

## **Is the Lord with Us or Not?**

Exodus 17:1-7

The Third Sunday in Lent; March 27, 2011

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

He who did not spare His own Son, how will He not along with Him graciously give us all things? He who did not spare His own Son, how will He not along with Him graciously give us all things?

I often find the sentences of Saint Paul to be convoluted. Once I do figure out what he is saying in his epistles, I think of at least a dozen different ways that he could have said this in an easier way. He who did not spare His own Son is God. God did not spare His own Son. He sent Him to die upon the cross. When Jesus died on the cross He was following God's will for Him. The death of Jesus was an atoning sacrifice. It took away our sins. It was a vicarious death. In other words we deserved death because of our sins, but Jesus got our death instead. Because Jesus got our death instead, we will live and live forever.

What Paul is getting at in Romans 8 is that if God was gracious enough to give You His Son, then He is gracious enough to give you everything else. He will not withhold from you anything because He did not withhold from you His Son. If you are important enough to Him that He would send His Son to die for you, then you are important enough to Him for Him to give you absolutely anything else. So there is Jesus dying on that cross. There He is suffering hell and damnation for us. There He is relieving us of our responsibility before God. There He is forgiving us of our sins. There He is doing it all for us. You can expect great things from God. Look at what He has already given to you.

Of course that means that you never complain about how God is taking care of you, right? You never complain about the spouse that He gave to you, do you? You never complain about the children that He has given to you, do you? You never wish that you had another spouse. You never wish that you had different children or a different number of children, or a different set of genders for your children. If you have all male children, you never wish for a girl. If you have all female children, you never wish for a boy! If you have a lot of children, you never wish for fewer of them! If you don't have many children or have none at all, you never wish for more! If you have adopted children, you never wish that you had birth children.

If you have a lot of things, you never wish that you had more. If you have a lot of money, you never wish that you had more. If you had fancy things, you never wish that you had fancier. You have never overspent on something that you did not need! Surely not! Surely you have never complained a day in your life. You have got up each morning and thought to yourself, what a bright new day that God has made. I think I am going to rejoice and be glad in it! You are always happy with the cat. You are always happy with the dog. You are always happy with the plumbing and roofing. You are always happy with the job that people you hire do for you. You are always looking forward to what the boss is going to say today! You look forward to the busy season, after all you are more productive then! You are more useful then! You can render more glory to God during the busy season because you are discharging your vocation to Him. I bet you have never wished that you had a different vocation. You never envy your neighbor's vocation or wish that you had the same job he or she had.

I bet you never wish that you looked like those people on TV. I bet you are content with your appearance. I bet you look in the mirror every morning and say to yourself, "Man, there is a person that

God loves! And I love him to." Of course if you are a woman you would say, "I love her too." God didn't spare His own Son for him so I can expect that He is not going to spare any other expense for me either.

The quote is attributed to Abraham Lincoln, "Whether you get married or not, you will regret it." Married people go around wishing they were single and single people go around wishing they were married. The grass is greener on the other side of the fence. The Bible calls that idolatry. It is a sneering at the grass that God has given to you and therefore a sneering at God. It is like God gave you a present at Christmas and you told Him that you did not like it.

And we have won the lottery of life. One of Christy's relatives told me that just before his death. We have won the lottery of life. He meant the United States. We just happen to be alive in the United States. We could have been born anywhere to any parents at any time. God chose for us to be born in the United States. Not only were we born in the United States we were born in the twenty-first century. We can indeed thank God for indoor plumbing. The prairie has been settled. For many of us we have inherited our land that our fathers and grandfathers worked hard to build up to leave to us. We do not have to pioneer the land ourselves. We do not have to drain the land ourselves. Or for Christy's uncle who lived in Saint Louis, he did not have to fight to have an education or find work. He had it given to him. My land we are white people on top of it. We live in white privilege in a white country with black and Hispanic minorities. We have automatic privilege granted to us. It is assumed that we are hard working and honest. We have to be lazy to prove them otherwise.

I had pretty good parents. They taught me right from wrong. They taught me to believe in Jesus. They stayed married and are still married. Now I am speaking personally, your parents have their advantages also. Is it so bad if life does not turn out ok in every detail?

In which country would you rather live, the United States or Libya? Many of you have told me how little you care for President Obama. Isn't grand to live in a country where even if he is elected a second term in office that's it for him? For those of you who like President Obama think about other presidents that you didn't like, perhaps the previous one. There was no revolution to get Bush out of office. There was no mass demonstration in which people died. Which would you rather have? President Obama or President Umbarak? Would you really want to fight a civil war like they are in Libya? Would you want to do that in order to have a new election? Which protests would you rather have sat in, the one in Cairo or the one in Madison, Wisconsin? We have won the lottery of life and still we complain. Our Father in heaven has given us His only Son into death and still we complain. Some of us are even angry with our Father in heaven. We resent Him because there were some things that we expected to have and we did not receive them.

And by the way, we are worse than the Israelites. They wanted water. That is not such an unusual thing to expect. It is easy sometimes to read Exodus and Numbers and condemn those narrow minded Israelites. It is easy to Pharisaically read the stories of their grumbling and think to ourselves, if we had seen the waters of the Red Sea part and had seen the plagues brought on Pharaoh and the other wonders that the Lord performed, we would not have complained about a lack of food and water in the wilderness. We would have known that the Lord would have taken care of us.

Well, people when it comes to water out of the rock the only people who witness the miracle are the elders of Israel. Joe blow Israelite does not get to see it. Only his clan leader tells him that this water came miraculously from the rock over there. Secondly, they are complaining about a lack of water, a necessity. If God had this great plan to save us out of Egypt and He thought of everything else that He would need to do in order to get Pharaoh to release us and to save us from Pharaoh at the Sea of Reeds, then you would think that it would have crossed His mind to have some water available in this

wilderness that He intended to lead us into! Of course, there in lies their faithlessness. Of course, it crossed His mind. Therein lies our faithlessness, of course He will graciously give us all things. He gave us His Son.

You know Lutherans take suffering pretty good. Those of us who are theologically aware expect suffering to come our way. We are dismayed when we hear other Christians say to us that any kind of suffering or want is the wrath of God against our sins. That it is some kind of punishment for the things that we do wrong. But we don't take miracles very well.

Evangelicals, Pentecostals and even some Methodists take miracles pretty well. They seem to expect them to happen. And they are dismayed when a Lutheran tells them that suffering may not in fact be the punishment from God that it seems that it is so plain that it is. They don't take sickness or freak accidents very well.

What I am about to say, I say for biblical reasons. I am not an ecumenical guy. Ecumenism is hypocrisy so much of the time. I don't think that Christians should just get together because it is a nice thing to do. They should do it only if it can be genuinely done. But I really do think that in this instance everyone is right.

You can read Deuteronomy 28 and God lays it out in black and white. If you sin, you will get punished. Punishments include floods, earthquakes, disasters of various kinds, invasions, famines, droughts, childlessness, diseases, freak accidents and death.

You can also read the book of Job and know that sometimes people will be sinless and perfect and they will still suffer all of the things that I just listed. Even sinless people suffer the loss of their children, floods, earthquakes, fires, invasions, etc. Don't believe Job? Look at our Lord Jesus Christ. There He is perfect. There He is crucified. You can say that He was bearing our sin. Yeah, but He didn't have to do that. He is nevertheless one who is perfect who died.

What does this all mean? It means two things. First of all, Jesus means it when He says take up your cross and follow Him. Jesus also means it when He says that if you have faith as small as a mustard seed you can say to this mountain be moved into the heart of the sea and it will obey you. And Jesus is not using a metaphor there. He is not talking about spiritual or emotional mountains. He is talking about the kind that inhabit Colorado or Tibet. After all God just recently moved the islands of Japan several feet, a mountain should be easy work for the Almighty.

It means that when you suffer, you are close to Jesus because He suffered. When you suffer you are participating in His suffering. If you suffer thirst as the Israelites did and cry out that you thirst you are doing nothing more than what Jesus did on the cross. If you die suddenly and too young, then you are doing nothing different than what Jesus did on the cross. I could go through the list of sufferings that I did earlier, but you remember them and you have sufferings of your own that I don't even know about. Each and every one of those things that makes you want to complain to God and be upset with Him are things that join you to Christ. They are the cross that God has laid upon you, but then if God has laid a cross on you, you are His Son for God only lays crosses on His Sons.

It also means that when you rejoice, you are close to Jesus because He rose from the dead. When you are healed, when your surgery was a success, when you have your children and have a lot of them, when they are healed, when you are successful, when you get the raise, when you get the new vocation that you were hoping for, when you make the trip that you wanted to make, when you get the girl that you wanted to get or the boy, you have experienced a small resurrection of your own. Only God can give you these things. Only He feeds the hungry. Only He gives drink to the thirsty. Only He clothes the

naked. Only He heals the sick. He is your healer. Only He raises the dead. If you experience these things, then you are close to Jesus because He rose from the dead.

Now think about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are only three days apart. They are never without each other. We might miss one service or the other, but Jesus did not miss His Good Friday. Jesus did not miss His Easter Sunday. He had them both. He experienced them both. He endured them both.

When you suffer or are deprived, you are experiencing your Good Friday. Your Easter Sunday is never far away. When you are blessed and gifted and healed, you are experiencing your Easter Sunday, but take heed, in this life Good Friday has not gone anywhere.

Even the most blessed in this life die. And even the dead and most wretched rise. And when we are the most wretched and the dead because our resurrection is coming, we have no reason in the world whatsoever to complain.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.