

Crumbs – Good News for the Diaspora!

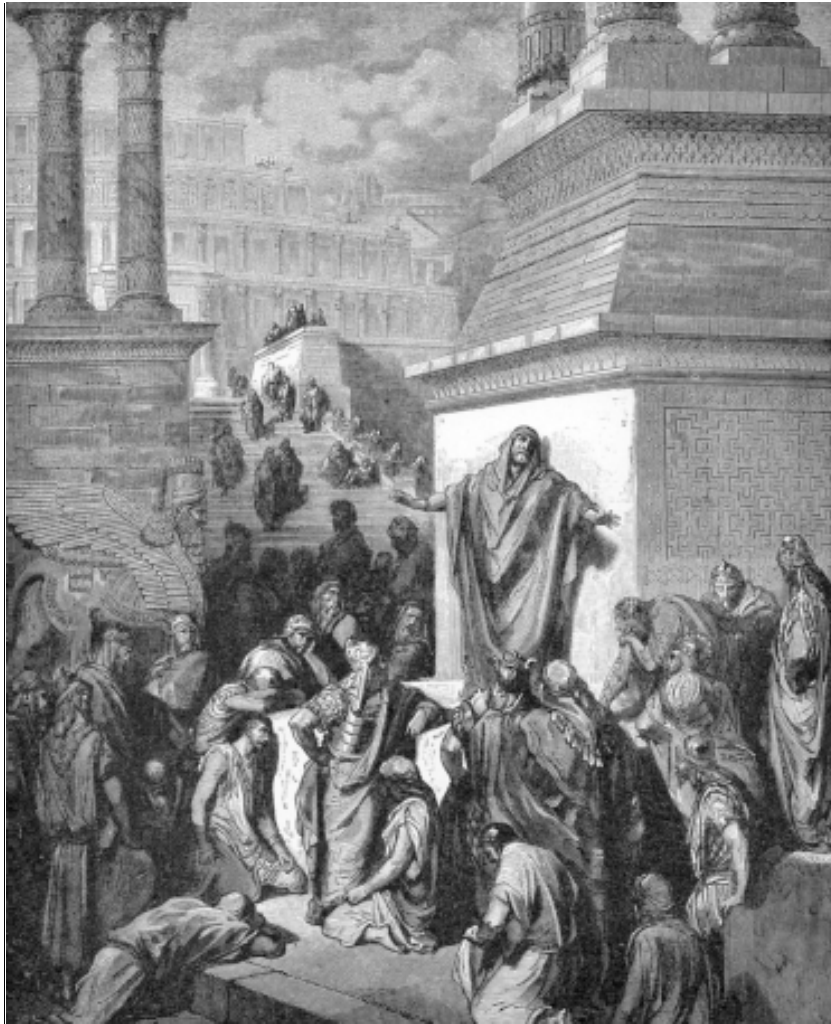


Illustration: Jonah Calls Nineveh to Repentance

A Devotional for the Week of the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity.

SUNDAY.

The harvest, truly, is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers into His harvest. – Matthew 9:37-38.

If you take a general view of the heathen world and even of Christian countries where so many churches are served by false teachers, in what condition do you find the people? They are famished spiritually, and scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. Is not that a sight to move you with compassion? Can your Christian heart see this and remain cold and indifferent?

Jesus was moved with compassion when He saw a condition similar to what we see today, and, therefore said to His disciples: "The harvest, truly, is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers into His harvest." And He says this to us. We should pray to God – to implore Him fervently to grant laborers, preachers of the Gospel, who are to garner immortal souls for His Kingdom. For wherever sowing is being done, wherever the Word of God is preached, there also, without fail, will be a harvest, there men will be brought to faith in Christ and obtain salvation. For God says of His Word that it is preached: "It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11.)

But do we Christians pray God for laborers as the Savior bids us pray? Do *you*? Alas, we must confess to much coldness of heart. If we Christians truly prayed God to send forth laborers into His harvest, He would surely gladly and abundantly grant our prayer. Indeed, by such prayer God would open the heart of many a one to say: "Here am I; send me!" (Isaiah 6:8.) It is our fault that there are so few laborers. God is willing to give, but we do not ask Him; God is willing to send, but we do not go.

PRAYER. – Lord, for Jesus' sake forgive me this sin, that with such coldness of heart I behold how all the world is famishing spiritually, that, though You do command us to pray for laborers, I

nevertheless pray so seldom and so poorly, and that on my own part I do so little toward sending out laborers into the field. Give to me the precious gift of Your Holy Spirit, yes, through Him, I beg You, inflame the hearts of many Christians and move them with sincere compassion and to fervent prayer and willing service. Amen.

Hymn 470, 1.

SAINTS of God! the dawn is bright'ning,
Token of our coming Lord;
O'er the earth the field is whit'ning;
Louder rings the Master's word:
Pray for reapers
In the harvest of the Lord!

MONDAY.

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven. – Matthew 10:32-33.

With the heart to believe in the Lord Jesus and with the mouth to confess Him before men, these two are as intimately linked together as a light and the brightness it sheds forth. For flesh and blood, which still clings to us Christians, it often is a hard task indeed to confess our Lord before unbelievers, who mock or threaten or smile in derision. But the new man within us ever again comes to the surface and freely confesses his allegiance to his beloved Savior.

Flesh and blood may so overpower a Christian as time and again to fall into the mortal sin of denying Christ. But when the look of Jesus quickens his faith again, bitter tears and a renewed confession always follow. And him who thus confesses Jesus before men, he, the Lord, will confess also before His rather in heaven; He

will testify that he is His own through faith, and will be His in all eternity. Blessed is he whom the Savior thus confesses!

But he that denies the Lord Jesus, he that is ashamed to confess Him before men, he that in the presence of Christians, indeed, acts as a Christian, but in the presence of unbelievers acts as an unbeliever, such a person has lost his faith, has ruthlessly cast it aside. Him will our Lord also deny before His Father in heaven and say: "I know him not!" And woe, woe to him or her whom the Lord will thus deny!

PRAYER. – Grant to me, O my Lord Jesus, the right and sincere faith in You, my only Savior, that I may steadfastly cling to You in true faith, and confess Your name, though the world should look askance at me for it. Help me, Your weak child, in every temptation, lest I deny You! And acknowledge me as Your own before Your heavenly Father, and as worthy, through You, to remain with You in everlasting bliss. Amen.

Hymn 552, 6.

Therefore my Intercessor be,
And for Thy bloody merit
Declare my name from judgment free,
With all who life inherit;
That I may see Thee face to face,
With all Thy saints in that blest place,
Which Thou for us hast purchased.

TUESDAY.

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword. – Matthew 10:34.

Thus says the Lord Jesus. And it is a very strange saying of the "Prince of Peace," who also, in the night preceding His death, said to His disciples: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." (Isaiah 9:6 & John 14:27.) And we know of a certainty that He brought peace to us: peace with God, whom we had offended and provoked to wrath, peace with all the reconciled children of God, peace of heart and conscience. But this is a spiritual peace, a peace indissolubly connected with the truth of the Gospel and faith. Jesus did not come to send a carnal peace on earth, a peace that conflicts with the truth of the Gospel and faith.

On the contrary, where the Gospel is preached in its purity, and where men truly believe, there sword and war loom forth - brought on by such as refuse to believe and accept the Gospel. And back of them stands the old Evil Foe. And, alas! such sword severs the most intimate ties. The unbelieving son is set at variance with his father and the daughter against her mother and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. And we must bear this. We dare not, for the sake of peace, deny our Savior, nor His Gospel, nor any Word of His Truth, nor the faith in Him and His Word. He says: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

(Matthew 10:35-37.)

My dear Christian, do not let such sword and discord shake your faith and become a stumbling-block to you. Stand firm! You, nevertheless, have the true peace.

PRAYER. – My Lord and Savior, I thank You for having merited the true peace for me. But when discord arises and war is waged against me because of Your Word and my faith in You, as once it did against You, then give me Your Holy Spirit, that my heart may not be troubled nor afraid, but that I may cheerfully and firmly cling to You. Amen.

Hymn 109, 2.

The world may call herself my foe,
So be it; for I trust her not,
E'en though a friendly face she show,
And heap with her good things my lot.
In Thee alone will I rejoice,
Thou art the Friend, Lord, of my choice,
For Thou art true when friendships fail;
'Mid storms of woe Thy truth is still
My anchor; hate me as she will,
The world shall o'er me ne'er prevail.

WEDNESDAY.

He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me. – Matthew 10:38.

The cross of which the Lord Jesus here speaks is every hardship or tribulation that we must bear because we follow Him. If we follow Jesus, we shall have a cross to bear, for the devil hates us, the world persecutes us, and our own flesh and blood troubles us in many ways. The cross with which our Lord and Savior was afflicted casts its shadows, which cause pain and affliction to those who follow Jesus. And whoever does not willingly take this cross, and does not follow Jesus steadfastly, is not worthy of Him, he cannot be His disciple, cannot be a Christian. For if we wish to be exempt from this cross, we can accomplish this only by no longer following Christ. If we wish to avert from us a part of this cross, it can only be done by partly surrendering our faith and our confession and the obedience we owe Christ. But can a Christian do this without altogether falling away from Christ?

THURSDAY.

An old, well-known pastor, since departed, owned a picture which represented some cross-bearers who threw off their cross entirely, and others who sawed off a part of it. But they all ceased to follow Christ.

Whoever would lead a life that is agreeable to his flesh, and would try to find happiness by throwing off the cross of Christ, will lose this very happiness and enter eternal death. But he that loses his life and happiness on this earth for Jesus' sake, will find it for all eternity. Follow Jesus, even when burdened with the cross! The Lord will regard you with compassion and help you.

PRAYER. – Lord Jesus, my Savior, without You I cannot have life, without You I am lost; I must follow You as a sheep follows its shepherd and a disciple his master. Grant me this, O Jesus! And if then I must take Your cross on me, graciously help me, O Jesus, and give me true courage and boldness. Yes, do help me, O Jesus! Amen.

Hymn 334, 1. 6.

COME, follow me, the Savior spake,
All in my way abiding;
Deny yourselves, the world forsake,
Obey my call and guiding;
O bear the cross, whate'er betide,
Take my example for your guide.

Who seeks to find his soul's welfare
Without me, he shall lose it;
But who to lose it may appear,
In God shall introduce it.
Who bears no cross, nor follows hard,
Deserve not me, nor my reward.

Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. – Matthew 13:12.

God's spiritual gifts are, mainly, a believing knowledge of the Word of God, peace and joy in the possession of salvation, and strength willingly and obediently to follow Christ through this life to eternal life.

These spiritual gifts, by reason of their divine origin and nature, thrive and bear fruit. For they are gifts of the Holy Ghost who dwells within us; and the Holy Ghost cannot be idle and inactive within our hearts; He causes the seed which He has planted, and which through Him has life, to grow. Thus it is that ever more of this believing knowledge of the Word of God, of this peace and joy in the promised salvation, and of this strength willingly and obediently to follow Christ, is given to him who has these spiritual gifts, and in whose heart the Holy Spirit truly abides. This is what the Lord Jesus means when He says: "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance."

On the other hand, if any one disregards the spiritual gifts of God, if he resists the Holy Spirit, who desires to work within his heart, and refuses to give place to Him, then at last the Holy Spirit departs from such a person; and when the Holy Spirit departs, all those things are likewise taken away from such a person, which in the first place were given him by the Holy Spirit. He is then without the believing knowledge of the Word of God, without peace and joy in the salvation of Christ, having lost it now, and without strength willingly and obediently to follow Christ. A vine withered and cast forth, is such a person. And this is what the Lord Jesus means when He says: "But whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." A very, very serious word, which, alas! but too often comes true.

PRAYER. – Lord God Holy Ghost, forgive me the slothfulness and disinclination of my carnal mind wherewith I have hindered You from bestowing on me the full measure of Your spiritual gifts. O Lord, let me rejoice in Your precious and blessed gifts, and give to me, O Lord, an ever greater fullness of the same, to the glory of Your name and to my soul's eternal welfare. Amen.

Hymn 249, 1.

COME, God, Creator, Holy Ghost,
And visit Thou the souls of men;
Fill them with graces, as Thou dost,
Thy creatures make pure again.

FRIDAY.

Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? – Matthew 18:1.

What we would say in answer to this question might be wrong. Let us see what the Savior answers. He says: "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all and servant of all." (Mark 9:35.)

What does this signify? It signifies three things. First: It is right for a Christian to desire to be first in the kingdom of God, that is, to wish to do more for the kingdom of God than any other man, and also earnestly to attempt this. Secondly: But in doing this, such a Christian must consider himself nothing but a poor sinner, which indeed he is, and deeply deplore that he can do so little, but esteem every other Christian better than himself. Thirdly: In doing this, he again must serve all others and make himself their servant, for in the kingdom of God service alone is what is wanted.

Whom, therefore, does our Lord call the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Him who uses his best endeavors to amount to

something in the kingdom of God, but at the same time esteems himself less than others, and serves others with the greatest humility.

The Savior further answered our question by setting a little child in the midst of His disciples and saying: "Verily, I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:24.) Conceit shuts one out from the kingdom of heaven, for it is in direct opposition to the state of a heart that trusts in the Savior of sinners. Whoever, like a dear little child, serves his fellow-man, and at the same time, again like a dear little child, considers himself the least of all believers, he, yes, he is the greatest.

A wonderful doctrine, and directly opposed to flesh and blood! But such a one the Savior loves.

PRAYER. – Lord Jesus, give to me, and sustain within me, a poor sinner, the true faith, that I may be and remain in Your kingdom. And grant me Your Holy Spirit to serve You gladly in Your kingdom by serving my neighbor. And guard me against faith-destroying conceit and vanity! Let me be Your beloved disciple in childlike simplicity and humility. Amen.

Hymn 365, 1.

LORD, hear the voice of my complaint,
To Thee I now commend me,
Let not my heart and hope grow faint,
But deign Thy grace to send me.
True faith from Thee, my God, I seek,
The faith that loves Thee solely,
Keeps me lowly,
And prompt to aid the weak,
And mark each word that Thou dost speak.

SATURDAY.

Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? – I say not unto thee: Until seven times, but: Until seventy times seven. – Matthew 18:21-22.

Thus Peter, asked, and thus the Savior answered him. Hence we must ever and again be ready to forgive with all our heart, actually to forgive. How often does God forgive us who sin against Him? Daily and richly. It cannot be counted. We always sin against God, and God always forgives us. How often does our brother, our fellow Christian, sin against us? It is as nothing compared with our innumerable offenses against God. Again and again we should be ready to forgive with all our heart, actually to forgive. Should we sinners be less ready to forgive than the holy God Himself? Should we, who could not live and be happy without the forgiveness which God grants us, refuse to forgive others? Why, then we would fully deny the spirit of faith, then we would have lost our faith, then we ourselves could no longer look to God for forgiveness.

The Savior teaches us to pray: "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," and says: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14-15.)

No one can remain a Christian who places himself in opposition to this word of the Savior and refuses to forgive. Ah indeed, for flesh and blood it is difficult and often impossible to forgive, to forgive from our whole heart. But have we not been born again? Should the old Adam rule within us? No, the new man must live and rule. And we want to forgive, forgive again and again. My dear Christian, take this well to heart! It is a most serious matter.

PRAYER. – Lord Jesus, again I come to You for help. Help me against my sin-corrupted flesh and blood! Help the new man within me! Grant that I may always be ready to forgive from my whole heart

if any man sins against me, a sinner. By Your Holy Spirit make Your clear command a power within me! Preserve me in Your grace! Amen.

Hymn 365, 3.

O grant that from my very heart
My foes be all forgiven,
Forgive my sins and heal their smart,
And grant new life from heaven;
Thy Word, that blessed food, bestow,
Which best the soul can nourish;
Make it flourish
Thought all the storms of woe
That else my faith might overthrow.

These devotions are adapted from *Crumbs* by C. M. Zorn (1914).

The hymn stanzas are from *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* (1918).

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