

Thanks be to You, our most merciful Father in heaven, for the Word of Your Gospel, which is able to save the soul. Grant Your saving truth to them that have it not, and cause Your light to shine on the nations sitting in the darkness of idolatry. Through Your Word draw us to Your Son, that we may have life in Him. Amen. (Reading the Psalms with Luther, Ps. 63, CPH, p.148)

And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

In Christ Jesus, the blessed Morning Star that has arisen in our hearts, dear fellow redeemed:

Yard lights are good to be sure, but in the dark a light trained on your walkway as you take your steps is even more invaluable. Yard lights can often create shadows, which conceal hidden dangers as you move about. While a yard light again can certainly give you a bit more comfort in exposing any lurking dangers like wild animals or criminals, being sure footed is of top priority, preventing tripping and falling.

We might use for the theme of the longest Psalm, Ps. 119, its 105 verse: "Your word is lamp to my feet and a light to my path." The Apostle Peter recognizes this in our text: **The Prophetic Word Is a Lamp unto Our Feet**, which now includes the Apostolic Word for us as we await in faith the fulfillment of all that God has promised us.

I

Luther observes: "*We must have the light [of the Word] and cling to it until the Last Day. Then we shall no longer need the Word, just as artificial light is extinguished when the day dawns.*"¹ Now this in no way disparages the Word of God. Right now you and I who live in the darkness of this world need it to reveal to us the Way, that is Christ Jesus, our one and only Savior.

In our Gospel lesson we read the account of the last great Old Testament prophet, John, the baptizer. He was in the dungeon of King Herod soon to face execution for faithfully declaring the Word of the Most High. He did what most of us do when we start seeing

¹ Martin Luther, AE Vol. 30, p. 166.

our life here coming to a close; he started to wonder if he actually did what he was supposed to do in his vocation as forerunner. So he sent disciples to ask Jesus if He was indeed the One who was to come, or should they be looking for another. Jesus answered, but not with a simple “yes”. He directed John to the prophetic word from Isaiah describing the works of the Christ and put the question back to him - are not these the very things He, Jesus of Nazareth was doing?

Through this prophetic word Jesus illumined the lamp before John’s feet. He could proceed toward his death knowing that Jesus was truly the Savior promised of old. The glint eventually emanating from the cleaver that would fall upon John’s neck would reflect the truth of this sure word of God’s love of deliverance from this dark world.

II

This word was not the word of men expressed with philosophical sophistication. This prophetic word came from God Himself. “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” Yet most of your neighbors view the Bible as nothing but a collection of human opinions about God.

You and I can never prove the veracity of the Bible as God’s Word to an unbelieving mind. Our Lord never instructs us even to try such an impossible task, but He does send us out with the powerful message of His love for all in Christ Jesus, His Son. As sinners hear God declare this truth the Spirit works upon darkened hearts and enlightens them to the truth, so that believing in Christ as Savior, trust in the Bible as God’s Word naturally follows. That is what happened for you and me. No one first proved to us the Bible is God’s Word, we first believed in our Savior and were then convinced the Word of truth is revealed to us by His prophets and apostles.

We are soon going to be celebrating the mystery of God being born of the Virgin. The unbelieving world marvels at what we celebrate with faith, but can only draw close to this light through the glittering and sparkling trappings of the season. The world will even try to find meaning in that babe born in Bethlehem, but it is not the truth, which gives life. So the world will try to find messages about the poor and homeless in the story of the young parents journeying to an unfriendly place; about low class workers in the story of the shepherds; about diversity in the story of the wise men; about tyrannical governments in the response of Herod. But all such messages lead only to additional sadness, guilt and shame. Despair eventually results from all such worldly contemplations.

But this is not so with you my fellow believers. You “have something more sure, the prophetic word” which gives life and thus gives hope. “[Y]ou will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises.”

Again, when the unbelieving world hears about the light for our feet, they reject it, since in their way of thinking more needs to be illumined. They will ask the Church of our Lord Jesus to explain the hidden things of God. For example, they will point to mass shootings with innocent lives taken out in an instant; to the abuse of children even under the cover of the outward Church; to natural catastrophes with the destruction of property and loss of life and ask how a loving God can let something like these things happen. For the unbelieving mind this is proof positive that no loving God exists. For us it speaks of the corrupt nature of this life brought about by our sin and that while God has not revealed to us the reasons He allows horrific things to happen, we do not blame Him, but we know and trust in the salvation He graciously provides from all of it.

So while the prophetic Word does not answer all our questions. The answers regarding life and salvation are abundantly clear and repeated by God’s inspired writers for over 1,500 years of writing about the same subject without contradictory solutions offered. The one solution that is given us is the blood and righteousness of the Son of God made man as our sufficient holy Substitute.

The world calls for a yard light for spiritual enlightening and they stumble and fall. God has given us the lamp for our feet and we go from day to day knowing the Way, the Truth and the Life, which is Christ Jesus, our Lord. Confidently take the steps put before you in your many vocations, which God has called you to my fellow believers. The Morning Star is coming. The great gettin’ up morning is fast approaching. Your lamp will soon become obsolete like it did for the five wise virgins who made it into the wedding hall. The new Jerusalem “has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, its gates will never be shut by day - and there will be no night there.”

Until then, confidently use the lamp provided for your feet in this life. Do not be fooled by the magnificently deceptive yard lights provided by the world. Just the other evening I was parked in a super illumined parking lot and drove out into the night, not realizing at first I did not have my headlights on. So too the unbelieving world can fool us into thinking that its ways give clear guidance in this life and that we do not need the “low beams” of light for our feet.

Your Lord promises to keep you surefooted unto your end with the light of your salvation He provides, guiding you through this dark world. Despite your many missteps on account of your sins in this life, through the blood and righteousness of your Savior, you are forgiven and kept on the narrow path leading to life everlasting. By the Lord's lamp unto your feet, The Way is clearly seen and followed by you all the way to the end for Jesus' sake alone. Amen.