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## Cover Art

Saul tries to pin David to the wall with his spear  
Illustrated for the Wittenberg Bible  
Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1534

# Forever Shall Abide

## The Book of Psalms

read faithfully with Martin Luther



## An Advent Devotional

Week Two

Psalm 22

Psalm 101

Psalm 51

Psalm 118

Psalm 66

Psalm 119

This is the Christ, our God Most High,  
Who hears your sad and bitter cry;  
He will Himself your Savior be  
From all your sins to set you free.  
He will on you the gifts bestow  
Prepared by God for all below,  
That in His kingdom, bright and fair  
You may with us His glory share.

- Martin Luther  
"From Heaven Above to Earth I Come"



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## Psalm 22

"In His Passion Christ actually assumed or took upon Himself the sins of all men."

· Martin Luther

Part of human sinfulness is to ignore what sin does to us. We like to ignore or downplay the impact and consequences of sin, of our own sin in particular. We turn our eyes away from suffering. We cover aging and death with makeup and pretend it's not there.

In Psalm 22, God paints a graphic picture of what sin does. He paints a picture of the Crucifixion. This Psalm is truly prophetic, describing in astonishing detail what happens on Good Friday, and as such it helps to ponder what Jesus actually did on Good Friday. With His crucifixion, Christ assumed, He took upon Himself, our sin. If you want to know what sin looks like, what sin does to people, look at the cross. Sin tortures, wounds, exhausts, mocks, and ultimately kills.

What Jesus did upon the cross was no mere play acting. Rather Jesus took upon His own body the weight, the entirety of sin. He who knew no sin became sin for us, and it all came crashing down upon Him. We try to deny sin's corruption. Jesus held up this corruption for the world to see. Faced with that truth, the world only mocked and derided.

This was done for you. When Christ took up your sin, it was not merely to show how serious sin is, but He was crucified to take your sin away from you. There will be times when you do see your sin, when your attempts to deny or pretend it's not there will fail, and Satan will crush you with guilt. At those times as well, behold the cross. Don't downplay your sin, but rather say, "Yes, my sin is vile! But see, Christ has taken my sin. It is not on me, it is on Christ, and I am forgiven by the blood that He shed as He bore my sin!"

- Rev. Eric Brown

### Oratio

Heavenly Father, make us to remember that Christ has truly borne our sins. Amen.

## Psalm 119:81-88

"Therefore there is no comfort for me until Your Word is fulfilled and the Word of righteousness, which is the Gospel, comes."

· Martin Luther

This week I had the challenge of comforting a friend whose love one died unexpectedly. How do you provide comfort when the loved one never longed for salvation, never looked to the promises God provided? David, however, longs for the promise of God: "My soul longs for your salvation; I hope in your word. My eyes long for your promise; I ask, 'When will you comfort me?'" (Ps 119:81-82).

As David longed for the fulfilled promises, we anticipate the celebration of the fulfillment. We plan the Christmas meal. We shop for the perfect gifts. We sing for joy at our Savior's birth, worshipping the Word made flesh.

People hear the carols sung, see nativity scenes, bake cookies, have a family meal, and yet some miss the salvation made flesh in the baby Jesus. Some miss the promise fulfilled on our behalf. They miss the comfort that was foretold and realized in Jesus. Apart from our Savior there is no comfort but only a wish that all will be well. In the end, all they have are memories and gifts of Christmas past.

For those who have lost loved ones, Christmas is a difficult time. The Christ of Christmas is the fulfillment of the promises of salvation. He gives us the comfort that death is not the end. We have a hope, a certainty of the reconciliation with our God, a gift from God Himself to His people. We have received the perfect gift that will last, a gift we can share, very God Himself.

- Rev. Andy Guagenti

### Oratio

Father, may we look for opportunities to share the Gospel and provide true comfort to those who have yet to receive Christ so their hearts may be comforted. Amen.

## Psalm 118

“Not to trust in men and not to rely on princes remains a rare and great art. All the world does, and continues to do, nothing but bank and build on men and princes, that is, to despair of God and to step on His First Commandment.”

· Martin Luther

When the Augsburg Confession (the foundational statement of what Lutherans believe, teach, and confess) was being written, Luther couldn't attend. He was an outlaw. So instead he stayed behind and wrote a letter about Psalm 118 and sent it to the people at Augsburg. This is part of why Luther emphasizes here that we do not rely upon men or princes.

There were great theologians and mighty princes there at Augsburg on the Lutheran side, but that could not be the basis of their hopes or approach. Rather, everything would hinge not on the might of men but upon the Word of God and the Gospel of Christ Jesus. This reminds us of a truth our flesh does not like. If it hinges upon God and His Word, then it does not hinge upon me—not upon my strength, my wisdom, or my wants.

While I often want to be in control, while I want to be considered great and powerful, in truth it is much better that God is in control. God knows what He is doing far better than I do! Moreover, while I am often mean, petty, and grouchy, God is full of steadfast love that endures forever. He is in control for you, winning you forgiveness and salvation through Christ. He is in control for you, to raise you from the dead and give you eternal life. This far surpasses anything we or any human leader could ever do!

- Rev. Eric Brown

## **We pray**

Grant us peace, Heavenly Father, that we might learn to contentedly trust in Your steadfast love for us. Amen.

## Psalm 51

“All of this David calls true sacrifice and worship. He rejects all other sacrifices that the raving saints bring.”

· Martin Luther

David writes this Psalm after the prophet Nathan crushes him with rebuke of his great sins and declares him to be forgiven by God. As we contemplate the coming of our Savior, it is good for us to reflect like David did on our sins.

David claims he has sinned only against God. By this he doesn't deny that his sins have hurt others grievously. He is acknowledging that all sin is first and foremost against God's Law. It is against God that we sin, whether it is also directed against another person or not.

David cries out for mercy. Jesus is mercy incarnate. His coming is God showing mercy to His people. He brings mercy to bear upon those He heals and teaches. He shows mercy in not holding our iniquities before our eyes but by removing them from even His sight.

David cries out for his transgressions to be blotted out. Our transgressions are blotted out by the blood of the baby born to take our transgressions away. David calls upon the Lord to hide His face from David's sin. Our sins are hidden as we are covered by Jesus' righteousness and holiness.

David calls upon God to create a clean heart in him and renew a right spirit in him. Jesus has indeed given us a new heart—His heart. He has given us a right spirit. He has sent His Holy Spirit to dwell within us and to resurrect our own spirit to new life in Him. We can then delight in His will and walk in His ways.

- Rev. Matthew Brackman

## **We pray**

Create in us a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us. Let us delight in Your salvation and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your Holy Name. Grant us Your peace so that we are no longer troubled by the sins of our past. Let us live in peace. Amen.

"For God has cheered our hearts and minds through his dear Son, whom he gave for us to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. He who believes this earnestly cannot be quiet about it. But he must gladly and willingly sing and speak about it so that others also may come and hear it."

· Martin Luther

"For me?" This might be the puzzled question we ask when someone surprises us with a gift. Then, as we pull back the paper, we want to tell everyone what we have received. That's what we hear in this joyous psalm.

The Psalmist says, "Come and see what God has done, how awesome His works in man's behalf!" (Ps 66:5). God rescued Israel from their peril in Egypt. However, he knows that while God has done these things for the children of man, He has also done them with him specifically in mind. He says, "Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what He has done for me" (Ps 66:16).

God has rescued us from our sins. That's what this season is all about. God has not rejected us but sent His Son to be born, live, suffer, die and rise for us. God had you in mind.

The psalmist bookends the words "for me" at the opening and close of the psalm. However, he doesn't include the phrase as a question, but as a joyous statement of fact. So do we! With Luther we rejoice to tell the world, "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me."

- Rev. David Tannahill

### We pray

"Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!" (Ps 66:20). Amen.

"Nothing blinds more thoroughly than one's own idea, and therefore it rightly is trouble in the dark and a pestilence."

· Martin Luther

In this psalm, David makes promises to God, to himself, to his family, and to the people of the nation. He pledges things that are good, and worthy, and desirable. But we know from Scripture that David often failed in these promises. At various times he broke his covenant with the people, with God and with himself. As we read of David, and others who failed to keep their words, it's easy for us to critique them and say, "If only they had..." But what about us?

In an exposition on this psalm, Luther wrote, "The spectator can play the game best." In other words, "everyone's a backseat driver." We think we know best and could have done it better. But do we? Can we? What will an honest and frank examination of our promises reveal to ourselves and others? What have we promised to God? "I'll read my Bible more," or, "I'll help out at church more." How about ourselves? "I'm going to get in shape," or "I'm going to get that project done." Our family, our friends, our employers and coworkers—if we go down the list we'll probably find too many examples of how we have fallen short of our promises.

Thanks be to God that His promises are sure and true. The Almighty has made promises to prophets and kings, to His people high and low, and they all came to pass. But the greatest promise made was to our first parents, Adam and Eve, that after their fall into sin there would be a Redeemer to raise them up. In this Advent season we look back to that promise fulfilled in Christ. But we also celebrate the promise of His presence, through the working of the Holy Spirit, in our daily lives, and we look forward to the promised return of our Savior when we will all joyously live in His heavenly glory.

- Rev. Richard Gizynski

### We pray

Heavenly Lord, thank You for Your promise of salvation kept, and for the promise of eternal peace and joy yet to come. Amen