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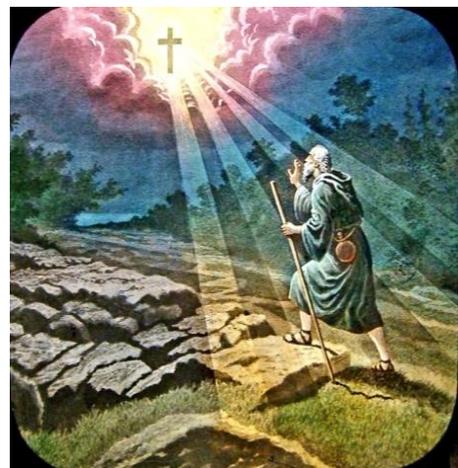
Devotion – Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end (‘future and hope’– TJW).” Jeremiah 29:11.

2020 has been a year of testing. Satan has caused us to be bombarded with messages of fear and gloom from the media: will COVID-19 prove as deadly as many believe it to be? Will it prove even more dangerous than we have been warned? Has it just been another example of media fear-mongering, prompted by Satan, to overwhelm Christians with worry and despair? How much has church life been affected with the locking down of congregations, the inability to gather together publicly for the hearing of the Word, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and fellowship with brothers and sisters in the faith? Inspired by the Satanic hatred of the devil, are there many official movements which are using these circumstances to strangle and destroy the Christian Church?

So, as we press on into 2021, can we look forward to better times? Or is this a ‘new normal’?

We all hope for better things, but where do we turn for hope? Christians should turn to the Lord for help and sustenance through troubled times. In Romans 8:18–26 Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, describes our hope, and its connection to Creation, the Fall, and Restoration: that the sufferings we experience now “*are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us,*” (v18). Paul is here describing the New Creation, where the effects of the Fall will be eternally abolished (cf. Revelation 21:4). He states that the creation was subjected to “futility or vanity”, and that it will eventually be set free from its fallen state. The whole creation, including humanity, has been “groaning” in pain until now. Indeed, living as fallen creatures in a fallen world makes us “groan inwardly” (v23). We eagerly await the New Creation – including our incorruptible bodies – where all will be set free from bondage and decay. Paul states that this is our hope: to be delivered from this fallen, sin-cursed world.



While it is the hope of a blessed eternity that inspires the Christian to remain faithful, let us serve the Lord faithfully and to the full in the time that He has given to us here on earth. He promises to provide us with our “daily bread”, that He will “never leave us nor forsake us”. When the world praises the ingenuity and intelligence of scientists, doctors, medical staff, and politicians for developing vaccines and curing those afflicted, may we always remember they are but using the resources that our Creator

God has provided for them. It is the Lord Who has given them their “body and soul, eyes, ears, and all their members, their reason and all their senses, and still preserves them.”

In the Book of Genesis, the Bible provides the historical foundation for science and it is this which, after the Fall, has become vital to ease suffering. Thanks to this God-given provision, there may be effective treatments or preventative measures for COVID-19.

The Christian has a glorious hope. In Jesus Christ, God has conquered sin and death! Thanks to the divinely-sanctioned enterprise of science, founded upon the mandate of Genesis 1:26, 28, suffering can be alleviated, including diseases like COVID-19. Ultimately, death, suffering, and evil will be completely vanquished, because Jesus Christ our Creator and Saviour, rose from the dead. Praise God that Jesus, the Last Adam, paid for our sins and that of our forefather, the First Adam. Jesus, therefore, will finally abolish the consequences of the Fall in the New Creation. Based on our Saviour’s promise that “God’s Word is Truth,” John 17:17, we know the Bible’s history in Genesis is true, indeed that all the words of the Bible are true, and therefore we have confidence that the hope the Bible offers for the future is true. Now *that’s* real hope!

A Short Exposition of 1 Peter

(Continued from October – December 2020 edition)

1 Peter 1:5: “Who are KEPT by the POWER OF GOD through FAITH unto SALVATION ready to be revealed in the LAST TIME.”

Five reasons why Christians are to thank and bless God the Father:

- First reason: Through regeneration, believers have been made God’s spiritual Children.
- Second reason: Through faith, Christians have a living, sure, and certain hope of eternal life.
- Third reason: Christ’s resurrection is the proof that God the Father has accepted His atonement for the sins of God’s Children and that on the Last Day they shall rise with glorified bodies to be with their Saviour in heaven.
- Fourth reason: Heaven is the incorruptible and undefiled inheritance of the Christian.
- Fifth reason: Through the Word of God the Heavenly Father keeps the true Christian in the true Faith.

The Child of God cannot keep himself in the faith. We are warned of the devastating power and number of the enemies of Christ in Revelations 20:7–8: “Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.” With an army numbered as the “sand of the sea,” Satan has already surrounded the Christian Church. As a ravenous, hungry wolf he craves to destroy the church before Christ returns. So intense is his desire to annihilate all children of God, he is described by Saint Peter according to the original Greek as “a roaring lion prowling about, seeking whom he may devour.” Luther writes of him:

“The old evil foe
Now means deadly woe:
Deep guile and great might
Are his dread arms in fight,
On earth is not his equal.”

Superior in cunning and power to every human born of the flesh since Adam, Satan has reaped great success in claiming a vast number of souls for his kingdom. Even large numbers of once faithful Christians have been seduced and deceived into departing from God’s Word entering his realm of “misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice.” The staunch and faithful subject of the devil is the EVIL, GODLESS WORLD which daily tempts the child of God with greed, envy, and pride. The treacherous CORRUPT NATURE which even Christians have inherited from Adam serves as the devil’s subversive agent, tempting in thoughts, words and deeds to undermine the power of the truth and to promote sin and error.

As the grand master of strategy and tactics, the devil is cunning enough to approach as an “angel of light,” but the deadly poison of a snake is under his tongue. On one occasion Luther once remarked: “Satan will never tempt a man to commit an act of immorality with an ugly old hag, but a beautiful, attractive woman.” All those images from the cartoons and from the Middle Ages that show the devil as an ugly creature with a goat’s face, horns and long tail are completely false. If Satan appeared in that form everyone would instinctively flee from him. Appearing as he does in a beautiful form as an “angel of light,” he appears so attractive to our Old Adam, and instead of fleeing from him, many run after him.

ONLY THE WORD OF GOD CAN KEEP GOD’S CHILDREN IN THE TRUE FAITH.

God knows the power of our enemy and our impotence to resist him. Since He knows we cannot keep ourselves in the faith, the Lord gives us the wonderful promise in verse 5. In the Greek, ‘kept’ is a military term. It means ‘to guard, to protect.’ Holding fast to God’s Word, the Christian is taking refuge in an unassailable fortress. Though besieged by Satan with many temptations on all sides, no real harm can come to him because he is guarded and protected by God’s almighty power. As the Holy Spirit instructed Saint Paul to write, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” God’s Word is the shield that protects us from the fiery arrows of the devil. Every word of the Book of Life is powerful because It was given by inspiration of the Holy Ghost and is therefore absolutely inerrant and infallible. Clinging by faith in Christ to this Word we can rest secure, untouchable by the devil. The Lord’s watch over us is 24/7, year in, year out, never ceasing for a moment, until we arrive safely in heaven. Psalm 121:3–4: “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”

This power of God is only ours if we truly believe in Jesus as our Saviour and show our faith is genuine by loving obedience to His will. The word SALVATION is connected to the words “ready to be revealed in the last time.” God’s plan of salvation, in which the believer is kept and guarded, was appointed before the beginning of time, in order that it might be revealed at the end of the world. This will be the glorious day in which our Lord Jesus Christ will return to gather His children to their eternal rest. The exact time of this wonderful day has not been revealed, but it was sufficient for Saint Peter to remember that God is keeping watch over us. Our soul’s salvation rests in the secure hands of our Heavenly Father, if we remain faithful to His Word. LET US CLING TO THE WORD.

We dare not neglect His Word and Sacraments or we will cut ourselves off from the power that nourishes and sustains our faith. If we turn off the electricity we prevent the current from giving us light, and just so by cutting ourselves off from God’s Word the light of our faith will go out. Some people believe that ‘once in grace always in grace,’ the idea that once you are saved you can never be lost. Examples from the Bible such as King Saul, Judas, and Demas prove this is a very mistaken idea. These were once believers who fell away from the faith and were lost. The Bible warns us to watch and pray so that we remain steadfast in the faith and out of love to Christ resist the enemies of our soul.

Commenting on this verse Dr Wessel of Old Missouri wrote: “What a sweet, strong consolation for the suffering Christian who is anxious about his soul’s salvation! It is a consolation that has inherent power to strengthen the weak faith of the Christian and to cause him to rejoice when he looks forward to the time when his salvation shall be revealed.”

Dear reader, are you truly thankful that through His word the LORD keeps you in the true faith?

Questions to think about

1. Using the parable of the Sower, prove why the statement: “Once in grace, always in grace” is erroneous.
 2. In Philippians 1:6 what do the following expressions mean, “begun a good work,” and “will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ?”
 3. In Thessalians 5:24 what do the words “Who also will do it” mean?
 4. True or False, and give a reason for your answer: “Good works are necessary to preserve faith. Evil works destroy faith.” (Answers will be given in the next issue.)
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Brief History of the Church— Life and Deeds of Dr Martin Luther

[Since what the late *Professor Koch* teaches is so true, “**History is a great teacher,**” let us take note of the following lessons of History and value God’s grace in preserving His Word with us.

CHAPTER XII - LUTHER'S PILGRIMAGE TO ROME (Continued from January – March 2020 edition)

In **1510 Luther** was sent from **Erfurt Germany**, on business pertaining to the convent, in company with a monastic brother, **to Rome**. He was the more willing to undertake the journey as he hoped, by a visit to the holy places, as they were called, to **find rest and comfort for his conscience**. But the further he proceeded on his way, the more frequently and the more vehemently he thought the words were sung in his ears: “**The just shall live by faith.**”

Before Luther had reached the Apenines¹ he chanced to meet several **monks who ate meat on Friday**. He admonished them, in kind and courteous words, entreating them to remember that the **pope had forbidden the eating of meat**. The monks were not a little alarmed at these words, fearing that, if the matter should become known, they would incur danger and public disgrace. Therefore they agreed to put Luther out of the way. But God so ordered it that the porter notified him of this bloody intent, and **he accordingly made good his escape** in the best way that he could. At another time, when he and his companion had slept the whole night with the windows open, they were so affected by the unhealthy night air that they could proceed only a mile on the following day. **Their great thirst** placed them in constant temptation to drink water, which in that region is fatal. Finally they revived and refreshed themselves with two pomegranates, by which God preserved their lives.

Of his journey he relates: “In Lombardy on the **Po**, there is a very wealthy cloister of the Benedictine order, which has an annual income of 36,000 ducats.² There such luxury and voluptuousness³ prevails that 12,000 ducats are appropriated to banquets, 12,000 to the buildings, and the remaining third to the convent and the brethren. I was in the cloister and was treated sumptuously.”⁴



¹ The highest point in this mountain range is 2,912 m.

² About \$5,400,000 today.

³ It here means lavishly decorated and full of delicious food.

⁴ An expensive and magnificent banquet.



When Luther first perceived (saw) the city of Rome he fell upon his knees, lifted up his hands and exclaimed: “Holy Rome, I salute thee! Thrice (three times) holy because of the blood of the martyrs which flowed in thee.” There he sought in deep devotion to satisfy his soul.

“In Rome,” he relates, “I also was a **crazy saint**, ran through every church and grot,⁵ and **believed every lie that left its stench in the city**. I embraced the opportunity also of reading masses there, and was then very sorry that my father and mother were living yet, as I would have been glad to redeem them from Purgatory by masses, and other precious works and prayers.” But even when he read mass with the most devout feeling, **he experienced in his heart all the more sensibly the power of the words: “The just shall live by faith.”** There was at the Church of St Peter’s a flight of stairs called **Pilate’s Staircase**,⁶ which the papists represented as having been transported thither from the judgment hall in Jerusalem. The pope had promised plenary (full) indulgence to those who should ascend these stairs on their knees. Luther undertook this work with the purpose of propitiating⁷ God, whom he thought he had highly offended; and of expiating⁸ his sins, looking upon this as the best and the last means to find comfort. But while he crept up the stairs he felt as though a voice of thunder cried to him in terrible tones: **“The just shall live by faith.”**⁹ This deprived him, indeed, of all the comfort which he had expected to obtain there **by his own works and efforts**, but rendered him all the more attentive to the power of the words, which should be the means of showing him the true way to heaven.

Rome was lauded (highly praised) at that time as the ‘fountain of righteousness;’ but **Luther learned to know it differently**. He relates: “I was at Rome, though not long, – read many masses there, and also saw others engaged in them, so that I tremble when I think of it. There, among other **vile, coarse buffooneries**¹⁰ I heard courtesans¹¹ boast at the table, and making merry over the circumstance, that some in saying mass had used the words: “Bread thou art and bread thou shalt remain, wine thou art and wine thou shalt remain,” and that they had thus elevated the host. I was a young monk who was truly sincere and pious (led an outwardly moral life), and such things pained me.

What should I think? What other thoughts than these should occur to me: Is it possible that here in Rome such mockery is indulged in openly at the Lord’s Table? How can it be that all of them, the pope, cardinals, courtesans and all, say mass thus? How nicely then would I have been **deceived**, who heard

⁵ He here means grotto, cave of so-called “sacred” relevance to the Catholic Church.

⁶ The Holy Stairs” consist of 28 marble steps that, according to legend, are from the praetorium in Jerusalem. That was a palace used by **Pontius Pilate** who presided over the trial of Jesus that ended in Jesus being crucified. Legend has it that **Jesus** walked up the steps on his way to trial and that Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor **Constantine** (who reigned from the year 306 to 337), brought the stairs to Rome after a pilgrimage to **the Holy Land** -- another Catholic lie.

⁷ To seek God’s pardon by his works.

⁸ By doing these works he hoped to make amends for his sins.

⁹ Yet he still did not believe these words.

¹⁰ Foolish, clowning and mocking behaviour.

¹¹ Prostitutes, especially those with wealthy or upper-class clients.

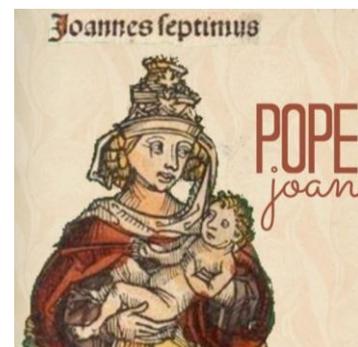
them say so many masses. I was quite **disgusted** too at the hustling levity¹² with which, helter skelter, they performed the mass, as if it were a puppet-show; for before I had reached the Gospel the priest at my side had finished his mass and cried to me, “Quick, quick, send her son (reference to Christ) home to our Lady speedily.”

He also learned in Rome how shamefully believers were there deceived with **spurious** (false) **relics**. He testifies: “This I can say confidently, from what I saw and heard at Rome, that **it is not known in that city where the remains of St Paul or St Peter lie, or whether they lie there at all**. The pope and the cardinals **are well aware that they do not know it**. Yet on the day of St Peter and Paul they set up two heads, pretend that they are the real heads of these apostles, and **lead the common people to believe it**, who crowd around them in devout wonder; but the pope and the cardinals, with their attendants, know right well that **they are two wooden heads, carved and painted**. Thus they **deceive** also with their veronicas¹³, pretending that our Lord’s face is impressed upon the handkerchief, while it is nothing but a little, square, black board, with a veil hanging over it, before which hangs a curtain that is drawn when the Veronica is shown, so that **the people see nothing more than a screen before a black board**, and this they call showing and seeing the Veronica, with which **shameless lie great indulgences are offered and great devotion is displayed**.”



In Italy Luther found **priests of the grossest ignorance**. To the question: how many sacraments are there? they answered: three, the sprinkling brush, the censer and the cross. He says of them: “The greater their honors and dignities, the more wantonly they sin, so that it has long since become a **proverb: the nearer Rome, the worse Christian**.” In general, he is unable to find words to describe the **horrible abominations** which he saw in Rome. “Not the least tittle (tiny amount) of divine order is observed at Rome, no, its observance is ridiculed as folly. All evil examples of spiritual and secular knavery¹⁴ flow into the world from Rome as from a sea of wickedness. No one believes what villany¹⁵ and what horrible sins and vices are practiced there; **to be convinced of it a person must see and hear and experience it for himself**.”

“At Rome, passing down a wide street which leads to St Peter’s, I saw a **stone statue representing a pope under the figure of a woman, holding a sceptre**, clothed in the papal mantle, and bearing a child in her arms. No pope passes through this street, as he must not behold this statue. It is a young woman of Mayence, who was brought by a cardinal to England in the character of a boy, and finally conducted to Rome. There she was elected pope by the cardinals, but her shame was exposed, as she was publicly delivered of a child in that street.



“I must here relate an occurrence showing what **opinions** we should form of the holy **scoundrels and murderers** of the Romish.¹⁶ At Rome I was told the following: ‘About seven German miles this side of the city there is a village called Roncilion. In the time of (Pope) Paul I there was an official of the pope in that place who saw the scandalous, satanic proceedings of the pope and his parasites at Rome, and withheld from him the annual dues from his office. The pope summoned him, but he refused to appear. All the commands of the pope he despised. At length **the pope excommunicated him**, but he remained indifferent. Then the pope had the bells tolled, and, with the pulpit lights extinguished, had him anathematized according to custom, but he concerned himself nothing about it. Finally, because such obstinate disobedience of the pope passes for heresy according to Romish law, **he had the official’s picture painted on paper, with**

¹² Treating serious matters, especially God’s Word, with such little respect.

¹³ A cloth supposedly impressed with an image of Christ’s face.

¹⁴ Roguish, deceitful acts.

¹⁵ Wicked, criminal behaviour.

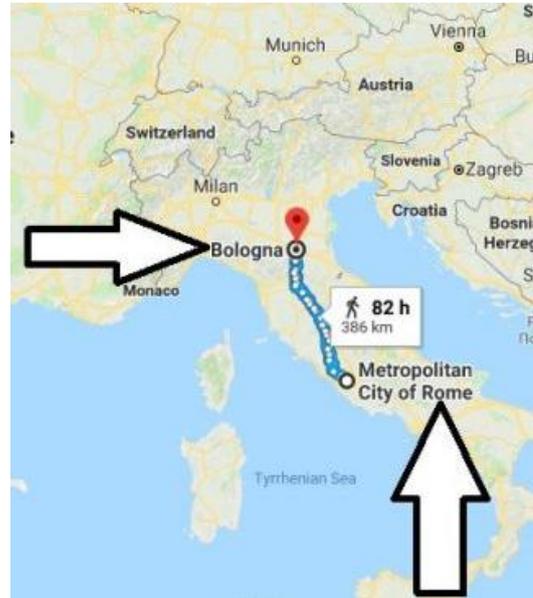
¹⁶ The authority, jurisdiction, and governmental functions associated with the papacy.

many devils about his head and on either side, and had this brought before the court, accused, and condemned to the stake as a heretic, and instantly the paper was hurried to the fire and burned.

“The official then also had the pope painted in the midst of his cardinals, **all full of devils over head and round about**, convened a court, and had the pope and cardinals charged with being the vilest knaves on earth, who did incalculable injury to the poor people, who, when their chief dies, place at their head the wickedest person to be found among them, and who are well worthy of hellfire; and **many witnesses were brought to prove this**; upon which the judge, the official and the plaintiffs cried that they should be burned, and instantly, in the name of a thousand devils, **they hurried the pope and cardinals away to the fire**; till at last the pope silenced him by force.

“This story may be laughable, but it shows a terrible evil, how the pope causes great scandal by his horrible, devilish wickedness at Rome, and **how the people who see it are offended** and become epicurean¹⁷ like themselves. For nearly all who return from Rome bring a papistic conscience with them, that is an epicurean faith, as it is certain that the pope and cardinals with their whole gang of rogues believe nothing, and **only laugh when they hear faith mentioned**. I myself heard it said publicly on the streets in Rome, that **if there is a hell Rome is built over it**, that is, next to the devils themselves there is not a more depraved crew than the pope and his toadies.”¹⁸

Thus Luther was called **to become himself thoroughly acquainted with Rome**, in order that, in due time, **he might be the better qualified to bear testimony against it**. Therefore he says himself: “I would not for a thousand florins¹⁹ have missed seeing Rome, for then I would always fear that I might do injustice to the pope; but we speak that which we have seen.”



When he had accomplished his mission in Rome **he returned home poor and dejected**. He had been undeceived (free from deception). **He had expected to find holiness and consolation in Rome, and he found diabolical wickedness instead**. In **Bologne**, he was attacked by such a severe pain in his head and ringing in his ears that he thought his end was approaching, and he fell into a profound melancholy.²⁰

LUTHER THE REFORMER BEGINS WITH THE CORRECT UNDERSTANDING OF AND BELIEF IN THE WORDS, “THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.”

Later, in 1516 at Wittenberg, when he studied to prepare his lectures on Romans 1:16–17 the Holy Spirit suddenly showed him the true meaning of these words: “**The just shall live by faith,**” now with a radiance which they had not before. He was revived and wonderfully refreshed as if by a ray of heavenly light.

¹⁷ A life devoted to sinful luxury or wicked indulgence in sensual pleasures whose motto is: “Let us eat, drink, sin, for tomorrow we may be dead!”

¹⁸ Those who **flattered** and **ingratiated** themselves with the pope in a **servile** way to gain their own ends.

¹⁹ Approximately 1 million dollars.

²⁰ Of his trip to Rome **Luther** later said: “I went with onions and returned with garlic.”

Never before, frequently and zealously as he had studied the epistle to the Romans, had he so clearly and forcibly understood the meaning of these words. Now **it was written in his soul**, with divine clearness and firmness, that **the righteousness so often mentioned by the apostle is the righteousness of Christ, which God graciously imputes to faith**. There at Wittenberg he examined further into the matter with unremitting diligence. “Then,” he writes, “**the whole Scriptures were opened to me, and also heaven itself**, Immediately I felt as if born anew, as if I had found the open gate of Paradise. Henceforward, also, **I saw the beloved Holy Scriptures with other eyes**. Therefore, I compared all the passages I could remember, and found it to be all the more certain that the righteousness of God signifies the righteousness which he gives us, because this accords with the Scriptural mode of speaking, e.g., the work of God means the work which He performs in us, the power of God means the power which He gives us, the wisdom of God means the wisdom which He bestows upon us, and so with God’s strength, God’s salvation, God’s glory, etc. As I had previously with all my heart detested the words, ‘**righteousness of God,**’ I now began to value and love them as the sweetest and most consoling words in the Bible. In very truth this passage of St Paul was now to me the very gate of paradise.”

- From *Life And Deeds of Dr Martin Luther* by Rev Hermann Fick (an old Missouri pastor) and translated by Prof Loy, pages 55-63 to be continued; slightly adapted).

