psalm, not only as the cry of our Savior in His passion, but also the cry of His Christians in the world. We can never do any better than our Lord Jesus. In suffering, in faithfulness, in hope, in victory, He is our everything. He does not just set an example for us to follow. He provides Himself. He gives us His suffering, His faithfulness, His hope, and His victory, and makes them our own. If He were only our example, He would be but a Christ on paper, an unreachable ideal, one of those vain idols which He decries in v. 6 with the words "lying vanities" (meaning "empty idols"). No, because He is a real Christ, a real Savior, He does not prescribe that we do these things, but *provides* them for us, in *Himself*. Therefore learn well this lesson. As you view your Savior's life, find yourself with Him in all that He does, for that is what it means that He is your substitute. Look upon Christ, and do not just say, "He did that for me." Look upon Christ, and say, "There indeed is *my* suffering. There is *my* death. There is *my* faithfulness and hope. There is *my* victory. For by the power of His Word and baptism, I am there with Him. I am in Him, and He is in me." It is in this same manner that King David could write the words of this Psalm, applying them to himself. They are true God's elect, *only because* they speak of Christ.

And only because they speak of Christ, can we appear under His Cross and find not shame there, but glory. "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. Bow down

thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me." Here, at the cross, where the world sees the wages of sin, we see the righteousness of Christ being given to us in the most selfless sacrifice the world will ever know. In order to deliver us in His righteousness, He had to be delivered unto death with our sins.

Only by the death of Jesus upon the cross does God become our strong rock, and our house of defense. Apart from the cross there is no grace, and God would count us as His enemy. His fortress and strength would be our dread, not our salvation, and we would not have to worry about the snares of God's enemies, for we would be among those meeting in secret in a pointless and futile attempt to overthrow Him. All our days would be spent in shame, and if we knew any cross at all, it would be our own. But Jesus has not only taken the cross, but joined Himself to it. The secret plotting of men which otherwise could not touch Him as God, He now succumbs to as a man, and as a man, speaking to His Father in heaven. First he cries out to His Father in "haste" or more accurately, in terror, "I am cut off from before thine eyes!" (v. 22). There is no greater terror than to be forsaken by God, a terror which the Son of God endured so that you would not have to. And then, He humbly speaks to His father once more, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." And as a man, he bows His head, and yields His spirit.

These are things of which the world is ashamed. To lift high the cross, not as a sanitized token of peace, but as a graphic and vivid portrayal of the suffering of Christ, this the world cannot endure. To them, this real cross is shameful, but we find no shame there. This is our hope and our glory. At the end of our life, we can do no better, than to commit our spirits unto the God of Salvation who has redeemed us from eternal death through the Cross. Therefore be shameless in your trust for the Lord who has redeemed you. That is, never be ashamed, no matter what, to be called one of His own, and to be under His Cross.

The cross, that most cruel way to die, was considered for generations to be an instrument of shame. When the Jews cried, "Crucify Him" they did not just want Jesus killed, they wanted him to be utterly shamed. They wanted all of His disciples, who had put their trust in Him, to have their trust turned to shame. You see, they were materialists. They believed that if a man were physically shamed, if his flesh was marred, especially if he was put on public display, that alone would shame his soul and to put a curse and a blight, not only upon him, but upon all who loved him, his family, and in the case of a teacher, his disciples also. We see it in their treat-

ment of the maimed and the crippled and the blind, whose ailments were considered a curse by God, just punishment for some deep sin. This is nothing less than an utter disregard for the soul and an obsession with the flesh. We see the same idea in the Muslim world where a daughter can shame her parents just by showing her hair in public. A thing which is nothing at all, purely external, for them becomes a blight upon the soul which can only be removed by slaying the women who so “shamed” her family. Out of the sickness and evil of his soul a man does many things that are sin in themselves. We do not need to search for sins, or ways to call a man cursed and condemned. God has already condemned us all when He revealed that the heart of man from his youth is only evil continually, and that all men, by nature, are under the curse of the law, and worthy of eternal death. It is not what is external which shames a man, but what is in his heart. The Pharisees would speak all manner of hateful words and lies, but heaven forbid that they touch eat the wrong kind of food. Jesus told them, “It is not that which goes into the mouth of a man that defiles him, but what comes out of his mouth” (Matt. 15:11). So likewise the things that happen to you in this world, what you have for your possessions, your disabilities or lack thereof, what you eat, or any other such thing do not make you or prevent you from being blessed before God. Luther says in the Battle Hymn of the reformation, “And take they our life, Goods, fame, child, and wife; let these all be gone, [and] they yet have nothing won. The kingdom ours remaineth.”

Our Lord Jesus despised the shamefulfulness of the cross. That is, He rejected the whole concept that the cross must by itself must bring shame and a blight upon Him, and upon all who believe on Him. Hebrews 12:2 declares that we look “unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.” It was not the mere external act of submitting to the cross that redeemed us, it was not the physical reality of nails, and a crown of thorns, but the inner life of our Lord, the perfect mind and heart which he carried to the cross, His love and compassion for sinners, the torment of His soul that he willingly endured, that turned the cross from an implement of shame to a banner of glory. There is now no shame for them who are in Christ Jesus, who are under His cross.

How do we glory in the cross? There is a controversy that rears its head from time to time in the Lutheran church about whether or not the body of Christ should appear on a crucifix. Should the Christian glory in the broken frame of our Lord, upon whose head is the crown of thorns, who is the epitome of grief, the Man of

sorrows? Some would say that to have the body of Christ on a crucifix is to deny the resurrection, but I have not found even one person who kept around a crucifix because he denied the resurrection. I have, however, heard men decry the crucifix because it is too bloody, too much the picture of pain, too much of a reminder of the suffering which Christ endured. Much easier is it to have a sanitized cross. This, I think, is the real reason that a crucifix makes men uncomfortable. Whether our churches, our homes, or our pendants have crosses with or without the body of Christ is neither here nor there. We glory indeed in the empty tomb, but that too derives its meaning from the cross. The glory of the cross is not to be found in the physical symbol consisting of two pieces joined together in a T, but in the pains of hell and the measureless suffering which our Lord endured.

See how in our Psalm our Lord is constantly alternating between the dreadful assaults of His enemies, and the victory that the Lord will have over them, between his marred and broken body which caused his friends and neighbors to stand far away and turn their faces from Him, and the mercies of the Lord who does not abandon Him forever, but brings Him back to the land of the living, between the abandonment that he experiences in hell, and the certain trust that the Father will not leave Him to be ashamed, between the lying words of his enemies, and the certainty that they will be put to silence? All these things take place together in the mind of our Lord. He speaks now of mercy, now of dread. Now of suffering, now of hope. Now of terror, now of victory because it is only by the torments of the cross that the shame of sin and death is lifted from the race of men. *That* is the cross in which we glory.

The only shame to be found at the cross is in those who persecute our Lord and His Church, who would crucify the Son of God afresh, who would rob from men that glory. They are not under the cross. They stand apart, pointing to it and speaking blasphemies about it. They still would make the cross a shame, and yet it is they who shall be ashamed when they lay silent in the grave (v. 17). But we who call upon the name of the Lord cannot be ashamed. For how great is the goodness which the Lord has laid up for them that fear Him, which he Himself was accomplished for them that show their trust in Him before the sons of men! Therefore love the Lord, ye He saints! Be of good courage, for He shall strengthen the heart of all who put their hope in Him. Amen.