

## God Is The Strength Of My Heart!

Psalm 73:23-26, Judica Sunday

March 29, 2006

Beloved of the Lord.....We all know Martin Luther as a heroic man of faith. Being a Catholic monk, he stood up before the powers of Rome, and confessed the truth of the Bible, that we are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord, and not by the good works of man. Luther had a strong faith. But from history we also know that Luther often suffered from depression. He was plagued with vexing doubts and worries. Even after his conversion to Jesus Christ, Luther was often very sad. In a very frank way Luther wrote of his own sadness saying, "All sadness is devilish because Christ, in whom we believe, has come to console us and to have mercy on us. Therefore the Holy Spirit must be called upon in times of sadness. He is our defense and defiance against death and dangers. If you feel sadness because of death, say: 'I shall not die but live'.....But dear God, this article of faith will not enter into the heart. That is the reason why so much sadness come to us. I am often angry with myself that although I have delivered so many lectures, have preached and written how this temptation is to be overcome, yet I cannot root out sadness when I myself am tempted." (*This is Luther*, E. M. Plass, pg. 230) Martin Luther, that great hero of faith, was no different from any other Christian. While in faith He knew his sadness was unnecessary, by his own power he could not root out or get rid of all his sadness.

Beloved of the Lord,....we are no different from Luther or any other saint before us. Sooner or later we will all experience sadness. Therefore we should never think that Christians are always happy. For even though by the grace of God and faith, we have been covered with the righteousness of Christ, this does not mean that we are no longer sinners. We still have this wretched body, this sinful flesh which will drag down our spirit. However, there is still reason to be happy and joyful. For no matter how depressing this world may be around us, we still have the righteousness of Christ! We still have the forgiveness of sins by His body and blood! We still have a loving God who tenderly watches over us, guarding and protecting us with His Holy angels! We still have the Holy Spirit which comforts our hearts with the sweet and forgiving Gospel message! We still have the gates of heaven open to us, and Christ Jesus will keep them open for us, safely bringing us to the other side after death! We still have the love of God upon us, His blessings each day. And by God's great power and strength, He will never take these blessings away from us. Truly His grace shines down upon us. Our heavenly Father smiles down upon us. "By grace are ye saved through faith." Therefore let us lift up our weary heads in

faith and hope, and see our Christ Jesus who helps to strengthen weak hearts with His tender love and mercy!

I. Our flesh and heart fail us. First let us dispel the myth that Christians are always happy! Christians are not always happy, nor should we expect them to be. If you have found in Christ your Deliverer from all sin, do not think that now you will be happy all the time! You will not! If you know other Christians who are always happy and upbeat, be happy for them, but know that they are flesh too, and will suffer from sadness. For we are all creatures of the flesh.

Just consider the writer (not Author) of Psalm 73, whose name was Asaph. Asaph was essentially King David's Choir Director. He was a Levite employed in the work of the church. He wrote Psalm 50, and most of Psalms 73-83. Asaph was no different from Luther or any other believer. He had bouts with depression. Asaph declares, "I cried unto God with my voice.....In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord.....my soul refused to be comforted...I remember God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed!" Ps. 77 You see great sadness and struggle in his words! Often He is overwhelmed! In fear he cries out "My flesh and my heart faileth!" Clearly Asaph is weak, and Asaph is human. Both his flesh AND his faith are weak!

And doesn't this remind us of our own life? Aren't we weak too? At times aren't we depressed, heavy laden, and sorrowful? Sometimes our sorrows outweigh our joys! Just consider our station in life. If we are a husband or father, we want to be strong for our wife and children, but often we feel weak. We want to be their source of strength, a protector, provider, counselor, and comforter - but often we feel weak. Often a mother wants to be strong for her children, but at times she feels weak too. In all these cases let us remember that we are but flesh and blood, hence we are naturally weak and of doubtful heart. While we want to be of a strong faith and not worry or get sorrowful about our problems, so often we see how weak we really are. We relate well to the words of the apostle Paul who says, "the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." Weakness and sadness are the fruit of our Old Adam. So often we fail to see this world with the eyes of faith.

II. God takes us by the hand, and guides us. Therefore if we find ourselves weak, saddened, or depressed: if loved ones need strengthening, we must abandon the search for help within, and we must look outside of ourselves. For the help of each and every child of God comes from above, from the Father of Lights who daily attends our needs. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Jms 1:17 Our God is not a God who says, "Let

me see, shall I help out this poor soul today or not? Do I really feel like helping him, or do I want to see him suffer for a while." NO INDEED, OUR GOD IS NOT LIKE THAT! Rather our God speaks in this fashion, "My dear child has prayed to me for help. He is sad and weak and I must remind him of my powerful grace to make him stronger. I will therefore shower my tender mercies upon Him and remind him that through His Savior Jesus Christ there can be peace in his heart and strength. I will take him by the hand and lead him by My Word and Spirit."

Asaph knew of God's counsel and guidance, for he prayed, "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel." God guides us well and He uses His Word to guide us. If you want to sit down and be counseled by the best Counselor in the world, sit down at your kitchen table, open your Bible and start reading. But if you keep that Bible closed, or if you despise His Word, or if you do not pray, do not expect to see God's help. How sad it is to see today, so many people in the world looking every place but the Word of God for help when they are in trouble. So many read self-help books, visit less than Christian counselors, or they seek counsel by watching TV talks shows. But it is all in vain. What people really need to do is listen to God's Word, repent of their sins, and find in Christ Jesus their Savior! This world would be a far better place if everyone sought counsel from the Lord!

Dear friends, if you trust in Christ Jesus and seek His counsel, you have nothing to fear. Asaph knew this, and so he prayed to the Lord saying, "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand." Certainly when we feel weak and troubled, sad or depressed, we need to seek the help of our good and gracious Lord knowing He is always with us. We need not panic as Peter and the disciples did in the boat when the wind and tempest raged, and Jesus was sleeping. Jesus knows well how to rise up and say, "Peace, be still". He knows well how to calm our troubled breasts. Moreover, God truly does take us by the right hand. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me." Do not forget that He is your loving Shepherd, your Good Shepherd, who watches for your soul. God the Holy Ghost works to preserve and keep you in the one true faith - and He will not let you down, for He has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." You will not fall, but God will keep you on the straight and narrow course by the power of His Spirit. "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench." Mt. 12:20

III. God strengthens our heart, and gives us joy. Thanks be to God Almighty, that today we are assembled to

receive God's counsel by His Word. And even though in life we often do not seek His counsel as we ought, He forgives us of this sin too, by the merits of His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

But most importantly today, our Lord would have us remember that He is the True Giver of Joy in this world. For all who trust in Him, there is always reason to rejoice in the midst of sadness. While we often feel weak or despondent, God is the strength and joy of our hearts, an ever present help in time of need. Asaph writes "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." God is the strength of your heart, dear weak Christian. You need not fear in times of weakness but seek after God who is your strength. That is the wonderful thing about being a Christian. God helps us to know that even though we are weak, He is strong! Even though our sins beset and trouble us, the grace and love of God is stronger than sin. "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart." I Jn. 3:20 Meaning, his forgiveness and love is more powerful than our sin and guilt. Where sin abounds, God's grace does much more abound!

One important way in which God shows us the power of His forgiveness is Holy Communion. He gives you His own body and blood as a sure sign and seal of forgiveness. We need this forgiveness of sins for it gives us strength to resist the devil the world, and our flesh. We approach the Lord's Table "chiefly to receive forgiveness of our sins and thus to be strengthened in our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Cat. #315 This is the Lord's way of confirming you in His grace, love, and tender mercies. If you sorrow over your sin, He invites you to receive His body and blood that your soul may be at ease in peace.

Therefore dear Christian, be assured that through Christ Jesus, there is joy in the midst of sadness. There is hope in the midst of hopelessness.....companionship in the midst of loneliness. There is plenty of grace to cover sin. Through Christ, joy overcomes sadness. And even though we will often experience sadness in this world, soon enough God will bring us joy again. But the true joy wherewith we rejoice in heart, is that the Lord Jesus has paid for all our sins on the cross. He died and rose again the third day. We "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." Rom. 5:11 You are forgiven of all. He will never leave nor forsake you. He will guide you by His right hand. He will continually counsel you by His Word. Therefore do not fear, but live in joy, and live in peace. Amen.

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