

OPENING SERMON PREACHED AT THE SERVICE OF CONVOCATION

of the

Fifty-second Annual Convention

of the

CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

Delivered by the Rev. E. R. Stallings, Conference President

Text: Philippians 3:4-11

Dear Friends in Christ,

In one of our hymns we sing, “The world is very evil, the times are waxing late. Be sober and keep vigil, the Judge is at the gate.” This hymn expresses not only that the world is very evil, but that the end of the world is fast approaching. These two elements are related. According to Scripture, the evils of the world will increase more and more up to the very last day. The Bible says, “*But evildoers and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*” (II Timothy 3:12).

Thus, each succeeding generation is more evil than the previous. In this respect, when our grandparents said to our parents, “Things are not the way they used to be,” they were right! And when our parents said to us, “Things are not the way they used to be,” they were right! And when we say to our children, “Things are not the way they used to be,” we are right!

Indeed, because the world is waxing worse and worse, we Christians must fight harder and harder not to be conformed to this world. With the Judge at the gate, we must “*work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Philippians 2:12) lest we get careless and lose our faith. This is why we have chosen as our convention theme, “*Be not conformed to this world.*” Daily the world seeks to squeeze us into its mold. And as we look at visible Christendom, the world is succeeding in getting so many professing Christians to conform. It has become very difficult to tell the difference between the Church and the world.

Now then, when we speak of the world, what do we typically think of? Typically we think of its evil deeds such as drunkenness, immorality, thievery, slander, doing drugs, getting divorced and having abortions, etc. To be sure, these are typical evils of the world. However, there is one element of the world which is more insidious than this wicked deed and that wicked deed. It is an evil which if not checked and rejected will poison any Christian and any fellowship of Christians. What would that be? It is the world’s religion, namely, the religion of the law, the religion of work-righteousness or self-righteousness. To this, we certainly must not conform. It destroys saving faith just as much as falling into worldly living. In our text, the Apostle Paul expands on this most eloquently.

As we examine our text, we see that its chief statement is this: “*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.*” In short, our text answers the two-fold question:

“What Is Gain, and What Is Loss?”

As we consider this theme, we shall do so under these three points:

- I.** What the Apostle Paul used to count as gain, but later counted as loss in view of Christ;
- II.** How anything we might consider to be gain is really a loss if it replaces the righteousness of

Christ;

III. How gaining Christ is gain indeed.

Now before we take up these three points, we must understand the immediate context which explains why Paul says what he says in our text. Just prior to our text Paul says, "*Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision*" (v. 2). These dogs, these evil workers, those called "*the concision*," are the Judaizers, those Jews who confessed to believe in Christ but held that circumcision and the ceremonial law must be maintained and upheld. These Judaizers were like vicious dogs. They were fanatics on the Law. They found their gain in their Jewishness and their law-keeping. They were elitists, those who took pride in what they thought made them holy and special. These elitist Judaizers were trying to influence and prejudice true Christians against Paul. They were seeking to make Paul look like a heretic.

Thus, as he did with the Corinthians, so to the Philippians, Paul defends himself and his work as an Apostle of God's grace. He must do a little bragging, but not to promote himself, but to defend himself against the dogs, the concision. Since the concision were always boasting about their achievements and their fleshly righteousness, Paul speaks in their terms. He says, "*Though I might also have confidence in the flesh*" (v. 4a). If righteousness is truly gained by what the flesh produces, Paul could proudly look back to his old life as a Jew. He even adds this: "*If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more*" (v. 4b). Paul is saying, "Alright, you Judaizers, if any of you think you have something to boast about on the basis of fleshly achievement, I have more! I have out-done you all!"

It is here that Paul expounds on **what he used to count as gain**. He proceeds to unfold a very impressive resume of his past accomplishments and distinctions as a Jew. First he says, "*Circumcised the eighth day*." The Judaizers prided themselves on being circumcised. Circumcision was for them a badge of honor and glory. Of course, circumcision had already been fulfilled in Christ and had been abrogated. Thus, their badge had no merit or honor before God. Yet speaking on the level of the Judaizers, Paul says that he had not only been circumcised, but circumcised on the eighth day as the Law required. Many of the Judaizers were proselytes or adult converts to Judaism. As such, they were circumcised in later life. Hence, Paul could say, "My circumcision was more pure than yours! Mine was an eighth-day circumcision!"

What is more, Paul also used to count as gain the fact that he was a pure descendant of one of the original twelve tribes of the people of Israel. He says, "*Of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin*." Paul may well have had written documentation or family records which proved that he was a direct descendant of the tribe of Benjamin. This tribe belonged to the southern kingdom of Judah. Unlike the lost ten tribes of Israel which became amalgamated with the heathens, many from the Southern kingdom of Judah were never so assimilated. They remained pure Jews even after the Babylonian Captivity. As such, Paul was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He was a real "blue-blood."

Added to this, Paul was a Pharisee. He says, "*As touching the law, a Pharisee*." To be a Pharisee spoke for itself. To be a Pharisee meant one was among the strictest keepers of the law above all others. The Pharisees were very proud of their law-keeping and truly believed they were better than others. The Pharisee in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican exemplifies this.

But Paul added another credential. He says, "*concerning zeal, persecuting the church*." As we know, before the Apostle Paul was converted, he as a Pharisee persecuted the church. Saul the Pharisee was the preeminent persecutor of Christians. He out-did all the other Jews in rounding up Christians to have them imprisoned and even put to death. He was among those who supervised the stoning party which stoned to death Stephen, the first Christian martyr. He believed he was doing

God a service! He saw this as gain!

Finally, Paul used to count as gain something else. This is the most significant of all. He says, *“touching the righteousness which is in the Law, blameless.”* Like all Pharisees, Paul was an impeccable observer of all the ceremonial laws and also of the traditions of the scribes and elders. No one could lay any blame on his outward adherence to the Law. Before men, he was blameless. He was sincerely obedient and dedicated. Yet he also sincerely believed this made him blameless before God! Paul was a pure-bred advocate of the natural religion of work-righteousness. In short, Paul was saying to these Judaizers, I was what you are now, but more!

Yet here Paul makes the stunning statement that all those things which he used to count as gain, he now counts as loss for Christ. Hear his words again: *“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ”* (v. 7). All those things which were impressive before men, all those things which made Paul at one time elite among the elite, he now sees as having no value whatsoever. But why? None of those past gains produced righteousness before God! None could remove his inbred sin and guilt. As the Scripture says, *“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags”* (Isaiah 64:6). All of Paul’s zealous Law-keeping had no value in terms of righteousness before God. The Bible says, *“For by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified”* (Galatians 2:16). Sinners are capable of earning only one thing: God’s eternal wrath and punishment. Righteousness before God is not what we earn, but what Christ earned.

But when did Saul the Pharisee realize this? He came to realize this when Christ suddenly appeared to him on the road to Damascus and crushed him with the Law! Then and there Paul came to see his sinful nature and that despite all his Law-keeping he was guilty before God and deserved only God’s wrath and eternal damnation. He came to see that being circumcised on the eighth day, being of the stock of Benjamin, being a Hebrew of the Hebrews, being a Pharisee, being outwardly blameless under the Law, none of these things could add up to righteousness. None of these things could justify him before God.

Indeed, it was when Paul gained Christ by faith that he saw clearly that his past gains were only loss. He says, *“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ”* (v. 8). From the world’s point of view, Paul did lose a lot. Upon becoming a Christian, he was no longer a member of the Jewish elite. He was cut off from all Jewish favor and the support of his family. He was now counted among the off-scouring of the earth. He now lived a life often marked by poverty and want. He was now himself the target of persecution on the part of the Jews. Yet now he counts all that he lost as nothing but dung or manure. All that he lost was worth losing because he had won Christ by faith. He now had what is truly excellent, namely, the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord.

Yet what did Paul mean when he said, *“that I may win Christ?”* He explains. He says, *“And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith”* (v. 9). He won Christ by putting aside all the self-righteousness of the Law, and by simply embracing by faith the righteousness which Christ won for all sinful mankind. The only righteousness which avails before God is the righteousness Christ earned for us. Christ’s perfect obedience to the Law and His sin-atonement death on the cross, the two taken together, are what satisfied the offended justice of God. In God’s sight, in God’s estimation, this is righteousness. This is what Paul gained by faith in the Lord Jesus.

Now only one thing mattered to Paul—to know Christ. To know Christ more and more! As he says, *“That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.”* By these words Paul mentions three specific things which he

gained by knowing Christ. First, he gained the power of Christ's resurrection. The power of Christ's resurrection is that it sealed the redemption and justification which Christ won. Paul saw that his own salvation was sealed and confirmed by Christ's resurrection. Also, by knowing the power of Christ's resurrection, Paul saw that his own death had been conquered. No longer was Paul enslaved by the fear of death even though he often stared death in the face such as when he was stoned in Lystra, was shipwrecked, was bitten by a poisonous snake, and was five times beaten with forty stripes save one. In other words, the hope given by Christ's resurrection empowered Paul to live his life with single-minded devotion and faith-courage.

What is more, by knowing Christ, Paul gained "*the fellowship of Christ's sufferings*" and was "*made conformable unto Christ's death.*" The more he suffered on account of Christ, the more intimately he fellowshiped Christ's own sufferings. Unlike Christ's sufferings, Paul's were not expiatory. Nevertheless, Paul suffered from the same hatred and scorn which were heaped upon Christ. In that respect, by suffering for Christ, Paul also was made conformable unto His death. In suffering for Christ, he was a partaker of Christ's sufferings and death. The Bible says, "*But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings*" (I Peter 4:13). Thus, what Paul suffered or lost for Christ's sake, resulted in the gain of being conformed to Christ. The ultimate gain of fellowshiping Christ's sufferings would be that of finally attaining the resurrection of the dead on the Last Day. As Paul says, "*If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.*" This is the ultimate gain: To rise on the Last Day and to be with Christ for all eternity.

Well now, this brings us to our own case as Christians. As we live in this world, we must ever keep in mind what is really our gain, and what is really no loss. As we live in this world, we are constantly tempted to think like the world. We are tempted to see things as Paul did before he was converted. Chiefly, we are tempted to see our righteousness before God as something we achieve by our works. Because of our Old Adam, because we have a sinful nature, we have a natural tendency to think in terms of self-righteousness. For example, we can take a false pride in our orthodox heritage. Yet our orthodox heritage is not the ground of our righteousness before God. Being a part of the Concordia Lutheran Conference is not what justifies us before God. Also, no Christian should conclude that he is a better Christian because he has been a Christian longer than someone else. We must not think we are more spiritual simply because we have accumulated more knowledge. Indeed, when the accumulation of knowledge makes us puffed up with pride and self-righteousness, this is not gain, but loss!

What is more, very subtly, we can find ourselves converting our sanctification into being the basis of our justification. We are justified before God, not by how holy a life we think we may live, but only by faith in what Jesus did for us. Indeed, our sanctification ever remains imperfect. As Paul said of himself beyond our text, "*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect*" (v. 12a). Thus, we are to live the rest of our lives striving to be more and more sanctified. Yet no matter how hard we strive, we never achieve perfect sanctification. Indeed, even as we strive to mature in sanctification, the motive must be Christ's love for us and gratitude to Him for what He did for us. As Paul says, "*For the love of Christ constraineth us*" (II Corinthians 5:14). Oh how subtly we Christians can become Pharisees! Let none of us ever get stuck on himself and his own importance. Like Paul, we must ever say, "*I am what I am by the grace of God,*" and sincerely mean it!

Furthermore, Christians are sometimes tempted to think that they live a deprived life. Our young people in particular are tempted to feel that they deserve to have a time in their life when they can go out and really taste the world. Many a young Christian has been like the Prodigal Son. "Give me my money now before I get old and can no longer live a little!" The Prodigal Son went off and lived in riotous living, but soon realized he had been a fool. He threw away what was really gain, and gained what was really only loss. He came to himself, repented, and went back home both to God and to his earthly father to reclaim what was of true value — his soul's salvation! Young people, do

not let the glamor of the world deceive you. All the glamor and gain of the world is really nothing but dung, nothing but manure, nothing but loss! It all leads to hell!

Therefore, let us never fret over what we think we have sacrificed for Christ. Once the disciple Peter came to Jesus and said, *“Lo, we have left all, and followed thee”* (Luke 18:28). Peter was rather impressed with himself in what he had given up. Yet whatever we may have had to give up in remaining true to Christ is worth it! In fact, Jesus said to Peter, *“Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting”* (Luke 18:29-30).

Thus, let us see that what we gain in Christ makes all losses nothing but pure gain. If you have Christ, you have everything and have lost nothing. Did you really lose when you lost your old worldly friends who feel you betrayed them by becoming a Christian? Did you really lose when you lost a job because you refused to cheat or be dishonest or because you asked not to be scheduled for work on Sunday? Did you really lose when someone you loved and wanted to marry turned away from you because he or she would not accept your Christian faith? Did you really lose when you did not make that all-star team because the coach only wanted players who were like him —worldly? Are we losers by belonging to a small orthodox church which cannot provide our children with a large youth group to socialize with or an exciting variety of programs? All that is dung, pure manure, compared to Christ and His true saving Word. Most people who belong to such churches may well be on the road to hell because fleshly, worldly gain has replaced the saving Gospel of Christ! What good are all such so-called advantages if in the end we lose our souls! *“What is a man profited if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? And what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Matthew 16:26).

Like the Apostle Paul, let us see that in Christ we have nothing but gain, not only now, but for all eternity. By faith in Christ and His righteousness, we are accounted righteous before God even now. In Christ, we stand justified before God. We do not have to wait for Judgment Day to know what God’s verdict is. Jesus says, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that hath My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life”* (John 5:24). Even now our sins are forgiven and all our guilt is removed. We live with a clean conscience. *“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1).

In and through Christ and the power of His resurrection, we are able to live a truly God-pleasing or sanctified life. In Christ, our family life, our jobs, our school work, our recreation, our entire life is blessed by God’s grace. In Christ and His righteousness our marriages are blessed with Jesus’ love and forgiveness. In Christ our job as parents is made easier because we have Christ’s sufficient grace in place of our weakness.

Finally, in Christ we shall attain, along with Paul and all the saints, the resurrection of the dead. Even death cannot steal away our gain in Christ! In Christ, our death is swallowed up in victory. Ironically, it is in the hour of death that we will appreciate most the words of Paul: *“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.”* May this ever be the faith of us all! In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

THE SUNDAY SERMON

for the

Fifty-second Annual Convention

of the
CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

Delivered by the Rev. Ross A. Mahan, Pastor
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Text: **I John 2:15-17**

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our beloved Savior.

“For where your treasure is there will your heart be also” (Matthew. 6:21). What do we truly love in this life? The answer to that question will reveal many things about us. A man’s soul will cling to that which he loves! How I spend my money, spare time, and energies will reveal what I love and what I love I will live and become! The thoughts that occupy my mind will become my meditation and my dreams until more and more they will become a part of myself. God created man to fear, love, and trust in Him above all things and will not allow any thing in this life to steal the affections of our hearts from Him. Man was created for the Lord and will find no rest until his soul rests in God. *“No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other; Ye cannot serve God and mammon”* (Matthew. 6:24).

Trying to serve God while loving and serving other things is both sinful and impossible; we should not and we cannot serve two masters; attempting to do so will destroy our eternal souls. The context of our Epistle lesson is the believer’s fellowship with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ (I John 1:3). The Christian walks with God in the light of the Gospel and the confession of sins according to the blessed propitiation of Jesus Christ for our sins (I John 1:7, 9; 2:2). The evidence of this new fellowship with God is our love for God and our brethren that gladly obeys His commandments out of gratitude for His great mercy given to us in His Son (I John 2:4-5). It is in light of our new relationship to God through Christ that the Apostle John reminds us this morning how dangerous and foolish it is to love the world.

A man is either a lover of God or of the world; he cannot be both.

We will see, first of all, that **(I)** love for the world separates man from God; and, secondly, that **(II)** the Lord Jesus Christ has overcome the world!

I.

Hear again the words of our text: *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”* If a man loves and serves the world, there will be no room in his heart for the love of the Father. Jesus said: *“If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him”* (John 14:23). When we love this world, we are preventing God the Father from loving us and coming into our hearts to dwell; we are refusing to walk in fellowship with Him (I John 1:7) and are guilty of spiritual adultery. *“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God”* (James 4:4).

What is *“the **WORLD**”* that John forbids us to love? The same words for “love” and “world” appear in John 3:16: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”* It is obvious that John is using “world” or *kosmos* to mean something different. “World” in Scripture can mean the totality of heaven and earth created by God. Paul said to the Athenians: *“God made **the world** and all things therein”* (Acts 17:24); and in Hebrews: *“By faith we understand that **the***

worlds were framed by the Word of God" (Hebrews 11:3). The "world" can refer to human society alienated from God under the power of Satan or the entire human race. God's love for the **world of men** moved Him to send His only-begotten Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the *whole world* (John 3:16; I John 2:2).

John uses "world" in our text in an ethical sense to describe a **Satanic world system** that is hostile to Jesus Christ and opposed to the Kingdom of God. It is the kingdom of darkness ruled by Satan, the world not as God created it, but as the devil has corrupted it. Satan is called "*the prince of this world*" (John 16:11) through whom "*the whole world lieth in wickedness*" (I John 5:19b). The devil is "*the god of this world who hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God, should shine unto them*" (II Corinthians 4:4). The WORLD with its lusts and pride is reflected by the words, thoughts, behavior, and desires that flow from man's corrupt sinful nature that presumes to live his life without God. "*The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God*" (Romans 8:7-8). Man by nature walks "*according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*" (Ephesians. 2:2).

The spiritual evil of the world dominates the lives of unbelievers. Just as a train will travel in whatever direction the railroad tracks take it, so natural man apart from Jesus Christ will go in whatever direction the world takes him. Man is born in sin; therefore a life of selfishness and neglect of God seems perfectly natural to him. "*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). Man goes about his daily routine each day without realizing the road he travels in his life is leading him to eternal destruction. Jesus said: "*Enter ye in at the strait (narrow) gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat*" (Matthew 7:13). Here is man in his natural environment, blindly traveling down the road leading to hell; and, unless he is delivered by the power of the Gospel and placed on the narrow way leading to life, he will die under God's wrath.

The WORLD represents a very real danger to the Christian's faith; its lust, sinful pleasures, and false pride attack our souls in subtle ways designed to separate us from our relationship to God. The world tries to conform us to its sinful philosophy and hates anyone that refuses to go along with it (Romans 12:2). Jesus predicted the unbelieving world would hate His disciples: "*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you*" (John 15:18-19). St. John wrote: "*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you*" (I John 3:13). The world is no friend of Jesus Christ, nor should we expect it to be. Jesus warned us to beware even when the world speaks well of us, for this was how they treated the false prophets in the past (Luke 6:26).

Satan tempts the Christian through the world by the "*lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.*" This was how he tempted Eve in the garden. He began by questioning, perverting, and contradicting the clear Word of God to undermine her confidence in God's Word; he then appealed to lust and pride. "*And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat*" (Genesis 3:6). Satan caused Eve to distrust God and His Word; her loss of faith led to disobedience to God's command. Satan is doing the very same thing in the churches today; he is the father of all false doctrine, and his attacks upon God's Word during the past half-century have been relentless! The Apostle John warns us: "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world*" (I John 4:1).

False prophets have filled the churches with so many false doctrines that many professing Christians no longer understand nor believe the Gospel. A new world religion has appeared in our country during the last few years; this new faith declares that all religions are equal and lead to the same place; man can get to heaven by his good works; Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians all worship the same god; and, even if a man does not believe the Gospel, he can still go to heaven if he is sincere in his own religion. The world denies objective truth; all truth is relative, flexible, and changes according to the times; and, if anyone dares to believe in the inspired inerrant Word of God, he is intolerant, hateful, and bigoted. Even the doctrine of Christian love has been twisted with the use of high-sounding words like “tolerance,” “diversity,” “inclusiveness,” and “equality,” all designed to force Christians to deny God’s Word and accept perversion into the church and society as normal.

Sadly, many professing Christians have embraced the world’s sinful philosophy, deception, and lust and denied the faith. During the past few decades the church has faced an especially difficult challenge, as the world has been able to channel its satanic philosophy, false doctrine and lustful images directly into our living rooms via the television. The television industry reminds us of the words of St. Paul: “*But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived*” (II Timothy 3:13). Just when we think television cannot get any worse, it sinks to an even lower level of immorality. As Christians we must remember that the world hates God’s Law and the Gospel and will do anything to undermine and destroy His Word in the church and society. Many Christians without realizing it are imbibing of the world’s philosophy, lusts, and sinful behavior *vicariously* through television, movies, and other media.

The Apostle warns us this morning not to love the world, for “*the world passeth away and the lusts thereof.*” Jesus told the story of the rich man who loved the things of this world with its luxuries, fine clothing, food, and wealth more than anything. One day the rich man died, “*and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom*” (Luke 16:23). The rich man was in hell, his riches and worldly pleasures gone forever; from now on he would only know remorse, torment, and eternal separation from God. The rich man is a reminder of the dangers of loving the world. If the world is tempting you with its lusts and pride, remember the words of John: *The World is passing away!* We cannot build our lives on the shifting sands of worldly opinions and lusts, for only faith in Christ our Savior can preserve our souls on the Day of Judgment when Christ returns (Matthew 7:24-27). **The love of the world separates man from God**, but the Christian has every reason to rejoice!

II.

The perfect life and the innocent suffering and death of Jesus our Savior has overcome the power of the world **for us** by canceling the guilt and the power of sin by which the world held us in bondage. When speaking of His death, Jesus said: “*Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me*” (John 12:31-32). “*In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33). Christ has overcome the world; Satan is now a dethroned prince attempting to maintain himself in a defeated worldly kingdom, knowing that his time is short. What we could not do for ourselves Christ did for us; His redemption for sins objectively justified the entire world. “*God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;*”... “*For He hath made Him to be sin for us, [Him] who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*” (II Corinthians 5:19,21).

The believer in Christ now has an “*advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation [the payment in full] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world*” (I John 2:2). Our Savior’s death has reconciled the world to God, and through the Word of the Gospel and our Baptism into Christ He has overcome the world **in us** by the new birth

of the Spirit. The evidence of the new birth in our hearts is our faith and confidence in Jesus Christ. *“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God”* (I John 5:1a). By grace through faith in Christ we are the ones that do the will of God and abide forever! The grace of God given through the Gospel teaches and enables the Christian **not** to love the world. *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world”* (Titus 2:11-12).

The child of God by faith in Jesus Christ now enjoys blessed fellowship with God. *“If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another; and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin”* (I John 1:7). The Holy Spirit through the Gospel gives us a new love for God along with new desires and the power to keep His commandments. *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous”* (I John 5:2). Christ overcame the world **for us** and **in us**; He also overcomes the world **through us** by the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. *“Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”* (I John 5:4). *“I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one”* (I John 2:14). The believer in Christ that overcomes Satan through the strength and power of the Gospel is victorious over the world.

Jesus promised His Church: *“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels”* (Revelation 3:5). *“Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God”* (I John 5:5). John reminds us that **it matters what you believe!** Only faith, trust, and confidence in Jesus Christ the Son of God, our Advocate with the Father, makes the believer victorious over the world. To believe a lie is surrendering to Satan, the father of lies and the prince of this world (John 8:44; 16:11). The devil’s children in the world cling to his lies and deceptions, for they love the world; but the Christian wages a continual warfare against the world’s lusts and indifference to God; and we overcome the world through saving faith in Jesus Christ.

The Apostle John revealed the source of our new spiritual life when he wrote: *“This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ, not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth”* (I John 5:6). The Triune God cleanses us from all sin through *“the washing of water by the Word”* in Holy Baptism through which He grants the believing sinner forgiveness, cleansing from sin, and blessed deliverance from a guilty conscience (Ephesians. 5:26; I Peter 3:21). But Christ came *“not by water only, but by water and blood.”* The blood was the life of Christ poured out for us on the cross when from His pierced side there came out *“blood and water”* (John 19:34). Our new spiritual life, given by the Holy Spirit through the water and the blood, is a continual *“witness”* of the Son of God in the earth. *“And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one”* (I John 5:8).

The Holy Spirit creates spiritual life within the heart of the believing sinner through the water of Holy Baptism and nourishes and strengthens this new life within us by the eating and drinking of heavenly food, the body and blood of Christ under the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper. By partaking of the Lord’s Supper with hearts of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, the new life we have received from God through His Word is nourished and strengthened within us. We come to the Holy Sacrament today that we may be strengthened in our confidence that Christ died for our sin out of His great love for us and to receive the forgiveness of sins He promised us through this blessed means of grace. Through His Word and Sacrament He gives us spiritual strength to resist the devil, the world, and the flesh. Christ has overcome the world by His perfect life death and resurrection, and today He offers and seals this forgiveness and victory to us through the promises of His Word proclaimed in the Gospel and imparted to us in the Sacrament of the Altar. May God grant this forgiveness to each of us this day for Christ’s sake. Amen.