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“I WILL SEEK THAT WHICH WAS LOST, BRING AGAIN THAT WHICH WAS DRIVEN AWAY AND BIND UP THAT WHICH WAS BROKEN”

The subject of the presentation is from the Book of Ezekiel (Ezek. 34:11-16), which contains the following words:

“For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. **I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick:** but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.”

INTRODUCTION

This prophetic word of God leads us to behold the essence of God's seeking and caring love.

God created man in His own image. However, the fall into sin corrupted the perfection of God's work of creation and man became corrupted by sin, prone to evil and condemned to perdition. In the Book of Isaiah is stated, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Is. 53:6). God loved and loves man whom He created so immeasurably, that He gave His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus, to be the reconciliation for our sins and those of the entire world. It is God's will that no person would perish, but that all would once receive eternal life with God in Heaven.

In spite of the fall into sin, all children born into this world are righteous and believers, children of God, because of the redemption work by Jesus. According to the words of Jesus, their angels always see the face of the Heavenly Father. Baptism does not make them children of God, but in baptism God establishes with them the covenant of a good conscience. Baptism is not the place of new birth as it is often taught in our time.

It is God's will that all people would remain in unity with Him, but the enemy of the soul, as God's opponent, has accomplished and continues to accomplish the fact that the childhood faith

of many persons dies because of the destructive power of sin. The child lacks that care which only the mother, the kingdom of God can give.

GOD DWELLS IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

God has a Kingdom here upon earth. In the Epistle to the Galatians, it is described as, “Jerusalem which is [*from*] above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26).

Apostle John was able to see that kingdom in his Revelation on the Isle of Patmos and to write, “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Rev. 21:2, 3). One enters this kingdom through the door. Jesus, Himself, says “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9).

In His parable of the vine, Jesus teaches of the importance of the living relationship between the Lord Jesus and the kingdom of God. He says whoever does not remain in Him will be thrown away as a branch, and it will dry up, and they will be tied up, thrown into a fire and they will burn. At the beginning of the parable, Jesus states an important fact which emphasizes that the kingdom of God is in question. Jesus says “I am the true Vine and my Father is the husbandman.” God cares for His kingdom and its residents. God provides this care primarily through His gospel. Jesus says, “Ye are now pure because of that word which I spoke unto you.” It is important that we are still able to hear those cleansing words of Jesus in the kingdom of God.

God had opened this understanding to Luther in his time, and Luther illustrates clearly the proclamation of the word as the work of the Holy Spirit in explaining the Third Article of the Creed:

“The Holy Spirit leads us first into the fellowship of the saints, the bosom of the congregation, through whose mediation He preaches to us and leads us to Christ. You see, neither you nor I can truly know the least bit about Christ and receive Him as our Lord unless the Holy Spirit offers it to us through the gospel and lays it into our bosom as a gift.”

God lives in His own through His Holy Spirit. For this reason Apostle Peter can give such a high testimony of the children of God: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

GOD WANTS TO SEEK THOSE WHO ARE LOST

God has sent His Son to free the sinners of the world. Jesus, Himself, says, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost” (Luke 19:10). He is the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep and Who knows His own sheep and Whom His sheep also know (John 10:11,14). To show that even one lost sheep is important to him, Jesus related the parable of the person who had a hundred sheep. If he loses one of them, he will leave the other ninety-nine in

the wilderness and go after the lost one and seek for it until he finds it. And when he has found his lost sheep, he puts it upon his shoulder, takes it home and invites all his friends together to rejoice that he found one lost sheep. Jesus says that in the same manner, God's angels in Heaven rejoice over one sinner who turns unto repentance. (Luke 15:4-).

Think, dear brothers: Even one person is important to Jesus. In the work of the kingdom of God large groups of listeners are not most important. Considering the matter with the mind of man, God performs an inordinate amount of work for the sake of one person.

In the same passage of the gospel according to Luke, Jesus also relates a moving narrative about the Prodigal Son and his return to his father's home. The father lovingly receives the son who had wasted all his inheritance from his father's home and had committed a complete bankruptcy in his life, and gives his servants the task to dress him in the best robe. "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry" (Luke 15:11-).

Through the Holy Spirit God has given us, His children, the office to preach about reconciliation, and for that reason we are servants to proclaim in Christ's behalf this work of reconciliation to all people. We, ourselves, have permission to believe and also to relate to others that God has made Him, Who knew no sin, to be sin in our behalf, so that we would become that righteousness in Him that is acceptable before God (2 Cor. 5:18-21). The mission command given by Jesus is in effect, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

A CHILD OF GOD CAN GET LOST

A child of God can get lost from the kingdom of God and the care of the Good Shepherd. There are examples of this in Scripture. Saul was repeatedly disobedient to the advice which was given him through the prophet. In his disobedience he became hardened in heart and did not humble himself to be obedient and to be as a child. Saul lost the gift of faith and did not receive the grace to return (1 Sam. 13 and 15). Even David, who became king after him, fell into serious sins and lost the portion of a child of God. God rebuked David through the prophet and David recognized his condition and humbled himself to repentance (2 Sam. 11 and 12:1-13).

Two of Jesus' own disciples lost their way from the kingdom of God. Judas, who betrayed Jesus, was a disciple whom Jesus had selected. He had seen the godly power of Jesus and the miracles and had been able to share in His merciful love. In spite of all this, sin overcame the heart of Judas to the extent that he betrayed Jesus. We do not know what took place in the heart of Judas, but Jesus knew. Penitence came too late so that he no longer found a place for repentance.

Apostle Peter also fell away from the place of a child of God when he denied Jesus on Maundy Thursday night. Although he had sworn to follow Jesus even unto death, he did not have strength to confess his Savior when the threat from the world was great. Apostle Peter's heart was not hardened, but he knew and felt what he had done. Peter saw the loving face of Jesus and His gaze. The resurrected Jesus sent greetings with His disciples to Peter. Peter received forgiveness for his fall and was able to become a child of God again (Matt. 26). These few quotations from Scripture remind us that the danger of getting lost and falling is real. For that reason Apostle Paul

advises Timothy by saying “the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.” Apostle Paul’s warning continues to be timely that you would “hold faith, and a good conscience, which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck” (1 Tim. 1:5, 19).

We are in the world although we are not of the world. There has always been much in the world which can take away peace from the conscience and the freedom of believing. In regard to our faith, the dangers of our time are especially connected to the pursuit of entertainment and pleasure and to such individuality in which a person wants to be self-sufficient and independent. Sinful life comes near through all of our senses. In addition, the ideal of our time is the emphasis on success and especially economic success, whose actual price sometimes may be the well-being of oneself and of people close to us.

It is important that we take care of tasks of our temporal life and develop ourselves and get an education. Our time requires that we remain up-to-date and continually develop. That is required in business and in all types of work life. The conditions set by work life and economic life are at times so hard that there is reason to ask, are the demands for success so great that, under such demands, some of our young people and parents become exhausted and grow weary? Is there time left in families for children and young people and generally for each other as people and as close ones? What is really important to us?

Even as children of God, we can get lost in these matters to such an extent that our priorities dim. The goal of the enemy of the soul is to make all that acceptable which serves our desire for pleasure and enjoyment, as well as success in life. The heart easily becomes attached to visible and temporal things and without our noticing they become matters which dominate our lives.

The temptations of the enemy of the soul, with which he tempted Jesus in the wilderness, are familiar and timely temptations even today: Tempting God by seeing how far we can go without losing our faith, or seeking power and one’s own glory, as well as the concerns over daily bread.

The enemy of the soul continues to preach the sermon of unbelief and asks, “Has God really said that which the Spirit of God teaches in His kingdom? Will death actually be the result of eating the fruit of the forbidden tree?” The sermon of unbelief and the temptations of the enemy are directed to the heart. The enemy wants to conquer the heart and bring about a change there.

The reminder by Jesus is timely and important: Where your heart is, there also is your treasure. In the midst of a good time and success, however, we still are corrupted by sin and need the entire grace and grace care of God to remain as children of God. May the simple gospel sermon still nourish the hearts of us, the servants of the word, and of the listeners of the word. The gospel is powerful to cleanse us from deadening deeds to serve the Living God. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

During our present time, there is a desire for taking positions on important matters. The positions must be based on researched and scientifically valid knowledge. Truth is considered that which can be proved to be true scientifically. On the other hand, truth is considered to be relative and

often bound to a period of time. This type of thinking can reflect even in life in the kingdom of God. Matters related to life and faith are examined as dependent upon time, thinking that that which was taught sometime in the past, based upon the word of God, may not hold true any longer. Even Apostle Paul had to defend the simple sermon of the gospel against the wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 1:17-).

THE WOUNDED ONE NEEDS CARE

Sin wounds the child of God. The battle against sin is never so successful that we would not be wounded in battle. At the final stage, the battle is fought within our own hearts. When all influences of sin and, actually, sin itself, dwell in our flesh and blood, we are inclined toward sin. For this reason, the enemy of the soul often overcomes and wounds our soul so that the Holy Spirit of God becomes sorrowful and our conscience begins to hurt. These wounds of soul and pains of conscience cannot be cared for or healed by oneself, but they need God's kingdom's two pence of care – grace and truth. Grace above all, so that the wayfarer wounded by sin, bleeding and just barely alive, would be refreshed in the care of the Good Shepherd to believe and journey in faith endeavoring to keep a good conscience. It has been written in the Bible that the grace of God is wholesome and that it teaches us to reject all ungodliness and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world (Titus 2:11, 12).

It is important that we retain our trust in the grace of God and its caring and teaching power. The advice of the kingdom of God also is grace care.

The position of the kingdom of God and the significance and power of its grace care are not diminished even if the caretakers are not always skillful in the work. This unskillfulness has been discussed during recent times especially referring to the so-called caretaking meetings in the 1970s. The recent discussions have been public and they were initiated by sources outside the kingdom of God. The goal of the discussion does not appear to be limited only to the analysis of past events, but to make changes to the position and authority of the kingdom of God in the lives of believers. Support is sought by the discussion for such a way of life which is against the Word of God.

On the other hand, it is important that the wounds to the soul, offenses, and injuries between people that come about during caretaking situations be openly discussed and cared for among those people to whom they pertain. The grace of God has not taught and still does not teach one to treat any person in a manner that offends his human dignity. We can pray for such a mind from God that we would have strength to see our neighbor in every person and to relate to him as Jesus teaches with the example of the merciful Samaritan.

The kingdom of God always has been and is a kingdom of grace, in which all sins are forgiven by the commandment of Jesus. The grace of God and forgiveness is immeasurable—not only seven times a day, but seventy times seven. As often as your brother returns and repents, forgive him. As we, ourselves, have received a debt of ten thousand talents forgiven, we are obligated to forgive each other our offences (Matt. 18).

The gospel of the kingdom of God is the medicine by which God cares for the person who has been wounded by sin. He performs the care through us the children of God, who are unskilled on our part. It is important that we have the tenderness to listen when a brother or sister opens his heart and relates about matters that have wounded the soul. In that situation we are caretakers of the soul and the means for care are the grace and truth of God. In that sequence. The poet of a Song of Zion has clothed into poetry the attitude we need to go to a friend who has been deceived and wounded by the enemy of the soul:

1. Savior, give me Your compassion;
 give a mind of tenderness
 to approach a wav'ring trav'ler
 With a voice of friendliness;
 give me words of truth and wisdom
 to approach a stubborn pilgrim.

2. Help me overcome impatience.
 Give me words that free and heal.
 When I think the cause is hopeless,
 Give me faith that will not fail.
 May I speak the words that sever
 Bonds of bitterness and anger.

3. Give me strength that I could boldly
 Speak the Word of grace each day;
 Let me never cause offenses
 Or demand, or push away.
 Lord, preserve us all in mercy
 On the way to heaven's glory.

(SL 291)

GOD STRENGTHENS THE WEAK

The kingdom of God acts according to the condition of the weakest one. Apostle Paul also advises to do this by saying, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification" (Rom. 15:1, 2). Apostle Paul considers it to be important, also in such matters which relate to one's manner of living and outward endeavor, that we should act so that we will not cause offence. He warns that freedom should not become an offence to the weak and begins from there, "If food offends my brother, then I would never eat meat so that my brother would not be offended." According to the Bible, love will not cause any evil to one's neighbor.

The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. But, because we are of the earth and earthly, we do not always have the strength to comprehend this and cling to it. The apostle says, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:7). God's strength is powerful in the weak.

The security of the weak children of God is in what the Bible says about the Savior, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15-16).

When God is able to keep us as one poor in strength, then we have the desire to live according to the counsel of the Word of God, and God will protect us even in the midst of temptations (Rev. 3:7). A person who has become rich in himself and feels his own strength does not experience the need for the grace care of God’s kingdom. God loves even such a person and speaks to him personally as the Book of Revelations teaches us in regard to the servant of the Word in the church of the Laodiceans.

May the sermons of the servants of the Word lead the hearers of the Word to behold the sacrificial work which Jesus performed in our behalf, and may the Word of God and the gospel spoken by the power of the Holy Spirit encourage the children of God in their endeavor of faith. The sermon of faith and the strength of the gospel are needed by mothers and fathers, who ask in the midst of a growing family, “Do we have enough strength? Do we have strength to believe?” That strength is also needed by the young person, who is powerfully tempted by the world. The strength of the gospel is needed by the person who struggles against doubts of the mind and human wisdom. It is also needed by him, whose life in faith is threatened by the rush and the demand for success of our time. The strength of the gospel is also needed by our children and young people that they also would see that it is most important to dwell in the kingdom of God and reject the temptations of this world. It is important for all of us that God is able to open our eyes of faith to see by what power we believe.

The words of the Good Shepherd give security and encouragement:

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one” (John 10:27-30).

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

God’s seeking love

Respect for human dignity and the care of the soul

Success and God’s blessing

Care of the mind and the soul

Trust in God’s grace

Knowledge shall disappear—The Word of God shall remain