

FUNERAL SERMON

BY

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AT THE DEATH OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER

delivered at Eisleben 19 February 1546;

repeated seven weeks later at Halle in Saxony.

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Text 1 Thess. 4:13ff.

Dear friends: ^

It is fitting and proper that there be a sermon today with respect to the death and departure of our father Dr. Martin. He served all Christendom and all the churches of the German nation with great earnestness and faithfulness. He had a special regard for you people here at Halle. A large part of the world was converted through him. Dr. Luther fell asleep in Christ seven weeks ago at about 3 a.m. in his native Eisleben. A day after his departure from this world I delivered a sermon amid many tears in St. Andreas church, Eisleben. I am repeating the sermon on this occasion to remind Christian people what a treasure they had in this man and what they have lost in him. The sermon has three parts.

First I spoke of the person of Dr. M. Luther, of his extraordinary gifts and talents, of his deep spiritual insight and how for more than a year he prepared himself diligently for a blessed departure.

Secondly, on the basis of the text from St. Paul I spoke of the resurrection of the dead and showed that on the last day when we are in everlasting joy and blessedness we shall again see and hear the man Luther who for 29 years wrote, fought and contended against the satanic lies of the pope and his abominable monks, and against the kingdom of satan.

Thirdly I pointed to ^{the} probably ^e aftereffects of his death and predicted that the death of Dr. Luther, like the death of the prophets, would certainly exert a powerful influence on the godless, hardened and deluded papists and others.

I.

In speaking of the person and of the splendid endowments of Dr. Luther and how he so piously prepared himself for his departure (which is such a comfort to all Christians who know about it), I wish--and the wish is very much worthwhile, that all of you present here had lately read the book of Genesis which Dr. Luther so richly and beautifully expounded for us. I also wish that in the New Testament you had read and had fresh in your memory John 14, 15, 16, 17 because all this would help you appreciate the nature of this man and what a treasure you have lost in him; also the epistle to the Galatians, the Psalms, the proverbs of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, all of which he translated into the German language--something which no other doctors in Paris, K ln or in any other city, no, not even all the papists put together, could duplicate. These and other books reveal what a man Dr. Luther was, of what deep spirituality, how faithfully and diligently he worked in the Scripture. All this would impress on us what kind of a man we have lost.

Speaking of his person there is so much to say that much must remain unsaid. Therefore we will say nothing of his ingenuity, of the discernment he displayed even as a youth. People who knew him as a youth of eighteen and nineteen say they never knew of a greater genius. Among them are Dr. Lang and Dr. Staupitz, his collaborators in Erfurt. Dr. Mellerstadt, the rector of the University at Wittenberg, said: "Take special notice of the young monk, Martin Luther, who possesses a sagacity and a penetration such as I have not seen in any other. Surely he will become a great man." This also came to pass.

Dr. Luther possessed many gifts and talents. He was an eloquent speaker and an able translator of the whole Bible. Many learned to speak and to

write a correct German from him because he created a correct German as many will testify. While his ability as a speaker and a writer is seen even in the letters he wrote dealing with simple, ordinary things, it is especially evident in his books and other writings of which there are so many. The work praises its master. I will forego speaking of these natural gifts and simply refer all pious Christians to his books, postils, and commentaries. There they will discover that in him they had an excellent orator and preacher and a real bishop. Would to God Germany had many such people and bishops.

In Dr. Luther there dwelt a rich measure of God's grace, a great light of the Holy Spirit and a true knowledge of God and Christ which was not diminished but greatly increased by daily diligent reading and study of the Scriptures over a period of forty years so that he read the Scriptures through many times and was thoroughly familiar with it. Beginning at the age of twenty-four this great man continued this practice until age sixty-three when he died.

I want to call your attention to two particular sayings of Luther which reflect the state of his heart as Jesus says Mr. 12:34: Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. First are his words: I wish with all my heart I could understand at least in a small measure the first article of the Christian creed: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. However, I will gladly remain an a b c student of this article. I maintain that very few people even among the great have understood this article except perhaps Adam, Noah, Abraham, and David. Isaiah, Jeremiah and other patriarchs and prophets also understood some of it but they continued to study and remained students.

The other word of Luther to which I call attention is his expressed desire that the article of redemption, that God sent His Son into the world to redeem mankind, would be regarded as the highest theology as do Paul and the other apostles. He saw and understood that the article: God sent His Son into the world, is so excellent that no one could fathom it even after a lifetime of study although theological schools at Paris and at K ln devote but little time to it but rather oppose it with human reason. More of this later.

At this point I would like to comment on how Dr. Luther prepared himself for his departure from this life for one whole year before the end came. When he reached his 63rd year he often spoke words so precious that they might have come from the mouth of Noah who also lived in an evil day. Dr. Luther complained that the world loves lies such as the fables of the pope, the monks and others. And in spite of the bright light of the Gospel the people of the world live in sins and vices, in blasphemy against God, in idleness, obstinacy, conscious perseverance in depravity; no one admits to being a sinner, none will humble himself before God. Surely punishment will strike.

In his preparation for death the deceased showed a special grace and knowledge of God. In his Psalter and his prayer book which were his constant companions he wrote more than twenty entries as though he would say: When my last hour comes I will with the help of God grasp one of these passages and so be prepared against Satan and all the gates of hell. These entries reveal that he was by no means a novice but a real master in spiritual warfare.

The first passage he chose for protection and comfort is 1 Peter 5:7, CAST ALL YOUR CARE UPON HIM FOR HE CARES FOR YOU, as though he would say:

Gather all your cares and anxieties into a bundle. . . cast them on Christ, entrust them to Him. He cares for you. In obedience to this passage the venerable Dr. Luther did cast all his cares on the Lord Jesus in the hour of his death and he was not concerned about where his soul would be. He let God care for it as One who does care for and preserves it. At the time of death all men are concerned about their soul, what its fate shall be. But we are assured that as God cares for us throughout our life so He will also care for us in the hour of our greatest need.---It would not have occurred to me to use this passage from Peter as a reference to the last hour. But this illustrates what kind of a man Dr. Luther was and how diligently he weighed the words of the apostles.

With reference to this same passage Dr. Luther also expressed the sentiment: Our dear faithful God who called me into the office of the ministry will certainly care for me and preserve my soul and so I confidently and gladly commit my soul into his hands because He will know where it should abide since He has loved it so dearly and cared for it so much that He gave His life and soul to redeem it. Certainly He is the most noble and best Shepherd and Bishop of all who believe in Him. Praise be to Him in all eternity! His caring did not begin with me nor did He practice on me how He should provide for believing souls. I know I shall not be the first on whom He learns how to preserve and protect those who believe in Christ. Saint Lorenz on the funeral fire committed his soul saying: Christ cared for it and will preserve it. St. Stephen, Acts 7, did likewise and amid the stones commended his soul saying: Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. His soul was taken from him and preserved unto eternal life. And there were other martyrs so that I am by no means the first to commend my soul to Him and to have my soul preserved by Him.

Luther often said: I am glad the welfare of my soul does not rest in my hands. If it did, satan would long ago have possessed it in a moment like a hawk swooping down on a chick or a bird. But no one, no devil or anyone else, will tear my soul out of the hand of Christ to whom I have committed it for He says John 10: The sheep who hear my voice and follow me no one will tear out of my Father's hand or out of mine.

In his Psalter our father Luther also wrote words which St. Ambrose spoke to his brethren: I hope my life among you has not been such that I must fear to belong among you for we have a good and faithful Lord and I know of no friend who has been more concerned about me than the Lord and hence I am not afraid to die.

With these words of St. Ambrose Our dear Dr. Luther wished to indicate that he felt no apprehension of staying here longer because he had lived in such a manner that he was not ashamed of his conduct and had no fear of dying if it be God's will because he knew Christ had prepared a mansion for him in heaven.

He also wrote into his Psalter the words of a true spiritual bishop, one similar to St. Ambrose and one who was deeply grieved by the wickedness of the world and could hardly endure it. Christ said to him in his last hour: Why do you howl and cry? Has the world been so kind to you that you do not wish to part from it? You can't endure the wickedness of the world and yet you do not wish to leave it? These words must have had great meaning for Luther. How much sorrow and sadness he endured because of his enemies! His heart was grieved because of the godlessness in the world, because it was so steeped in greed, usury, in contempt and ingratitude toward God's word, in jealousy, hatred and in the poison of the

I want to depart. I want to keep God's commandments. I want to leave this evil world and go to a better country. On the night before his death he said: I have endured (vertragen) my dear landgraves, the counts of Mansfeld here at Eisleben but now I want to go home. I want to lie in my casket and surrender my body to the worms. --Such words show that his thoughts were occupied with death and dying and that he had no fear of death. All such words reveal what a rich measure of God's Spirit this man possessed and that he was a man such as the world has not had for some time. So much I said in the first part about the person of Dr. M. Luther.

II.

In the second part of my sermon I spoke of the resurrection of the dead and pointed out that on the last day we shall see again our dear father, the venerable Dr. Luther, now deceased. St. Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, says expressly that 'Christ will bring with Him those who sleep in Him. These words are most comforting to a Christian and let no one think he is a Christian if he does not find them to be comforting. This text contains a comfort so rich that no amount of gold could purchase it. A Christian clings to it, puts his confidence in it and firmly believes that on the last day he will rise again with all Christians.

A godless person, an Epicurian sow, finds no comfort in these words of St. Paul. His confidence is in money, possessions, usury, greed. He doesn't know or believe that he will rise on the last day and that he will see those who lived before and after him. However, Paul declares: The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout etc. As the Lord Himself is great so His triumph and his glory must be great also. While an epicure

remains indifferent to these words they are a pearl and a treasure to all believers.

St. Paul also says that he is telling a great secret about the resurrection of which the people of the world know nothing and says: Comfort one another with these words, as though he would say: I am revealing a heavenly secret namely that the world and all the people which you now see in it, the young and old, the poor and rich, must all go down to the earth, i. e. must die and be buried, believers and unbelievers alike, but on the last day all will rise again in their body, in flesh and blood, in spite of the fact that in the earth they decompose and are eaten by worms. They will rise with glorified bodies as St. Paul says 1 Cor. 15: It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.

Therefore when a good friend dies we should comfort ourselves with the assurance that we will see him again on the last day. Thus St. Paul while in Rome and facing the prospect of being murdered by the tyrant Nero comforted himself that he and all men would rise again on the last day. Likewise all children who are born and those yet to be born (the name of this life is being born, living, dying) shall rise in their bodies. Then will follow that happy and blessed day which Christ in Luke 21 calls "the day of redemption". . . . Then there will be no more marrying or giving in marriage, no child bearing. No one will be lame, blind or ill. And there will be no more death. Mortality will cease and an immortal, everlasting life will begin.

This is a most comforting text for Christians and we should cling to it

all our life. St. Paul says the Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, that we shall rise from the dead and be with our Lord eternally. Of all this the world knows nothing and finds neither joy or comfort in it. It turns instead to money and goods. In these words St. Paul is saying: You, dear Christians, if you lose me as your bishop, pastor and shepherd in Christ, I shall rise again and I shall certainly see you, my parishioners, again in yonder world and you shall see me.

St. Paul also says that the shout and the voice at Christ's return will be so loud that the dead will awake and those who fell asleep in the true faith in Christ will rise first and then those still living will be taken up to meet Christ in the air as He says John 5:28: The hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation. Together with them our venerable father Luther will also rise and have the same body, face, hands and feet which he had here and he will have the same blessed mouth which for 29 years preached God's word in its truth and purity to the German nation although that body will be glorified and will shine like the sun as Christ says Matt. 13:43 : Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father; and Daniel says (12:13) They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever. Since Dr. Luther was a great teacher and brought many to righteousness he will no doubt have a bright shining halo and we will see it if it so please God.

Job also writes in the 19th chapter: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. It is indeed a

a great comfort to Christians to be assured that their bodies shall rise again and that they shall see God in their flesh. This statement of Job agrees perfectly with what Paul says in our text. Accordingly we will see again that dear man whom we have now lost, and not only will we see him but he will be with us to whom he preached God's word and through whose ministry we were converted. He will speak to us and to the whole heavenly host of patriarchs and prophets about his battles and warfare against satan and his temptations to which he was subjected for 29 years. Dr. Luther was waging great battles against satan when dealing with Karlstadt, at the time of the Diet at Augsburg, when contending for the sacrament of the Altar, when opposing the Anabaptists, the Antinomians and others. Dr. Luther often confided: I will never reveal to anyone now what I am and have suffered because of the pure Gospel which God has restored to the world. But it will be made public on the last day. On that last day we will hear him tell what he would not tell us here of the great victories the Son of God won through him against sin, devil, papists, false brethren and others. To our great astonishment he will also tell what glorious revelations were given to him after he began to preach the Gospel and we will praise God for all the victories gained as Ps. 84:17 says: They go from strength to strength.--Of all such things the devilish monks, the obstinate pope don't know one word and even when they read it in Scripture they don't believe it.

The resurrection of the dead will take place suddenly. First those who fall asleep in Christ, then those who are still alive will meet the Lord in the air and be with Him forever.---Would to God such a day of the Lord would come soon so we would be taken to meet him before we sit down to eat the next meal; that He would deliver us from the misery and

distress which we must endure here and that He would make an end to the faithless world, its insatiable usury, avarice, jealousy, slander, pride, and pomp and other vices, its frightful blasphemy, reviling, persecution, murder, bloodshed, the idolatry of the despairing unbelieving papists, priests, monks and nuns. They do these things to excess.

We should constantly pray for such a day because it will be such a blessed, joyful, comforting day. There we will know each other even better than we do now. The wife will know her husband, the husband his wife; children will know their parents and pastors will know their parishioners and without interruption they will be speaking to one another and together they will praise and glorify God in that great assembly (generali synodo), in that eternal church, together with the dear angels forever and ever.

St. Paul suggests that the Thessalonians may hesitate to believe what he has written because it is indeed a precious article of faith that though we decay or are consumed by fire we will rise again, know each other, and together glorify God. This teaching is repugnant to reason which cannot understand how a body once consumed by worms or reduced to powder and ashes can rise again and live. The world ridicules such preaching about the resurrection of the dead and considers it sheer folly as is seen from Acts 17:18. When Paul preached in Athens about the resurrection of the dead some asked: What will this babbling say? So also when Paul preached to king Agrippa about the resurrection of the dead Festus called out loudly: Paul, you are beside yourself. Much learning has made you mad. (Acts 26:24.) This shows what the world thinks about the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Those who preach it are called babblers and madmen just as the pope with his bishops and cardinals calls us Germans lunatics and fools because we preach, believe, and confidently affirm that

on the last day we will rise in our body and see God.

The mystery about the resurrection is revealed to us by our dear God in His precious word and Gospel. The world ridicules it but the true church and Christendom treasures it as an eternal, living comfort. A Christian ought to comfort himself with this doctrine every morning when he rises and say to himself: I know a day will come in which God will raise all who fell asleep in Christ and that our bodies will rise and that those of us who believe in Christ and have done good will enter eternal life. A Christian should always think about and meditate on the blessed day of the coming of Christ and then he will be more patient in his suffering, cross bearing and temptations.

The hardhearted, blind and miserable papists know nothing of this. They blaspheme and persecute the holy Gospel which reveals this mystery of the resurrection on which our salvation depends. Anyone who does not believe this article listens to preaching which is in vain; his faith is in vain; he remains in his sins and is lost as St. Paul teaches in 1 Cor. 15. One should shun and avoid and have nothing to do with people who blaspheme the Gospel, reject it, will not hear or believe it. Such people should be avoided as one flees from the devil himself because a hardened, stubborn papist is the devil himself who has no faith . . . (und glauben zum Fenster ein and zur Tür hinaus.)

In summary Paul would say to the Thessalonians: I have revealed to you the mystery of how it shall be with the resurrection of the body. I have taught you this diligently from the Word of God. However, I will not always be with you to be your preacher. Nero is planning to kill me and my preaching will end. But then, if the world in its rage against me takes my life I know that I shall rise again on the last day together with you

all. These words were a great comfort to those Christians.

And our father Martin Luther, prophet and preacher of Germany, also comforted himself with these words and found great joy in them. He shared the sentiments of Paul and though he died, was buried, and was torn away from us, his parishioners, he would rise again on the last day to everlasting bliss and happiness. Thus we also should be comforted and rejoice at the promise that we shall see and hear our dear father and pastor in the eternal life to come. God grant this for Jesus' sake. Amen. This must suffice for the second part.

III.

In the third part of this sermon I predict that the death of Dr. Luther will no doubt have far reaching aftereffects which will become evident within two years. Especially the papists, priests, monks, and nuns who are now rejoicing in his passing will in a few years wish he were still alive so they could become his followers. They will wish, if such a thing were possible, that he would come back from the grave. However, they have tarried too long. If they had heeded his warnings and listened to his advice during his lifetime it would have been of great benefit to them in body and in soul.

We read in the Scriptures that the greatest and best prophets and men of God appeared on the scene when conditions were at their very worst. Before the flood there was Noah. Before the destruction of Sodom there was Lot. Later came Elijah and Elisha. But after the death of each of these there followed a great punishment. Thus we read in Judges 8:23ff:

It came to pass as soon as Gideon was dead that the children of Israel

turned again and went a whoring after Baalim and made Baalberith their god. But when they did this God's punishment soon followed. -And certainly now, after Dr. Luther's death a great and terrible judgment of God will come on Germany unless there is improvement. And there is no doubt that the punishment will strike especially the godless, hardened, despairing papists, monks, priests, and nuns.

History records that St. Augustin died at the age of 70, almost ten years older than Dr. Luther and that he was a preacher for 40 years, ten years longer than Luther. Before his death St. Augustin had a premonition that Africa, his native country, would be greatly troubled and would suffer some great catastrophe. Naturally this was a great grief and a burden on his heart. Similarly we can take for granted that after the passing of the great light Germany also will be troubled. Augustin's chief concern was a fear that after his death Africa would lose the Gospel. However, because of fervent prayer God preserved His pure word in Africa for another 200 years. Recognizing that we too might lose the Gospel let us live a life of repentance and let us fervently beseech God to preserve His Word among us also after Luther's death as He preserved it in Africa after the death of Augustin. God grant us this for Christ's sake. Amen.

How often Dr. Luther called Germany to repentance and warned the people e.g. in his House Postil in a sermon on The Destruction of Jerusalem, Luke 19 and in Ps. 110. In his letter to the spiritual leaders at Augsburg and in an admonition to his dear German people he sounded an alarm that if there was no improvement, if they did not avoid idolatry and those who practiced it (as he also admonished you here at Halle) such as the papistic monks and nuns, God would punish them and take His Word

away and allow all manner of error to prevail. Certainly the admonition of such a man should be taken to heart. Idolatry should be avoided. The old leaven should be swept out. One should not become a partaker of the idolatry of the papists that God's word may not be lost.

Especially the papists should be warned because the threatened punishment will surely come on them if they do not show improvement. At the time of his fiery death John Huss predicted that after 100 years a swan would appear on the scene who would not be fried. That man was Dr. Luther. He preached to pope, bishops, cardinals, priests, monks and fearlessly proclaimed the truth before the whole world. They did not fry him or kill him although many desired to do so. They failed. He fell asleep in God in Eisleben in his native land.

Just as John Huss' prediction was fulfilled so Luther also repeatedly, when speaking of the papists, spoke on this order: Just hold your peace and wait. After my death the monks and papists will be scattered like chaff before the wind because they will not be instructed in the word of God; they will not desist from their error but are determined to persist in their idolatry and in their godless life. They are not benefitted by admonition, instruction and warning as David says Ps. 36:3: He has left off to be wise and to do good. (cf German text). This is the way the papists are and hence it shall be with them as it says in Ps. 37:35ff: I have seen the wicked in great power and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he is not. Yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.

So it is with the papists. They are defiant and if they have a little breath they become proud and act as if they would devour us, and that

especially now that Luther is dead and they are glad. It would be far better for them if they had accepted his advice and repented. Then there would be help and counsel for them, for body and soul. However, if they will not do so God's eternal judgment and punishment, eternal fire and damnation will strike them. Anyone who does not repent will perish as Christ says in the Gospel.

Dr. Luther also wrote an epitaph and a prophecy for himself which reads: *Pestis eram vivens, moriens ero mors tua Papa.* Therefore let the papists take heed and repent because for 20 years they have blasphemed, shamed and persecuted the Gospel, condemned it as a doctrine of devils and as heresy and thereby have scattered, murdered, drowned and hanged Christians. May they now begin to believe the Gospel and accept it and help us spread it. If not, then as Luther was a pestis to them during his lifetime and with his preaching and writing pressured and scared them, so he will after his death be a death to them and an eventual end to their monkery, idolatry, and abominations. God grant that they listen, that they be converted, and together with us believe and accept the word of God and be eternally saved. Amen.

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