

The Fruit and Power of Christ's Resurrection

by Martin Luther

As we heard while explaining the meaning of Christ's passion, that it was not enough to know its mere narrative and history; so it is not enough to learn only how and when Christ our Lord arose from the dead; we must also preach and understand the benefit and use both of the sufferings and the resurrection of Christ, namely, what he thereby acquired for us. For if we preach only its history, it is an unprofitable sermon, which Satan and the godless know, read and understand as well as true Christians; but when we preach to what end it serves it becomes profitable, wholesome and comforting.

Christ himself pointed out the benefit of his sufferings and resurrection when he said to the women in Mt 28, 10 - "Fear not: go tell my brethren that they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see me." These are the very first words they heard from Christ after his resurrection from the dead, by which he confirmed all the former utterances and loving deeds he showed them, namely, that his resurrection avails in our behalf who believe, so that he therefore anticipates and calls Christians his brethren, who believe it, and yet they do not, like the apostles, witness his resurrection.

The risen Christ waits not until we ask or call on him to become his brethren. Do we here speak of merit, by which we deserve anything? What did the apostles merit? Peter denied his Lord three times; the other disciples all fled from him; they tarried with him like a rabbit does with its young. He should have called them deserters, yea, betrayers, reprobates, anything but brethren. Therefore this word is sent to them through the women out of pure grace and mercy, as the apostles at the time keenly experienced, and we experience also, when we are mired fast in our sins, temptations and condemnation.

These are words. full of all comfort that Christ receives desperate villains as you and I are and calls us his brethren, Is Christ really our brother, then I would like to know what we can be in need of? Just as it is among natural brothers, so is it also here. Brothers according to the flesh enjoy the same possessions, have the same father, the one inheritance, otherwise they would not be brothers: so we enjoy with Christ the same possessions, and have in common with him one Father and one inheritance, which never decreases by being distributed, as other inheritances do; but it ever grows larger and larger; for it is a spiritual inheritance. But an earthly inheritance decreases when distributed among many persons. He who has a part of this spiritual inheritance, has it all.

However, what is Christ's inheritance? His heritage is life and death, sin and grace, all that is in heaven and earth, eternal truth, power, wisdom, righteousness; he governs and rules over all, over hunger and thirst, over fortune and misfortune, over everything imaginable, whether in heaven or on earth, not only spiritual but also secular affairs; and the sum total of all is, he has all things in his hand, be they eternal or temporal. Now if I believe on him, I become partaker with him of all his possessions, and obtain not only a part or a piece; but, like him, I obtain all, eternal righteousness, eternal wisdom, eternal strength, and become a lord and reign over all. The stomach will not hunger, sins will not oppress, I will no more fear death, nor be terror-stricken by Satan, and I will never be in want, but will be like Christ the Lord himself.

In the light of this we now easily understand the sayings here and there in the prophets and especially in the Psalms; as when David in Ps 34, 10 says: "The young lions (the rich) do lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek Jehovah shall not want any good thing." And in another Psalm: "Jehovah knoweth the days of the perfect; and their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be put to shame in the time of evil; and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied." Ps 37, 18-19. And immediately following in verse 25: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging

bread." All this comes of itself from the fact that we are and are called Christ's brethren; not because of our worthiness, but because of God's pure grace. Yes, if God gave us this in our heart, so that we experience it, then we would be saved; but it goes in one ear and out the other. And this it is that Paul praises so highly and strongly to the Romans when he says: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him." Rom 8,14-17.

The title of being Christ's brothers is so high that the heart of man cannot understand it. If the Holy Spirit bestows not this grace, none can say: Christ is my brother. For reason is not bold enough to say so; although one may say it with the tongue, as the spirits of modern times do. It is not uttered in this way, it is necessary for the heart to experience it; otherwise it is pure hypocrisy. If you truly experience it in your heart it will be such a great thing that you will much prefer to keep silence than to speak about it, yea, in the presence of the magnitude of this inheritance you easily doubt and waver as to whether it is really true or not. Those who only cry: Christ is my brother! Christ is my brother! are not true Christians. A Christian acts quite differently, and it is very wonderful, so that the flesh shudders at it and dares indeed neither speak of it nor confess it.

We should bestir ourselves to hear this, not only with the natural ear, but also to experience it in our hearts, for then we would not be so forward and impudent, but would be surprised and amazed over it. True and godly Christians go along in life in contempt of themselves and in fear; they think thus: Ah, shall I, a poor, miserable person, who am steeped in sin, be now so exalted that God's Son becomes my brother? Ay, how is it that I, a miserable poor creature, am thus honored? I am at once confounded before it and feed upon it; for it truly requires a great effort to believe it; yea, when one experiences it thus, how it is in truth, he must from that hour die; for man, since he is flesh and blood, cannot understand it. Here in this life man's heart is in too great straits to lay hold of it; but after death, when the heart becomes larger and broader, we experience what we have heard through the Word.

In the Gospel of John Christ tells Mary Magdalene of the benefit and use of his death and resurrection still more plainly, when he says: "But go unto my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God." Jn 20,17. This is one of the great and comforting passages upon which we can venture, and of which we dare boast. As if Christ had said: Go hence, Mary, and say to my disciples who have deserted me on the field of battle, and who have well merited punishment and eternal condemnation, that my resurrection has taken place for their benefit; that is, by my resurrection I have brought it to pass that my Father is their Father, and my God is their God. These are few words and very short; but they contain a great thought, namely, that we have as great a confidence and refuge in God as Christ his Son himself has. Who can grasp such exceeding joy, unless one speaks of himself when he says a poor, corrupt sinner can and may call God his Father and his God, just like Christ himself does?

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has grasped the words of Ps 22,23 and taken them well to heart, when he says of Christ: "For which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation will I sing thy praise." Heb 2,11-12. If any worldly lord were to condescend so low as to say to a thief, or a murderer or to a low French character, Thou art my brother; that would be a great thing and everyone would be amazed at it; but that this King, who in his glory sits at the right hand of God, his Father, says to a poor sinner: Thou art my brother, that no one takes to heart, no one receives it in earnest, and yet on that hangs our highest comfort and courage against sin, death, Satan, hell, law, and against all misfortune, both of the body and of the soul.

Since we are flesh and blood, and subject to all kinds of affliction, it follows that it must be thus also with our brother; or he would not be like us in all respects. Therefore, in that he becomes like us, he tastes of all that we do, in order to be our true brother and save us, so that we on the other hand may become like him. This the Epistle to the Hebrews paints and brings out very beautifully when it says: "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to naught him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily not to angels doth he give help, but he giveth help to the seed of Abraham. Therefore it behooveth him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." Heb 2, 14- 18.

St. Paul in a very beautiful way condensed the benefit and use both of Christ's sufferings and his resurrection in one short passage, as in a nutshell, when he says to the Romans: "Who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification." Rom 4, 25. But on this theme enough has been said for the present; whoever desires may with profit meditate on it; more is written about it in the Postil; whoever desires to have it let him get it and read. We will now discuss another subject. Since people in many localities still cling to the papal abuses, so that they flock to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper on Easter, and this custom is so deeply drilled into them, that it is very difficult to root it out everywhere, we wish to give some instruction to the single minded and plain people, how they should at the present time partake of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. (Rodb's Ed., 1525.) Of this the following sermon plainly speaks.