

GOD, KEEP ME FROM TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE

Hear again the Word of the Lord,

Two (things) I ask from You; deny (them) not from me before I die:

- 1. Falsehood and false-word cause to remove from me; and,*
- 2. Poverty and riches do not give to me, cause to feed me (with the bread needful for me,*

lest I be full and deny You, and I say, Who (is) YHWH? And, lest I be poor and steal and profane the Name of my Elohe.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Last Wednesday, when those of you who were here for the Lord's Service to us that evening, when asked *What is His Name? And what (is the) Name of His Son? For, you know!* from Proverbs, chapter 30, we were led to answer, "God and Jesus."² Tonight's section of the Proverb now hangs upon the scaffolding of all the questions of last Wednesday that pointed us to God, His grace and His Son. Tonight, the Proverbs, though much smaller in terms of verses and individual words than last week's, is full of meaning. Yet, its meaning can be discerned rightly only after the faithful person confesses his or her state before God in the first part of the text. Hear again how it began:

"Says the mighty man, 'I have troubled myself, O God! I have troubled myself, O God! And I have withdrawn...'"³

That phrase is the confession of one who has discovered that he alone in himself, his might, his life's work, is not the answer to all that he needs for this body and life. Nor has he power in himself to enter into blessed eternal life. He has learned that all his searching apart from God's Word has been futile.

So, from the mighty man who is humbled before God, we hear of two requests of God. Such requests can only be rightly asked in our era by someone who knows the Name of God and the Name of His Son. That means that saving Faith in

¹ Proverbs 30:7-9.

² Proverbs 30: 4.

³ Proverbs 30:1b.

Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of all of one's sins is necessary. The requests of the faithful to God begin with this statement in tonight's section of Proverbs, chapter 30:

*Two (things) I ask from You; deny (them) not from me before I die:...*⁴

Why does writer and now the reader of the Proverb ask for just two things? The requests themselves make the answer to that question clear. Those two things hold in their petitions all that can keep the person of the Faith in the Faith until he or she departs from this fallen world to dwell with eternally with our Lord. The second half of the introduction to the two questions makes that specific reason for the questions clear when it says, *deny (them) not from me before I die:...*

In those two questions then are petitions to the One True God to preserve the faithful from the eternal-life-separating temptations to deception and the things connected either to great riches or extreme poverty. In our Proverb, the humble, faithful, mighty person of God, may rightly petition God for,

1. *Falsehood and false-word cause to remove from me; and,*
2. *Poverty and riches do not give to me, cause to feed me (with the) bread needful for me.*⁵

Those words can be a bit tough to swallow for us who have been brought up to work to save and build retirement savings or plans. We have been trained to try to pay off debts. Our hopes and desires are often to earn and keep a level of comfort unknown by our great-grandparents and those before them who were not living in royal houses. Our society encourages people to pass on their rightfully acquired wealth to their descendants. Our culture is grounded upon the ideals of the Declaration of Independence, which states, in part, this deistic thesis:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*⁶

⁴ Proverbs 30:7.

⁵ Proverbs 30:8.

⁶ Internet. http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html, accessed March 19, 2014.

God is not a revolutionary leader bent upon breaking the rule of kings. He is actually the King of kings. That King's Word shows that all men are actually created equal – that is, conceived and born dead in trespasses and sins. Further, they, we, you in your old nature, are in constant rebellion against your King.

God also has revealed that those who actually have inalienable rights are those who have seen their sinful state, confess their sins and will to walk in new life. They are we who do not reject God's blood-bought forgiveness. The rights of the Christian are granted to him or her on account of the sacrifice God made for them. He Who had all Rights, including eternal Life, Liberty to do good in all that exists – had no need to pursue Happiness – for He has joy in Himself. God set all of that aside for those who actually, at best, can only strive after such things in this fallen creation! God gave up His Life that those who know and believe in His Name and the Name of His Son may actually have true Liberty – freedom to not sin and freedom to confess our sins when we have fallen. All of that is contained in the thoughts which can be discerned from these two multipart requests in tonight's section of the Proverbs:

1. *Falsehood and false-word cause to remove from me; and,*
2. *Poverty and riches do not give to me, cause to feed me (with the) bread needful for me.⁷*

The first request deals with the Second and Eighth Commandments. That means that it deals with possible breaking of both Tables of the Law – against God and against one's neighbor. The first petition of the request of the faithful also may be connected to the fifth and sixth petitions of the Lord's Prayer. For in the humble request of the faithful for God to preserve one from falsehood and false words – lies – one is petitioning the Lord to keep himself or herself from sin debts against God and our neighbor. In asking God to cause to remove falsehood and lies, the person of the Faith is actually petitioning God to keep him or her from sinning in speech. And, the petitioner is

⁷ Proverbs 30:8.

also asking God to keep that person from the temptation to get what he or she desires by deceiving other humans. Enough on the first petition for tonight... On to the second:

2. *Poverty and riches do not give to me, cause to feed me (with the) bread needful for me.*⁸

In following a similar pattern to that which was declared a bit earlier, the second request deals with possible violations of the First and Tenth Commandments. It too, deals with our sins against God and our neighbor. The second petition of the Faith's request also may be connected to the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer. It shows the understanding of the one who is humble before God that God alone is the One Who actually provides for all of anyone's needs for this body and life. Literally, the speaker of this part of the Proverb asks God to give him or her only a prescribed portion or allowance of food. It is as if you are to pray, "God, keep me from too much or too little."

That might sound strange to our American ears. We are taught from a tender age on to get all we can grab and stick it in our mouths. Ours is really a culture of greed. We are all infected by it so much that we think that our desires are normal! Yet, unchecked striving after individuals' desires is what has gotten us into the state of the world about which we all complain. The ultimate consumer dream is to try to grasp for oneself the status of god – to be the owner of all that which that person sees. Those are the dangers the prayer of the Proverb recognizes with these words:

*lest I be full and deny You, and I say, Who (is) YHWH? And, lest I be poor and steal and profane the Name of my Elohe.*⁹

Those words tie the Proverbs to the Third Commandment and its meaning. Long, long ago, the first people who in their entirety were named with the Name of God. They were those whom He led through the waters of the Red Sea on dry ground. The Israelites did forget God as He said they would when their food was plentiful and their

⁸ Proverbs 30:8.

⁹ Proverbs 30:9.

herds were large.¹⁰ The records of those times have been inspired, recorded and faithfully handed down for generations.

That means that even those who bear God's Name, who are His chosen people in any generation, are still sinners. For them, for us, for you, this part of the petition of the Proverbs remains true:

lest I be full and deny You, and I say, Who (is) YHWH? And, lest I be poor and steal and profane the Name of my Elohe.¹¹

Those words are also reflected in the Seventh Petition of the Lord's Prayer. At the beginning of the New Testament era, the Proverb was still true. When God's people become satiated in their desires for riches, and their daily bread is abundant, they begin to deny God's Word and forget God. In particular, the Letters to the Corinthians record some of that which can happen to those who are named with God's Name.

The Words of today's Proverb texts are true for us in this congregation today. For the past few years we have been given more than we have asked for – in terms of mission, ministry, leaders and now, finances. Tonight's text calls us to examine ourselves, our desires and our congregational life, (in addition to our individual lives) and to repeatedly ask God to hold us fast to Him and His Word.

To that end, God has moved us to a solid mission statement which He is using to guide us in the work and wealth He is bringing to us. Hear it anew, not in pride, but in the humility which it expresses before God Who is giving us all we need for this congregation's life and for the lives of those whom God is drawing to us:

We are a group of sinners who, through no merit of our own, have been called by God to receive His gifts through the proper preaching of Law and Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments. At Catalina Lutheran Church, we preach, teach, and confess Christ Crucified for the forgiveness of our sins to reconcile us to the Father. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we share these gifts with others in deep gratitude to God, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

¹⁰ Cf. Deuteronomy 8:11-17; 31:19-21.

¹¹ Proverbs 30:9.

As has been declared before, Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of sins is at the heart of that confession of the Faith. When we view all that in light of the reasons for which the Proverbs petitions God, we find our causes to be humble. We are called to recognize that such a statement can become a statement of pride, rather than a confession of the One in Whom we have been led to place all our trust. To confess the congregation's agreed upon mission in any other spirit is to profane the Name of God.

If you reflect upon tonight's Proverb for any length of time, you can come to the conclusion that there is only one Man in all of history Who did not need to pray the two petitions. He is Jesus, the Son of Man. He alone, of all men, for all time, perfectly kept the Commandments addressed by the Proverbs tonight. Jesus, in Himself, purely prayed the petitions which are undergirded by the words of tonight's Proverbs.

As you remain in Jesus, you receive every good thing you pray for in the Proverbs. You may not recognize them until you die, but, in Christ, they are yours. So, now, let us fulfill the spirit of the two Tables of the Law and the Lord's Prayer. As a Collect, let us pray in the Faith as we have learned to from this night's Proverbs and petition God, to keep us from too much or too little.

Two (things) I ask from You; deny (them) not from me before I die:

- 1. Falsehood and false-word cause to remove from me; and,*
- 2. Poverty and riches do not give to me, cause to feed me (with the) bread needful for me,*

lest I be full and deny You, and I say, Who (is) YHWH? And, lest I be poor and steal and profane the Name of my Elohe.¹²

In the Name of Jesus we pray, Amen. (Please stand)

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Lent II Wednesday

Proverbs 30:7-9; II Peter 2:4-10; Matthew 6:9-13

March 19, 2014

Pastor Michael H. Morhouse

Soli Deo Gloria

¹² Proverbs 30:7-9.