A Martyr’s Faith in a Faithless World

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“The goal of each Christian is to make it to the end of life still trusting in those promises.” – pg. 15

# Part 1: The Word is Always Opposed

## St. Stephen: Martyr. Hero.

1. Summarize the life and death of Stephen.
2. What stands out to you about how they killed Stephen?
3. Why was he able to preach so boldly before them? Why was he able to pray for them as he did before he died?
4. What is a martyr?

Chapter 1 – Christians Need Heroes

1. Who are your heroes, and why?
2. What makes a hero? See the first paragraph on page 14.
   1. Who do our children pick as their heroes as they grow up today and how might this show us the state of the Church?
3. What do you think of the devil’s tactic of convincing us to hold different heroes? Is it a successful strategy for him to deploy against us?
4. Why do the martyrs make good heroes for us?

“Dear Christian, your heroes are strangers, wanderers, exiles on earth. Your heroes have a discontent with this world, knowing that there is something better. They have their eyes on the resurrection, the life and the world to come. They have their hearts set on the new heaven and the new earth where righteousness lives (see 2 Peter 3:13).” – pg. 14

Chapter 2 – The Planted Word

1. Summarize the Parable of the Sower. Then read it together as a group from page 20.
2. How do the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh seek to attack and destroy faith in each of the different types of soil?
   1. The path –
   2. The rocky ground –
   3. Among the thorns –
   4. The good soil –

Chapter 3 – Jesus Loves Me, This I Know

1. Consider your sin, the deep darkness of your past and present. Would you choose to love you? To save you?
2. The God who made the universe, and who made even you, chooses to save you! How do we know this?
3. What makes the simple children’s hymn “Jesus Loves Me, This I Know” so profound and enduring?

Chapter 4- The Bible is Not (Only) a Children’s Book

1. What is the danger of treating the Bible like a children’s book?
   1. What major account do many children’s Bibles skip?
2. Have you ever tried “reading with your nose?”
3. How has God’s Word surprised you recently?
4. “Most Christians contentedly drink milk their entire lives. They are never weaned. They never taste the solid food of doctrine. They never read the Bible theologically. They never get to the question of truth.” – pg. 33. Do you see this? What danger does it present?
5. What do you delight in? Are there things we can do that will help us in the future to answer that question by saying, “God’s Word?”
6. Which of these five tips did you need to hear the most?

# Part 2: The Bird Is the Devil

## St. Perpetua: Martyr. Hero.

1. Prior to her arrest, what would we say of Perpetua’s life? What did she have going for her?
2. When her father tried to convince her to renounce her faith for his sake, or for her child’s sake, what warning of Christ might she have remembered?
3. After the sentence was decreed that she was to be executed, why did Perpetua return to her prison cell one final time joyfully?

Chapter 5 – The Bird Is the Devil (Spiritual Warfare)

1. Do we live our day-to-day lives as though we are at war? Who benefits if we don’t realize it?
2. “Our Baptism drafts us into a military service,” (pg. 42). What might this look like?

Chapter 6 – A Declaration of War

1. “Where did this war start?” (pg. 43)
2. What is the *protoevangelium* and why does it serve as a declaration of war?
3. How did the Lord fulfill the protoevangelium and bring peace to us?

Chapter 7 – The Liar and the Lie

1. The devil cannot create; he can only destroy what God has made. What are some of the ways that the devil seeks to destroy the good works of God?
2. The chapter provides several examples of the devil’s lies in our lives and against our faith. Were any of these striking to you personally, as the devil has used them against you before? Are there any others that you know the devil has wielded against you?

Chapter 8 – The Field of Battle: The Three Estates and the Castle of the Conscience

1. “Where does the spiritual battle take place? Where is the battlefield?” (pg. 51)
2. What are the three estates? What is their role/purpose? And how is the devil attacking each one?
3. The devil’s “three points of attack are (1) the heavenly council, that is, the throne room of God; (2) the church where the Word is preached; and (3) the heart where the Word is received by faith,” (pg. 54-55).
   1. The devil seeks to accuse you before God in the heavenly throne room. Why do his accusations against you fail?
   2. “The most intense spiritual battles happen around the preaching of God’s Word,” (pg. 60). How is the Word of God the supply line for the Church Militant?
   3. How is the devil warring against the consciences of men?
4. Let’s reexamine questions 2 and 3 using the castle imagery from the book. You have the three estates serving as three walls of a castle to protect your conscience from the devil’s assault. Survey your castle. In what condition are your walls? What needs reinforcement and shoring up?

Chapter 9 – The Devil’s Tactic: Attack Repentance

1. What is repentance?
2. Why does the devil bother to attack the true preaching of the Law?
3. The devil seeks to destroy the preaching of the Gospel, also. But, “Tertullian reminds us what this means: we live in the water,” (pg. 70). What Gospel promises has God made to you in the waters of baptism that you may always live in them?

Chapter 10 – The Armor of God

1. “What is our equipment for war?” – pg. 71. How does each piece of armor point us to Jesus?
   1. Belt of Truth –
   2. Breastplate of Righteousness –
   3. Shoes of the Readiness of the Gospel of Peace –
   4. Shield of Faith –
   5. Helmet of Salvation –
   6. Sword of Spirit –
2. “What is our aim and place in the fight?” - pg. 71
3. Are unbelievers our enemy in this fight?
4. Describe the four points of the devil’s attack strategy. How have you seen him use these in your life, your family, and your church?
5. Reread Luther’s quote on pages 83-84, from his Preface to the *Large Catechism*, 14-15. How can you see this in Christ’s Church today?

Chapter 11 – The Cross Is the Devil’s Defeat

1. Is Jesus’ battle against the devil past, present, or future?
2. Unpack the Parable of the Strong Man (Mark 3:23-27).
3. If the death of Jesus defeated and bound the devil, why do things still look the way they do in this world?

Chapter 12 – They Did Not Love Their Lives unto Death

1. Should Christians fear death?
2. What are some ways that the devil seeks to tempt us to fear death? Can you point to examples of how some of the early Christians responded to such temptations?
3. How does the fear of God cast out all other fears?
4. Elaborate on this statement from pg. 97: “In this way, when we are not afraid, we are free. Free to die and free to live.”
5. What three weapons are we as saints able to use to overcome the works of the devil?

# Part 3: The Assault of Suffering

## Polycarp: Martyr. Hero.

1. If you were dragged before a judge on account of your faith, do you think you would be able to be so bold as Polycarp was? Why or why not?
2. Polycarp prayed at the hour of his death, “I bless You because You have deemed me worthy of this day and hour, to take my part in the number of the martyrs, in the cup of Your Christ for resurrection to eternal life of soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit.” Would you consider it a blessing to be martyred? Why or why not?

Chapter 13 – Suffering and the Attack on Hope: In the Rocks with Shallow Roots

1. The world and our own sinful nature tell us to expect a life without suffering, a life where we get to be happy, healthy, and rich. What do the Scriptures teach us?
2. In the Parable of the Sower, the seed sown on the rocky soil springs up quickly, but dies when hit by the sun. What is the problem faced by that seed (person), and what would the remedy be?

Chapter 14 – Job, Suffering, and the Assault on the Preaching of the Altar

1. How can we respond to the attack on our faith that a good God wouldn’t allow evil in the world?
2. “The devil uses suffering to preach that God is angry, or that God is indifferent, or that God is not. He uses suffering to attack our faith, to tempt us to doubt God’s mercy or despair of God’s grace.” – pg. 115. How does the Lord speak to us in the midst of the devil’s preaching?

Chapter 15 – Peter’s Six Counsels to the Suffering

1. Why does the devil attack our good works, rather than our bad works?
2. “The call to be a Christian is the call to suffer.” – pg. 119. “But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.” – 1 Peter 2:20. Suffering is a gift from God. Do we believe these words to be true? How do you react to them when you hear them?
3. What prepares us for suffering?
4. Reread the Bible verses on page 126-127, from John 16:33, Acts 14:22, 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4, John 16:1-4, and 2 Timothy 3:12. How do these verses differ from what most Christians expect life to be like?

Chapter 16 – Joy in Suffering

1. “Why does Jesus say that we should leap up and down with joy and rejoicing over persecution?” – pg. 130
2. How does Christian hope differ from worldly hope?
3. Can you recall a time in your life when the Lord used trials to strengthen your faith?

# Part 4: In the Weeds

## Romanus: Martyr. Hero.

1. What could make Romanus so strong as to be able to preach Christ to his torturers, rather than simply scream from the pain?

Chapter 17 – In the Weeds: The Lust of the Flesh and the Pride of Life

1. How does the devil use pleasure to attack the seed, that is, the Word of God, in our lives?
2. Who is the demonic ally living in each of us? How does he seek to sabotage the seed?

Chapter 18 – Our Sinful Flesh

1. We are already guilty when we are conceived. Why is that?
2. What are the consequences of losing the image of God?
3. When we are conceived and born, what is our starting point? Are we oriented/pointed towards God and doing good, pointed towards death and evil, or somewhere in between?
4. What punishment do we justly deserve because of our sin?
5. Read together Ephesians 2:1-10. Can dead men save themselves? How, then, are we saved?

Chapter 19 – Lust Lives in Every Commandment

1. God gives us the Ten Commandments. How can we use them as a tool to both recognize our sinful desires, and fight back against those desires?
2. How has Satan abstracted love?
3. “Pick your vice; we’ve got a virtue to hide it.” (pg. 153, where you can find a couple of examples at the top of that page, or bottom of the previous). How have you seen this played out in your life, church, and culture?
4. Similar to the above conversation around the Ten Commandments, God gives each of us vocations, or callings, to serve various neighbors in this life. How do these vocations help you to understand what love is to look like each day?

Chapter 20 – The Anatomy of Temptation

1. “**14**But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. **15**Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” – James 1:14-15. When was the last time you remember this happening in you?
2. Revisit the “conversation” between the devil and our sinful flesh on pg. 156. How have you seen this played out in your life, church, and culture?
3. “The things of this world are fading away, and when we love them, worship them, desire them and chase after these desires, then we chain ourselves to a sinking ship.” – pg. 157. We know this. The Bible tells us this. And yet, why do we still seek to cling to this dying world and it’s ways? How might we go about living differently?

Chapter 21 – Sex and Money

1. In what ways, in just the last century alone, has the world sought to detach sex from God’s design?
2. For those of us who are casualties of this sexual revolution, what hope is there?
3. “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” – Matthew 6:24-25, as Jesus then teaches about not worrying. Yet, for as cleanly and plainly spoken as these words of Jesus are, why does money remain such a great temptation for us?
4. What is our treasure?

Chapter 22 – Sanctification Is a Lot of Little Deaths

1. What benefit is there in fasting, watching, and laboring?
2. How else can we fight back, subdue, and at last, crucify the flesh?
3. Reread the Luther quote that spans pages 174-175. Then examine yourself. Is this the life that you have been striving to life? If not, why not? If it is, how can your example encourage others?
4. What promises does God give to us through the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 6:5-11?

Chapter 23 – True Freedom and the Full Life

1. “Jesus came to give us a full and abundant life, a life rich in His blessings.” – pg. 177. What might such a life look like?
2. How does the Lord’s Prayer help shape us to know what our true needs are?
3. It is good to revisit where we opened this study on Part 4: how does pleasure strangle out faith?

# Part 5: Good Dirt

## St. Agatha: Martyr. Hero.

1. Share your reflections on the lines: “Agatha skipped joyfully to her execution, like she was going to a feast or a dance. She laughed and rejoiced. She said, ‘Unless you cause my body to be broken by your executioner, my soul will not be able to enter paradise bearing the Victor’s palm,’” (pg. 184-185).

Chapter 24 – Unless the Seed Falls to the Ground and Dies

1. “What does it mean to be the good soil?” (pg. 187)
2. There’s an old phrase parents would tell their children, “You are what you eat.” How does this phrase apply to the Word of God?

Chapter 25 – Jesus Is Our Champion

1. “Psalm 46 captures this for us wonderfully. The picture is of a city under attack…No matter what is happening outside the city walls…There is nothing to fear,” (pg. 189). Why?
2. “The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; He utters His voice, the earth melts,” (Psalm 46:7). How does such power remind you of God’s act of creation? What comfort does this give?

Chapter 26 – The Difficulty of Being Paul’s Enemy

1. “What does Paul know that makes him so unassailable?” – pg. 194.
2. Are you so unassailable? If not, what would it take to get to that point? If you are, what brought you to this level of mature faith?

Chapter 27 – Encouragement for the Weary

1. What challenges are making your marathon difficult?
2. Who is waiting for you at the end of this race, cheering you on? How does this encourage you to keep running?
3. Why does the book end by saying that “We are not seeking to have a martyr’s faith in a faithless world” (pg. 199)?

# Epilogue: Luther on the Joy and Gladness of the Martyrs as They Go to the Death

1. Why would faithful preaching excite the world and Satan against us?