



# FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, JUNE 13, 2014

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

**June 16-20**

PCA General Assembly.

**June 22, 10 a.m.**

We will observe the Lord's Supper as a part of the worship service.

*Please note that the Session has suspended Wednesday and Sunday evening activities for the summer. They will resume, God willing, after Labor Day.*

## From the Pastor's Pen...

In Luke 3, John the Baptist tells the people to "bear fruits in keeping with repentance." People were thronging to hear John and be baptized by him, but they didn't really want to live lives that matched the profession they made by coming for John's baptism.

There are similar problems in churches today. Many people like being associated with the church and Christianity, but they don't like the implications of the gospel, namely a turning from sin and a turning unto God. People give all sorts of excuses for why it is not possible to give up this or that particular sin pattern: "It's my life and it doesn't affect anyone," "I was born that way," "it's just who I am." But the Bible paints a completely different picture.

In our upcoming sermon this Lord's Day, we have a beautiful example of gospel power in the life of a sinner. Luke 19:1-10 gives the account of the conversion of Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus lived a thoroughly reprobate life. His whole existence was centered on the pursuit of money. He was a tax collector and had ample opportunity to defraud his fellow citizens and line his own pockets.

He lived a life devoted to self-gratification and using others to serve his own ends. But then he met the Lord Jesus Christ. His encounter with Jesus convicts him of his sin and brings forth faith and repentance. Repentance for Zacchaeus is seen in how he gives away half of his treasured possessions and makes restitution to the people whom he had wronged.

The story of Zacchaeus is one of the most glorious displays of the gospel's power. It shows that conversion is possible even for the "worst" kind of sinner. This should give us great encouragement to continue to pray and witness to friends and family who have not yet shown the "fruit of repentance."

## Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

The Catechism spends several questions detailing various benefits that God gives to Christians. Last week we looked at benefits we receive at death, and this week we consider those we receive at the resurrection.

*Q38. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?*

**A38. At the resurrection, believers, being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.**

We ended last week by noting that after our death though we are with the Lord, we are looking forward to and anticipating the day when Christ shall return and we shall receive a new, perfected body.

At the resurrection, not only do we receive a perfect body which shall enable us to fully enjoy God forever, but we are also vindicated.

Have you ever, in this life, been falsely ac-

cused, been made the subject of gossip, or endured ridicule because of the choices you've made or the stands you've taken for the Lord Jesus Christ?

Well, on a much greater scale, the devil has been slandering and accusing you all the days of your Christian life. Satan wants people to be condemned; he wants to deprive God of His glory by preventing His saints from persevering to the end. One of his tactics is to call to mind your own sins and failings.

But at the resurrection, all of God's people will be acknowledged by Him (which is a blessing in itself), and more than mere acknowledgment, God will publicly declare His saints to be *not guilty* of any charges the devil or anyone else might bring against us.

We shall finally be made to enjoy all the fruits of Christ's victory and death on our behalf. All the universe will see the greatness of God's grace to us as He receives us for all eternity.



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# Preparing to Come to the Lord's Table

Next Lord's Day, June 22, we will observe the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is one of two New Testament sacraments. The Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ to 'show forth' His death in the place of sinners and to nourish the faith of believers.

The benefits of the Lord's Supper are, of course, only for believers in Christ. Throughout history, however, people have misunderstood the purpose of the Lord's Table and observed it wrongly. Some, for example, presumed that the Supper was a "converting ordinance," meaning that it served to make a person a Christian and should be offered with the hope that those who partake will repent and turn to Christ.

But the Lord's Supper is only for the *confirmation of saints*. It is given by Christ for His people to remind us who are saints of the benefits that we now possess and to nourish our faith in Him.

Paul writes in I Corinthians 11:28-29 that a Christian ought to come to the Lord's Table prepared, by examining himself or herself: "**Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.**" The Holy Spirit of Christ did not inspire Paul to write that verse simply for his health, but to teach us how to come to the Lord's Table so that we may get a blessing from the Supper rather than judgment. Our Shorter Catechism gives us some help in that area.

WSC97 states: "**It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's Supper, that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of their faith to feed upon him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience. . .**"

In short, before you come to the table you should examine your graces to see that you are in Christ. If you are not in Christ, there is no way that you can "discern the Lord's body." But how can you know that you are in Christ? As we've seen Jesus teach, simply being "religious" and coming to church are not what save you or prove that you are right before God.

Rather, examine your life to see if there are true signs of love for Christ. Do you know His word? Are you growing - and seeking to grow - in your knowledge of Him? Or are you satisfied that you have learned "enough?" Do you submit to His word? Have you discovered your regular daily need of repentance?

The Lord's Supper is for sinners and sinners only. Even as Christians we still sin and fail to live up to our calling as saints. The Lord's Supper is not to give us "more grace" to cover our sins, as if Christ could be offered up as a sacrifice again. Rather, Christ gave His church the Supper to assure His sinful people of His steadfast, covenant love for them.

Prepare this coming week to come to Christ's Table by considering the words Christ spoke with His disciples before He went to the cross in Luke 22:14-23.

## Sermon Snapshot: "Seeking Mercy"

Last Lord's Day we looked at one of Jesus' parables, that of the Pharisee and the tax collector (or *publican*) in Luke 18:9-14. Jesus tells this parable, you remember, against and to warn those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous."

Both of the men in the parable believe in God. The Pharisee begins by expressing gratitude to God for making him the way that he is. He gives God all the credit for making him righteous. But for all his gratitude, he missed the most important thing of all: his own need of mercy. **The Pharisee's confidence was in the fact that he had stayed righteous.** The Pharisee had done more than what God's Law required in religious ceremony and in morality he was not an adulterer and was faithful in his business practices.

The Pharisee is a prime example of a religious and moral person, but his prayer shows that he doesn't really know God. Moreover, in spite of all his religion, the Pharisee clearly doesn't understand his sinfulness

either: since he hadn't done anything *really* bad, he assumed he must not be a sinner and as a result based his relationship with God on his religious and moral faithfulness. Many in our society have a similar view.

The publican, by contrast, is commended by Jesus Christ for his simple, desperate, trusting prayer: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." The publican understood both that God is holy and that he himself was worthy of God's condemnation because of his own sinfulness.

Many people fail to grasp that they are sinners. They believe that since they've tried hard and haven't been caught in some heinous act that they are right before God. However, Jesus makes clear, God only accepts those who come to Him seeking mercy;

He only accepts those who have realized their need.

The Pharisee may have looked to the world like someone whom God would be pleased to have worshipping him, but the only worshipers God accepts are those who realize they have nothing to offer him but their sins.



What is the gospel?  
& why does it matter?

Join us!  
Starting June 1  
Sundays @ 10:00 a.m.  
First Presbyterian Church  
302 Summit Street | Winona, Miss.