

Spirit of the living God, teach us to know and to consider the vanity of all earthly things, that we may be made truly wise to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, that our souls may not be left empty. Cause Your Word to grow in us and to bring *forth* fruit, which will remain unto eternal life. Amen. (Reading the Psalms with Luther, CPH, Ps. 119, p. 293)

When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats' Rocks. And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. And the men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.'" Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe. And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD's anointed." So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way. Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm'? Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.' See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness.' But my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! May the LORD therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand." As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the LORD put me into your hands. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. Swear to me therefore by the LORD that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house." And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

In Christ Jesus, who richly provides us all good things now and forever, dear fellow redeemed:

All the way back in chapter 18, after David had defeated Goliath and the women sang: “Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands”, Saul had become jealously enraged toward David. This put Saul on a 15 year hunt to kill David, whom he viewed as a rival for his crown. David was anointed as the next king, not Saul’s son, Jonathan.

Our text is the first of two times in those 15 years when the prey could have easily killed his hunter. But he did not, because God did not command him to do it and Saul remained the Lord’s anointed. David viewed himself in a truly God-given subservient role and by God’s grace remained faithful. But while the world and our own sinful flesh would justify being unfaithful in such dangerously lowly circumstances, we should conclude for ourselves in this life: **Subservient, Believers Have Their Good Things Even Now.**

I

In our Gospel lesson there was the conversation between the “rich man” in hell and Abraham in heaven, he responds to the plea for Lazarus to cool his tongue with water by saying: “Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things, but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.” It would be wrong for us to conclude: *unhappiness here on earth translates into happiness in heaven and conversely happiness on earth translates into unhappiness in hell.* This would give the impression that every poor beggar in this life will somehow earn heaven through his or her poverty. Rather the point is to see things from the “rich man’s” perspective: the good things in this life, earthly treasures, cannot compare with heavenly riches, which God intends for us all to receive.

In truth, through faith in his Savior, Lazarus, although appearing to be poor in regard to earthly riches was actually rich in heavenly treasures on earth, but now enjoyed to the fullest in the courts of heaven. Jesus’ words in His sermon on the mount corresponds to this truth: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Beyond sight in this life, Lazarus, the beggar was rich, rich toward God through faith already in this life with complete forgiveness, eternal life and the comfort of salvation. Whereas, again, beyond sight in this life, the “rich man”

was poor toward God in his unbelief, cursed, without forgiveness, thus death was abiding in him, and hell was staring him in the face.

So David was rich before God through faith even during those 15 years of great distress. By any outward observation like among his fellow warriors, he appeared to be receiving his bad things in this life. Yet David trusted that in his role as Saul's subject or servant obeying God's design for his life. David bowed low before King Saul before addressed him, yet David was truly rich. God provided him the good things not seen by the world around him. As he obediently accepted his subservient role, he lived as a sinner forgiven, possessing life and salvation.

II

David, in Ps. 37 writes these thoughts: "Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good, dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. ... Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him; fret not yourself over ... the man who carries out evil devices!" "The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him, but the Lord laughs at the wicked" ... "Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous."

Perhaps David was inspired to write these words after his long struggle with King Saul. Perhaps these words of David sustained Lazarus, if Jesus' accounting in the Gospel lesson, recounts an actual episode of one of His oppressed believers. No doubt many Christians, maybe even you, have been sustained by this Psalm of David in your subservient roles in this life while the wicked seem to prosper all around you. Your Lord has not forgotten you. Perhaps Stephen, the first Christian martyr, had these words of David sustain him as he passed from this broken and corrupt world, having his soul lovingly carried by the angels to its eternal rest secured for him by Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

For Jesus' sake, my fellow subservient believers, you have been given your good things in this life. True, they are not so often observed even by ourselves. Bad things can overwhelm us causing us to be discouraged, tempting us to be unfaithful in our various callings. The Church is right now bowing before the governing authorities in order to getting back to public services, where it is not infringing upon our free exercise of our religion.

Then consider this, likely in these days of social unrest, there are Christian victims on both sides of the thin blue line. They received bad things from the other side, but by God's grace refused to forsake their subservient roles, but faithfully bore up under their unjust suffering.

Sometimes the world, even our personal enemies will take note of our willingness to bear up under injustice even at their hands and remain faithful in obeying the will of the holy Lord. After David pointed out to Saul how he could have killed him but chose not to do this, Saul wept and responded: ""You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the LORD put me into your hands. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day."

Remember Jesus' teaching: "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father." Saul was an unbeliever at this time and no longer understood how the grace of God works. It is not our good works in this life that earn for us good things, but the work done by God's Son in our place. So while the unbelieving world does not understand, by God's grace you and I have come to know the economy of God's grace, purchased by Him through His Son on the cross and freely distributed to us.

Live faithfully in whatever subservient roles your Lord has called you. He uses them for His glory and your eternal welfare. Jesus' blood washed you clean of all your unfaithfulness in your vocations. His holiness fulfilled in His subservient role to His Father in your place covers you. By this you now stand right and holy before the Father. The good things often hidden here will be obviously enjoyed in the courts of heaven by us for Jesus' sake alone. Amen.