

“Why Does This Surprise You?”

☆ **We have enough!** (vv.12-16)

☆ **God forgives our ignorance.** (vv.17-20)

In the name of Christ-crucified and risen, dear fellow redeemed, loved by God:

Years ago we found this story on a kids’ cassette of Bible songs: “He was walking and leaping and praising God....In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”

In this Easter season of celebration we face a huge challenge as a congregation. Each spring our leaders carefully study our ministry needs and draft a budget. We don’t generally do pledges, but we do agree as God’s family to support His Gospel ministry together. Our New Life President today will tell us how we’ve fallen short of our commitments just when we need to be stepping up. In a real way we’re like the crippled beggar sitting at the Beautiful Gate between the Court of Gentiles leading into the Jewish temple courts. So is the risen Christ powerful enough to help us? Or is this just an old story for kids’ songs? God wants us confident and powerful in Christ. **“Why Does This Surprise You?”**

☆ **We have enough!** (vv.12-16)

Not so long before this Peter was the one holding out his hand to Jesus. Peter saw the wind and waves and started sinking down in the Sea of Galilee. **“Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith....Why did you doubt?” And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.** (Matthew 14:30-32 NIV84)

Through Peter’s denial, Jesus’ death and resurrection, His kind and forgiving reinstatement of Peter, the Apostle was strengthened in his faith. Now it’s Peter’s turn to help the crippled beggar in the temple: **“Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”** All the people could recognize him and **“were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.”** (Acts 3:1-10 NIV84) Notice how Peter said, **“What I have, I give to you.”** The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians will echo this in a special offering appeal: **“If the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.”** (2 Corinthians 8:12 NIV84) Lord, make us willing. Empower us that **We have enough!**

Critics of Christ’s church were busy criticizing Him long before they got to us. And their criticism was deadly. **“Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this? Why are you staring at us, as if by our own power or godliness we have made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and disowned in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. ¹⁴You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you. ¹⁵You killed the Author of Life, whom God raised from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶And on the basis of faith in his name, it is the name of Jesus that has strengthened this man, whom you see and know. This faith that comes through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.”** (EHV) ¹ Deep trouble, killing your own Messiah!

Yet didn’t we just spent forty days of the Lenten season seeing again how we killed **“the Author of Life”**? By our sins we whipped Jesus. We pressed the crown of thorns into His head. We nailed Jesus to the cross. We continue every day to mock Him, spit on Him, and cause Him to suffer. That’s why I’m so grateful to confess my sins, those I know and those I don’t, then to receive Absolution from Christ.

¹ EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version*, the Wartburg Project. Northwestern Pub. House, © 2017. Order: 800-662-6022.

Critics sometimes unknowingly ask questions out of turn. “How can we afford a new piano and timpani when we haven’t funded our budget?” This misjudges the donors as if they are falling short in their regular offerings. But they’re already funding more than their fair share. Be careful, dear friends. Remember what Jesus said to Judas and the other disciples who questioned Mary’s expensive gift of perfume to anoint Jesus. **“Leave her alone....Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me....I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”** (Mark 14:6-9 NIV84) If you want to ask critical questions, ask them of yourself: “Am I doing all I can? Am I praying for my brothers and sisters in Christ? Am I encouraging our leaders by my willing, eager, generous support?” Healthy questions for each of us!

What a generous God we have! We worship with such beautiful instruments and young musicians blossoming in skills and abilities. God’s grace is powering our congregation behind the scenes in committees and mission teams like never before. Game nights and Growth Groups are thriving. How can we avoid looking as if we’re alive, but spiritually dead? How will God save us from “hot wired Sardisian death?” He captures our heart with His love. Since your heart follows your treasure, He helps reveal your true love in your personal and family budget. It shows in your wallet. Because Christ is risen, **We do have enough!** We have boundless stores of grace from God. He is so forgiving, so rich in mercy.

☆ **God forgives our ignorance. (vv.17-20)**

After centuries of powerful prophecy God’s people should have known the Christ would suffer and die and rise again. But sometimes the truth is hardest to see when it’s staring right at us. Peter kept up the reassurance: **“Now brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, just like your leaders. ¹⁸But in this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through the mouth of all the prophets: that his Christ would suffer. ¹⁹Therefore repent and return to have your sins wiped out, ²⁰so that refreshing times may come from the presence of the Lord and that he may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you.”** (EHV)

Judgment Day is coming at the last trumpet and for each of us personally. Jesus kindly calls us to repentance in our head, our heart, and all the way to our wallet. He comes like gentle summer rain on a new mown lawn in that wonderful smell of fresh growth. So cool and refreshing as the heat dissipates in the cool after the rain. Thirsty souls receive Him gladly and drink in the water of life from heaven. Even where we are ignorant, the Lord’s Apostle Peter says we’re forgiven, even when we should know better.

Pastors too for not talking about this much at all? Admonishment by dedicated members suggest I need the Lord’s forgiveness of my ignorance. We’re falling for one of the oldest tricks of the enemy. A Christian retired from the Australian Special Forces pointed this out. “We’d get dropped behind enemy lines to disrupt supplies of fuel and food from getting up to the fighting. Satan does not have to turn us all into unbelievers. He just has to get us to fall short in our support. Then the weapons of the Spirit, the Word of God, does not reach the front lines to rescue souls from hell.” **Ignorance?** Forgiven!

The LORD: **“Every animal in the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand mountains....The world is mine, and all that fills it....Sacrifice a thank offering to God, and fulfill your vows to the Most High. Call on me in the day of distress. I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”** (Psalm 50:8-15 EHV)

If you’re among the 20% of our members funding 80% of our ministry, praise God for **“the grace of giving”!** And hear Paul encourage the Thessalonians: **“Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.”** (1 Thessalonians 4:1 NIV84) Years ago a college woman said, “Pastor, I finally did as you suggested and ran the numbers. I’m giving 15% and didn’t know it!” Last week a member gave me a check for \$1000 with a note from the non-member spouse in thanks for New Life. “Can you afford this?” Special blessing, special thanks to God. Our living Lord Jesus commands and promises: **“Bring the whole tithe...and test me in this. See if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour on**

you more blessings than you have room for.” (Malachi 3:10) Refreshing! **Surprised?** Be grateful. Amen.