

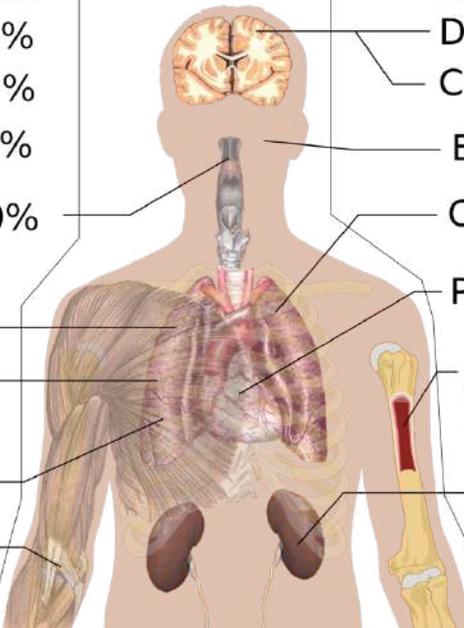
# The Presbyterian Banner

May 2020



## Common symptoms:

Fever: 83-99%  
Loss of Appetite: 40-84%  
Fatigue: 44-70%  
Loss of smell: 15 to 30%  
Shortness of breath: 31-40%  
Cough: 59-82%  
Coughing up sputum: 28-33%  
Muscle aches and pain: 11-35%



## In severe disease:

Difficulty waking  
Confusion  
Bluish face or lips  
Coughing up blood  
Persistent chest pain  
Decreased white blood cells  
Kidney failure  
High fever

**So these are the effects of COVID 19 but what about a renewed diagnosis of sin, ‘the plague of plagues’ as the Puritan Ralph Venning termed it in 1669.**

‘Sin is the most serious problem of mankind, yet it’s the one thing nobody wants to talk about. We almost never mention it in our prayers; we almost never admit that we ourselves are guilty of sin - not only to others, but also even to ourselves.’

*Contents:* Editorial : Why Did Luther *not* flee from the deadly plague? : Observing Baptism & the Lord’s Supper in Extreme Situations : Psalm 11 – What can the righteous do? : Search Work : Picture to Colour : Book Review – From the Lips of Little Ones : Knox PCEA Picture : Hunter News



## FROM THE EDITOR

**T**HE figures for the spread of the Covid 19 virus have increased enormously over the past month so that as of today (29 April) 3.1 million confirmed cases have been reported worldwide (1,034,000 in the USA), with a multiple of 5 to 10 times this number likely to have been infected but without symptoms and therefore perhaps unknowingly spread the virus. There have been 217,000 deaths but this figure does not always count those who died outside a hospital. In the USA there have been 59,000 deaths so far and nearly 22,000 in the UK. Disregarding small countries, on a per head of population basis, Spain is currently the worst for confirmed cases at 4,475 per million with the UK with 2,425 per million somewhat behind Belgium (4,107), Ireland (4,039) Italy (3,345) and the USA (3,139). In China the claimed deaths are 4,643 from 84,347 confirmed cases. This figure is treated with considerable scepticism in many quarters, but it of interest to note that India, which has been in lockdown since 25<sup>th</sup> March, has a similar 1.3 billion population but has reported only 29,974 confirmed cases and 937 deaths. Of

course its early days. Clearly there will be a lot of investigation of the handling by governments of the anti-virus measures in due course.

In Australia we have so far escaped relatively unscathed with 88 deaths from 6,738 confirmed cases. We are certainly not out of the woods yet, but are grateful to God for the wisdom of the health experts, imperfect though it may be. Still, a vaccine for widespread use is not going to be available until late 2021 at best, if it is ever formulated. Getting used to international borders virtually closed until year end at least and international travel in the doldrums for longer will work a change in our expectations. We may even face regular disease outbreaks hard or impossible to control – in which case we join most of the human race throughout the course of history. How will this impact the comfortable secularism of the West? Certainly, the Gospel will continue its ever relevant message.

On a positive note two young couples in the church have recently married - **Ben and Claire Klazinga** in the Brisbane congregation and **Mark and Harmony** Hamilton in the Manning congregation. We gave thanks for them and pray for blessing on them and for all our young people - those who single, for married couples, couples with children and single parents. From them come future leaders in the cause of Christ. #

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## Why did Luther *not* flee from the deadly plague?

Nathan Runham

*Nathan Runham is a Presbyterian RAAF Chaplain and PhD candidate at Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne. This article is a clearly written excellent piece of historical research with contemporary relevance.*

### Introduction

Martin Luther lived through the plague. He lived through it, because he deliberately chose *not* to flee from it. Unlike the COVID-19 pandemic that we face today, the Bubonic plague that Luther lived through, was an epidemic. This means, generally speaking, there were still places to escape and avoid the plague. Why then, did Luther choose not to flee? The answer to this question is that our neighbours matter. This might seem fairly simplistic, but it is what drove Luther to risk his own life – and family – in order to serve his neighbours. In the midst of our COVID-19 pandemic today, we would benefit our neighbours greatly too, if we were to love them as we love ourselves. How then do we love our neighbours – in the midst of a pandemic? Based on Luther's biblical understanding, and his own experience, he will give us practical advice to know: when to help, why to help, and how to help.

### Background

Killer plagues are not novel. The virus or bacteria which causes each particular disease might be novel – like COVID-19 – but deadly epidemics and pandemics have cursed humans since the fall. Medieval Europe was scarred by the Black Death (Bubonic Plague) in the Fourteenth Century, when at least twenty-five percent of its population was lost. The Fifteenth Century also witnessed at least four more epidemics. Martin Luther himself, lived through three “pestilences” during his lifetime.<sup>1</sup>

The first plague to hit Luther in Wittenberg, occurred on 2 Aug 1527.<sup>2</sup> Luther's protector at the time, Elector John, sought to move him and the other Wittenberg professors

to Jena for their protection.<sup>3</sup> Luther, however, chose to defy the order and refused to flee.<sup>4</sup> By August 19, seventeen days into the plague, there were already eighteen deaths in Wittenberg. For a small village, an average of at least one death a day must have been frightening. It is no wonder then that Luther's friends also appealed for him to flee, because Luther was placing himself, his son, and his pregnant wife Katie, at terrible risk by staying in the plague-ridden Wittenberg.

The Wittenberg plague lasted about four to five months.<sup>5</sup> During this time Luther's son John became sick. The wife of the *bürgermeister* (mayor) died – almost in Luther's own arms.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the pregnant wife of Luther's friend, George Rörer, died – as did their unborn child.<sup>7</sup> These events took a toll on Luther. He opened up about this trial in a letter he wrote to his friend Justus Jonas (10 Nov 1527), not too long before the plague began to decrease in Wittenberg:

I am concerned about the delivery of my wife, so greatly has the example of the Deacon's [George Rörer] wife terrified me. But He who is mighty has done great things for me; and so the endurance of great things also is required of me. May my Christ, whom I have purely taught and confessed, be my rock and fortress. Amen. My little John cannot now send his greetings to you because of his illness, but he desires your prayers for him. Today is the twelfth day that he has eaten nothing; he has been somehow sustained only by liquids. Now he is beginning to eat a little bit. It is wonderful to see how this infant wants to be happy and strong as usual, but he cannot because he is too weak ... We hope for the end of the plague. Farewell, and give a kiss to your son and a hug to his mother, and remember us in your prayers.<sup>8</sup>

These early November weeks of the plague were definitely a difficult and bittersweet time for the Luther household. In the midst of all this affliction, the tenth anniversary of the posting of the *Ninety-five Theses* also passed. Some scholars have argued that it was during these weeks of plague-ridden death, risk, stress and heartache, that Luther penned this majestic and comforting hymn *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott (A Mighty Fortress is our God)*. Yet, it is true that the precise dating of this hymn is difficult to determine.<sup>9</sup> However, the context could certainly fit.<sup>10</sup> In our day, it has already become a regular hymn of choice during the trials of our plague – COVID-19.

<sup>1</sup> In 1542 Luther writes, “I have now lived through three pestilences and have visited several persons who suffered from this sickness.” Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-72), 54:434. (Hereafter cited as LW)

<sup>2</sup> LW 43:115.

<sup>3</sup> Only Bugenhagen stayed with Luther, whereas Jonas and Melancthon took their families and fled the plague. See, Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (New York: Random House, 2017), 307. Luther writes in Nov 1517, “Pomer [Bugenhagen] sends greetings; he is my only companion, since all others have gone because of fear of the plague.” LW 49:179.

<sup>4</sup> Worthing writes, “The university was closed and nearly all its students fled the town, along with any healthy citizens who had the financial means to do so.” Mark Worthing, *Martin Luther: A Wild Boar in the Lord's Vineyard* (Northcote: Morning Star, 2017), 89.

<sup>5</sup> Luther expresses hope in a letter to Justus Jonas in Dec 1527 that the plague

is subsiding, “I wish you could come here just to walk with me through town, so that you could see that the plague did no harm, thanks be to God. Only two are left in the hospital, and they are convalescing well. Neither the doctor nor the deacons are busy with sick people in town, which of course is a definite sign that the plague has ceased.” LW 49:181.

<sup>6</sup> LW 43:115.

<sup>7</sup> LW 43:115-16.

<sup>8</sup> LW 49:173-75. Although Luther's daughter Elizabeth arrived safely in December, sadly she died in August 1528. See, LW 49:181, 203.

<sup>9</sup> See the discussion in Andreas Loewe and Katherine R. Firth, ‘Martin Luther's ‘Mighty Fortress’,’ *Lutheran Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2018), 128-129.

<sup>10</sup> LW 49:175, fn. 26. cf, Georg Scriba, ‘The 16th Century Plague and the Present Aids Pandemic: A Comparison of Martin Luther's Reaction to the Plague and the Hiv/Aids Pandemic in Southern Africa Today,’ *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 126 (2006), 73.

It was however, sometime before the plague struck Wittenberg that Johann Hess wrote to Luther with a question raised by clergy in Breslau: was it proper for Christians to flee such deadly plagues? Initially, Luther did not respond, probably due to ill health.<sup>11</sup> However, Hess again wrote to him. Thus, Luther began to reply by the end of July 1527, with his letter, *Ob man vor dem Sterben fliehen möge (Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague)*.<sup>12</sup> Yet, it was only a matter of weeks before the plague struck Wittenberg, and – quite understandably – this reply was interrupted.<sup>13</sup> When Luther did begin to write his reply again, he was a changed man.<sup>14</sup> He had now experienced the dreaded plague, and understood the risks, first-hand. It should be no surprise then, that during subsequent epidemics, not only his hymn (*A Mighty Fortress*), but also this letter, has, “enjoyed a wide circulation, particularly in times of pestilence.”<sup>15</sup>

### When to Help

In the midst of a deadly plague, how do we know when to help our neighbours? This is made more challenging by the requirements of social distancing and infection control measures. On what do we base our decision? Before Luther clarifies what we could call his “criterion”, he first delineates between two types of people. The first group are those who stay in plague ridden areas because they view the plague as God’s rightful punishment, and claim to stay on the basis of faith. These people hold to the fatalistic view of God’s judgement – doing nothing to help their neighbour. But Luther criticises this reasoning, by comparing it to a burning house where no-one rushes out to save those in the house, because they selfishly resolved it was God’s punishment.<sup>16</sup> “Ultimately”, Luther writes in view of this attitude, “such talk will lead to the point where we abbreviate the Lord’s Prayer and no longer pray, ‘deliver us from evil, Amen.’”<sup>17</sup>

The second group are those who believe it is proper to flee provided they do not hold public office. Luther allows that there may be times when people flee – not to disobey God – but due to differing levels of faith. However, Luther also notes that there are some who flee in disobedience to the Word of God. For Luther, this would be like someone

giving up on their confession of Christ in order to escape prison and punishment.<sup>18</sup>

Luther writes that pastors in particular, should remain steadfast in the face of death as a good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep – even though the hireling flees (John 10:11–12).<sup>19</sup> Why should pastors stay? Luther answers, “For when people are dying, they most need a spiritual ministry which strengthens and comforts their consciences by word and sacrament and in faith overcomes death.”<sup>20</sup> It is not just pastors, however, who are held to this high account, but also those who hold public office.<sup>21</sup>

Luther now identifies the criterion that allows for both preachers, and those in public office, to flee. The criterion being, that there must be enough preachers and public officials left behind to help provide their respective services.<sup>22</sup> In other words, we can flee only when our neighbour is going to be afforded the care that they need – in our absence.<sup>23</sup> This same criterion then, Luther applies to all persons who owe service or duty to one another. This amounts to “loving thy neighbour 101” for Luther.<sup>24</sup>

Fleeing is not necessarily a bad thing, however. In fact, Luther admits that the desire to flee death is a “natural tendency.” He then cites examples from Scripture of men who fled, like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Uriah, Elijah and Moses. “All of them fled from death when it was possible and saved their lives...” he observes, but here is the crux, “...yet without depriving their neighbours of anything but first meeting their obligations toward them.”<sup>25</sup> Set out here then, is the basic criterion for all people on when we can flee, or when we must help. Does our fleeing deprive our neighbour of essential services?

Luther then concludes with a practical example of how we might consider when to help our neighbour:

If it be God’s will that evil come upon us and destroy us, none of our precautions will help us. Everybody must take this to heart: first of all, if he feels bound to remain where death rages in order to serve his neighbour, let him commend himself to God and say, “Lord, I am in thy hands; thou hast kept me here; thy will be done. I am thy lowly creature. Thou canst kill me or preserve me in this pestilence in the same way as if I were in fire, water, drought, or any other danger.” If a man is free [from responsibility], however, and can escape, let him commend himself and say, “Lord God, I am weak and fearful.

<sup>11</sup> In a letter dated 13 Jul 1517, Luther writes to Nicholas Hausmann, “I have had a severe fainting spell, so that even now my head compels me to abstain from reading and writing.” LW 49:169.

<sup>12</sup> Or literally, “...flee from Death”. The “deadly plague” is inserted for context. LW 43:119–138. See also, Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-), 23:323–386.

<sup>13</sup> There is a break in the script that probably occurred late July or early August. Luther did not recommence writing until September. LW 43:125, fn. 15. As a result of the plague, Luther’s newly commenced lectures on Isaiah were also paused. See, LW 16:ix. Instead, Luther expounded the letter of 1 John to those who remained, a letter that “...can buoy up afflicted hearts” which is quite appropriate given the circumstances. LW 30:xi, 219.

<sup>14</sup> Scriba suggests, “His response was more academic before the Plague ravaged Wittenberg, and then became more spiritual and pastoral after the Plague had engulfed his own town.” See Scriba, ‘The 16th Century Plague,’ 70.

<sup>15</sup> LW 43:117.

<sup>16</sup> LW 43:124–25.

<sup>17</sup> LW 43:125.

<sup>18</sup> LW 43:120–21.

<sup>19</sup> Luther said in his 1 John lectures during the plague, “For just as Christ laid down His life and the apostles laid down their lives, so we, too, should lay down our lives, namely, for the strengthening of the faith of the brethren. There are also other occasions, as, for example, when there is a pestilence. Then preachers should remain, in order that they may lay down their lives for the brethren.” LW 30:277–78.

<sup>20</sup> LW 43:121.

<sup>21</sup> “To abandon an entire community which one has been called to govern and to leave it without official or government, exposed to all kinds of danger such as fires, murder, riots, and every imaginable disaster is a great sin.” LW 43:121.

<sup>22</sup> LW 43:121–22.

<sup>23</sup> LW 43:122.

<sup>24</sup> See Matt 25:41–46. “If someone is sufficiently bold and strong in his faith, let him stay in God’s name; that is certainly no sin. If someone is weak and fearful, let him flee in God’s name as long as he does not neglect his duty toward his neighbour but has made adequate provision for others to provide nursing care.” LW 43:123.

<sup>25</sup> LW 43:123–24.

Therefore I am running away from evil and am doing what I can to protect myself against it. I am nevertheless in thy hands in this danger as in any other which might overtake me. Thy will be done."<sup>26</sup>

### Why to Help

At this point in his letter, Luther's writing is interrupted, probably because of the arrival of the plague in Wittenberg.<sup>27</sup> The rest of the letter is written after the plague had hit, and here, Luther begins to analyse motives, to clarify why we help our neighbour. He writes:

A man who will not help or support others unless he can do so without affecting his safety or his property will never help his neighbour ... No neighbour can live alongside another without risk to his safety, property, wife, or child ... Anyone who does not do that for his neighbour, but forsakes him and leaves him to his misfortune, becomes a murderer in the sight of God...<sup>28</sup>

It might have been expected, in this section written during the raging plague, that Luther might tone down some of his uncomfortably strong rhetoric. Rather it seems, this first-hand experience of the Wittenberg plague has in fact confirmed and substantiated his criterion to stay, despite the risk to Katie, their unborn child, the sickness of John, and the death of friends. His own monastery home had become a hospital for the sick.<sup>29</sup> This might explain why Luther suggested that able governments should maintain the hospitals, with Christians to help.<sup>30</sup> Where there are no hospitals, "we must give hospital care and be nurses for one another in any extremity or risk the loss of salvation and the grace of God."<sup>31</sup> But whatever the case, Luther practiced what he preached. We cannot flee the plague, if it means fleeing our responsibility to our neighbour.

In a general sense, Luther does indeed view this plague as God's punishment. Yet, not without its benefits. After all, it is not brought on just to chastise us, but to test, "...our faith and love—our faith in that we may see and experience how we should act toward God; our love in that we may recognize how we should act toward our neighbour."<sup>32</sup> Moreover, we can even join the fight against the Devil by staying to help and love our neighbour!<sup>33</sup>

However, we need to check our motives. If someone stays to help – but for personal gain – this person "should not be surprised if eventually he is infected, disfigured, or even dies before he comes into possession of that estate or inheritance."<sup>34</sup> Conversely, the person who cares for the sick because of love for their neighbour can have confidence that, "God himself shall be his attendant and his physician, too. [If he were to get sick] What an attendant he is! What a physician!"<sup>35</sup>

Thus, Luther reaffirms the right motive:

...you hear that the command to love your neighbour is equal to the greatest commandment to love God, and that what you do or fail to do for your neighbour means doing the same to God. If you wish to serve Christ and to wait on him, very well, you have your sick neighbour close at hand.<sup>36</sup>

However, it is one thing to neglect our neighbours, but it is another thing to be "too rash and reckless, tempting God and disregarding everything which might counteract death and the plague."<sup>37</sup> By this, Luther means disdain the use of medicine, not avoiding people and places infected by the plague, and making a joke of the situation.<sup>38</sup> If harm comes to us because we neglect the use of intelligence or medicine, we are failing to rightly care for ourselves. Moreover, if we get sick due to our own negligence and pass it on to our neighbours, we are hardly acting toward them in love.<sup>39</sup> Worse than this, however, are those who wilfully and deliberately go around infecting others – or in our own day, deliberately coughing or spitting on health care workers. What should happen to them? Luther, uncomfortably for our ears today, calls for capital punishment.<sup>40</sup> Luther sums up our responsibility and urges us to re-centre our motives – why we help – in this way:

Very well, by God's decree the enemy has sent us poison and deadly offal. Therefore I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and

<sup>26</sup> LW 43:125.

<sup>27</sup> We should note that the year 1527 was probably one of the most difficult years in Luther's life. See the translator's introduction to *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* for the discussion. LW 37:155.

<sup>28</sup> LW 43:126.

<sup>29</sup> Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet*, 307.

<sup>30</sup> LW 43:126.

<sup>31</sup> Luther continues, "Thus it is written in God's word and command, 'Love your neighbour as yourself,' and in Matthew 7, 'So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.'" LW 43:127.

<sup>32</sup> LW 43:127.

<sup>33</sup> In fact, Luther identifies "two blows" to use against the Devil, "the first one is that I know that helping my neighbour is a deed well-pleasing to God and all the angels...", and the second blow is, "God's mighty promise by which he encourages those who minister to the needy. He says in Psalm 41, 'Blessed is he who considers the poor.'" LW 43:128.

<sup>34</sup> LW 43:129.

<sup>35</sup> LW 43:129.

<sup>36</sup> LW 43:131. See also, Matthew 22:39.

<sup>37</sup> LW 43:131. It is hard to reconcile Luther's own advice here, with Roper's initial scepticism regarding Luther's motives for staying: "Luther's decision to remain in Wittenberg was bold, but also revealed a reckless disregard for his own safety and that of his family. It may have been a residue of his wish for martyrdom, or, perhaps, another example of the remarkable courage that enabled him not to shirk what he felt to be his pastoral responsibility to his flock." Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet*, 307–308.

<sup>38</sup> Luther continues, "They say that it is God's punishment; if he wants to protect them he can do so without medicines or our carefulness. This is not trusting God but tempting him. God has created medicines and provided us with intelligence to guard and take good care of the body so that we can live in good health." LW 43:131.

<sup>39</sup> Anderson writes, "Luther regards those who reject disease prevention as people courting suicide, just as though they refused to eat. Worse, such people may also infect others in the process, making their actions murderous." Per Anderson, 'Reading Luther on Plague in a Technological Age,' *Word & World* 13, no. 3 (1993), 280.

<sup>40</sup> Apparently, one of the motives for wilfully spreading the disease was related to a medieval superstition that one could rid them self of the disease if they infected others. See, LW 43:133.

so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbour needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely, as stated above. See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.<sup>41</sup>

### How to Help

Luther concludes this letter to John Hess with some important instructions, which seem to have been attached at a later date.<sup>42</sup> They probably stem from lessons learned from the Wittenberg plague and are addressed as an open letter to all. Knowing when, and why we should help, Luther now provide us with, “how one should care and provide for the soul in time of death.”<sup>43</sup>

First, people need the Word. Thus, Luther says we must admonish people to “attend church and listen to the sermon, so that they learn through God’s word how to live and how to die.”<sup>44</sup> Luther would later teach, after the plague had subsided, that, “There is no plague worse for the church than a peace in which the Word of the Spirit and its diligent use are lacking. For the purpose of obtaining the true peace, however, we need nothing but the Word.”<sup>45</sup> However, those who have rejected the Word while in health should demonstrate, “remorse and repentance with great earnestness, tears, and lamentation.” That is, if they desire the sacrament, or want to be considered a Christian.<sup>46</sup>

Second, people need spiritual preparation. They should confess, take the sacrament, and reconcile with their neighbour *before* they die. There is no guarantee a pastor will be able to visit before death, thus:

Those who have been careless and negligent in these matters must account for themselves. That is their own fault. After all, we cannot set up a private pulpit and altar daily at their bedside simply because they have despised the public pulpit and altar to which God has summoned and called them.<sup>47</sup>

Third, people need to be diligent to call a pastor early. It is evident Luther must have had experiences like this in Wittenberg:

They want us to teach them the gospel at the last minute and administer the sacrament to them as they were accustomed to it under the papacy when nobody asked whether they believed or understood the gospel but just stuffed the sacrament down their throats as if into a bread bag.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, we can see Luther’s very pastoral and practical intent as he concludes this letter. His practical instructions may seem a little blunt, but nonetheless, it should remind us of what is at stake in a plague, or in our COVID-19 pandemic: the *seele* (soul). In the comfortability of life, particularly in the West, the Church often spends her time

and energy on things that will not last. And sadly, it might even take a pandemic to remind us of what is really important. Something which made Luther, the *seelsorger* (soul carer, ie. pastor), decide *not* to flee – despite the risks!

### Conclusion

We must end where we started with the question, why did Luther *not* flee from a deadly plague? First, because to do so, Luther would have deprived his neighbours. Second, because he was motivated by God’s command to love our neighbour. Third, because Luther, the *seelsorger*, knew the importance of providing pastoral care to dying souls. This is why Luther did not flee. Today, we are living in a different context, however, we still have neighbours. We might be isolated from them, but we cannot flee our responsibility to them. With the development of medical science and technology, we also have the ability to provide care to these neighbours at a distance. We may not need to have hospitals in our own homes, but we can ensure our neighbours are not deprived of contact, love, and the Word – spoken, read, prayed, and preached, whether from 1.5 meters, or 1000 kilometres away. In all this, may we stand firm on the fact that: “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott!” (A Mighty Fortress is our God!). Luther concludes his letter with these words and prayer; may it also be ours today:

I hope that I’ve written enough in this pamphlet for those who can be saved so that—God be praised—many may thereby be snatched from their jaws and many more may be strengthened and confirmed in the truth. May Christ our Lord and Saviour preserve us all in pure faith and fervent love, unspotted and pure until his day. Amen. Pray for me, a poor sinner.<sup>49</sup>

*This paper also appears concurrently in Stimulus, the journal of Laidlaw College (formerly the Bible College of New Zealand).*



Martin Luther by Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1532

<sup>41</sup> LW 43:131–32.

<sup>42</sup> LW 43:134, fn.16.

<sup>43</sup> LW 43:134.

<sup>44</sup> LW 43:134. Of course, this goes against social distancing laws. Yet, it can still be fulfilled in our situation, through the use of online church services.

<sup>45</sup> LW 16:342.

<sup>46</sup> LW 43:134.

<sup>47</sup> LW 43:134–35.

<sup>48</sup> LW 43:135.

<sup>49</sup> LW 43:138.

## Observing Baptism and the Lord's Supper in Extreme Situations

Rowland S. Ward

In all the discussion on the internet about observing the Lord's Supper in the situation of the Coronavirus, we should spare a thought for believers, particularly in Muslim lands, who have no regular contact with other Christians. They've become Christians through reading or hearing Scripture or Christian messages on the internet but live in situations where there are no other believers. They may experience persecution or imprisonment as they seek to express the faith. They may not even have access to the internet or printed literature and may only have part of the Scriptures. Who would deny that these believers belong to Christ and are part of his church even if not the church visible? Of course, we may not equate these isolated believers too quickly with the house churches mentioned in the New Testament since in general the implication there is not a gathering of just one family, while many homes in New Testament times might readily accommodate 20, 30 or more people, and all churches were equipped with elders and deacons (Acts 14:23).

It is said that exceptions make for bad law but on the other hand in extraordinary situations extraordinary things may be done. However, does that mean an isolated believer should baptise himself, or that he should have the Lord's Supper observance by himself with or without someone live-streaming the service? I would suggest this displays some misunderstanding of the nature of the sacraments. There is a distinction between 'at home' and 'in the church' (1 Cor 11:18,22) where the church is not referring to a building but to a distinct gathering of the Lord's people.

Baptism most fundamentally is the sign of God's covenant and is properly administered in the context of the visible church by those called to disciple the nations, baptising and teaching them (Matt 28:19-20). Those who believe already have the benefits which are signified and sealed in baptism so baptism itself is not essential to salvation. Baptism's necessity arises not from some inherent efficacy but because of Christ's command. Wilful disobedience to this command is sin, but there is no sin where the failure to be baptised arises without any fault in the person. Such a person belongs to the covenant which is why he or she would be baptised if that were possible.

When we come to the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:20) the essence of the Supper is not whether the bread is leavened or unleavened or whether the fruit of the vine is fermented or unfermented or white or red, or even, in extremity, if it is wine at all. These staples to sustain life are sacramental symbols of Christ who is our life, and serve to aid our

communion with the crucified and risen Lord. In the Supper the 'breaking of bread' - an expression used at ordinary meals too - is a significant action but the Supper must not be made a kind of passion play. Rather it points to the result of Christ's self-offering which nourishes our souls for eternal life. It is indeed Commemoration of the once-for-all sacrifice, Communion with the one who has been raised, and an anticipation in the Consummation in the marriage supper of the Lamb. So we do not celebrate at an altar but at a table which speaks of the fellowship with the One who has reconciled us to God by his death and who is now present with us at the table. That's a key point because it is the context of a meal with the Risen Lord that is an essential element (1 Cor 10:17). Hence it is also termed 'the table of the Lord' (1 Cor 11:27), an occasion on which we share one loaf and a cup for which we give thanks (1 Cor 10:16-17). Indeed, our Reformed fathers rejected the hosts or wafers used in the Mass by Roman Catholics precisely because they were not elements of an ordinary meal.

So it is in the context of the church as the assembly of God's new covenant community that the sacramental meal is observed and God administers his grace to us in a way different from but still subordinate to the Word. In a time like today's pandemic, when what is normal is taken from us by the greater obligation to preserve our own life and that of others, we still have the word of God to which the sacraments are always subordinate. In our homes we may read the Word and look in faith to the Saviour and know his blessing through the Spirit. We may even have live-streamed audio or video messages although these are not a full substitute for our church gathering. How we miss the worship and the fellowship! That we cannot observe the Supper in all its physicality in 'the church' as the gathered people of God is something we should miss just as we miss the regular worship services. If we cannot feast with the Lord in this manner we must accept his providence; meanwhile we fast and long for the coming of a renewal of the gathered fellowship.

In many places around the world there are small gatherings of a few families without their own pastor and one could certainly contemplate one of the elders, although not ordained as a minister of word and sacrament, being commissioned to administer the Supper even as he may also be preaching as he is able. These are provisions that aim to maintain in exceptional circumstances the essence of church life. But to have a situation where outside the visible church sacraments are administered by those not called to office is perhaps well-intentioned but downplays the Biblical teaching in this area. Rather let us be more conscious of our loss when we cannot gather together than upon insisting on or justifying an individualism by doing our own thing in a way that pays insufficient regard to Christ's institutions and the gathered community of the redeemed. And let us look forward to the promise of Matthew 26:29!

Prepared 12 April 2020 at the instigation of Dr Sam Logan for the website of the *World Reformed Fellowship*: [wrfnet.org](http://wrfnet.org)

## PSALM 11

**What can the righteous do?**

Rev. George Ball, PCEA Taree

**W**e don't know the exact circumstances behind this psalm of David. It may be set in the days of Saul. His life was in real danger; things were so bad that he was being advised to flee like a bird – just run away - give up – move on - throw in the towel. Ever felt like that? You feel demoralised, discouraged and hopeless. You think to yourself, 'That's it, I've had enough, what's the point of carrying on? What's the use?'. Perhaps this psalm is for you?

**1. The Counsel of Despair He Received (1-3).**

In this critical hour David received some demoralising advice (perhaps from well-meaning friends?) What they say is recorded in verses 1-3. (*The NIV and ESV correctly includes this whole section in quotation marks. Whereas the NKJV restricts the quotation to verse 1b*). David is advised to, '**Flee like a bird to your mountain**'. 'Get as far away as you can'! Why?

**Verse 2** fleshes out the nature of the crisis. The wicked were in process of carrying out their deadly plans. It could be a literal assassination attempt; or a character assassination. The wicked were subtle – they lurked in the shadows of darkness (cf. Ps. 10: 8-9).

**Verse 3:** The most disturbing thing of all is that the wicked seem to be successful. It had the upper hand. The pillars of a just and moral society were crumbling. (*It could well be set in the days of Saul – who was a moral and spiritual disaster*). David's advisers despairingly ask, '**What can the righteous do**'? The expected answer is: 'Nothing'! 'Things are so bad, David, there's nothing you can do'! The best thing – indeed the only thing – is flee. It's a counsel of despair.

**Verses 1-3** could well be a commentary on the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The world is incredibly wicked and dangerous. To quote some headlines from the current Barnabas Prayer Focus (it could be almost any week). *East Africa and Pakistan* - coronavirus infection cases rocket in locust-infested regions. *Myanmar (Burma)* - military jets open fire on Christian Chin villages killing 21 people. *Pakistan* - Christian farm labourer tortured to death for washing at Muslim owned well. *Nigeria* - elders hold service in burnt out church after Boko Haram lays waste to Christian village.

While we are saved from such terrible physical persecution in this country – never has the Christian faith been so much attacked and maligned. The traditional Judaeo - Christian values that have undergirded our society have been destroyed. It was once assumed there is a God in Heaven. If there is a God – he or she or it – must be confined to one's own private lives. God must not be brought into the public square or He (and you) will be ridiculed. It was once assumed that the 10 commandments were the basis of a moral society, but now we know better; good is now called evil; and evil is called good.

A foundational pillar of society was removed when our nation voted for same sex marriage. But there's more in store. Children are now told they can choose their gender. Gender is no longer fixed or absolute. The Sydney Morning Herald's editorial on Tuesday (28<sup>th</sup> January 2020) sums up the mood of our age. It was all about Margaret Court. It was entitled, '*Court's a champion but her views have dulled her legacy*'. This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her winning four slams in one season. The column concluded, '*The Herald strongly disagrees with Court. Her stance that homosexuality is a choice, is hurtful to many people and is just plain wrong. After so much debate and considering how quickly same-sex marriage has become a daily occurrence without fanfare, it begs the question why it took so long for politicians to make it happen. It should also highlight to Court how counter to mainstream Australia her views are*'. This was the final straw for me. After being a loyal customer for many years I promptly terminated my subscription to the SMH because of its consistent bashing of the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

**'When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do'**? Do we throw up our hands in despair? Do we admit defeat? Do we just let the world go to hell? It's tempting to run away and resign all responsibility. If we don't run away physically – we can run away emotionally and spiritually from any meaningful involvement in the world – we can give up praying and caring and witnessing. We can run away by longing for a return to the good old days (that never existed). But none of these are an option for the believer.

WDDD? (*What Did David Do?*)

**2. The Confidence of Faith He Affirmed (1a, 4-7).**

*He rejected the voice of fear and defeat.* He declares in verse 1, '**In the LORD I have taken refuge**' (Motyer). This was his default position and he's wasn't going to change now, despite danger and discouragement. This is an example of David doing what he often did – he talked to himself – as for example in Ps. 42: 5 and 11. '*Why are you cast down, O my soul*'? And in Ps. 103: 1-2, '*Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me*'. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has said, '*one of our main problems in the Christian life is that we tend to spend too much time listening to ourselves, and not enough time talking to ourselves*'.

*He affirmed the Sovereignty of God.* He says, '**The LORD is in His holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven**' (4). The foundations may appear to be crumbling, but the LORD hasn't abdicated His throne. 'Nothing happens in Heaven above, or on the earth around, or in hell below that He does not ordain and overrule'. It may not appear that way, but things are not always what they appear. There is no better picture of that than when Jesus was on the Cross. It appeared God's plans were defeated and in disarray; it appeared Jesus was a helpless victim. But it was all according to God's predestined plan (Acts 4: 28).

*He recognised the Scrutiny of God* (4c-5a). He says, '**His eyes see, His eyelids test the children of men**' (4c). When it appears that the Lord is blind and ignorant and doesn't have a clue; David reassures us that He sees and knows everything.

'Perhaps the eyelids imply the thought of screwing up one's eyes to examine something closely'. *'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good'* (Prov. 15: 3). He says further, '**The LORD tests** (or examines) **the righteous**' (5a). He recognises that these trials are not without a purpose. God is using them to refine us. This is the kind of testing that Job experienced. His foundations were shaken to the core. In one day, he lost his wealth, his family and the support of his wife. Yet he said, *'He knows the way I take; when He has tried me, I shall come out as gold'* (Job 23: 10). Peter writes, *'You have been grieved by various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ'* (1 Peter 1: 6-7).

He believed in the Judgement of God. He says, '**His soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Let Him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulphur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup'** (5b-6). The Lord detests the wicked and the violent. He is adamantly and eternally angry with everyone who is evil and does evil. He's not bland and weak and soppy. He is a righteous God who hates sin (7).

The fire and brimstone remind us of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19: 24). God has appointed a day when He will destroy forever all sin and wickedness. Peter writes, *'the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of the ungodly'* (2 Peter 3: 7).

Finally, he was convinced of the ultimate salvation and glorification of His people (7). He writes, '**the upright shall behold his face**'. He also writes in Ps. 17:15, *'As for me I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I am awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness'*. Job testified, *'After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me'* (Job 19: 26-27). Jesus said, '**Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God** (Matt. 5:8). John says of the redeemed, '**they will see His face**' (Rev. 22: 4).

Dale Ralph Davis recounts the story of William Montague Dyke. *When William was 10, he was blinded in an accident. Despite his disability he gained honours at university. He also fell in love with the daughter of a high ranking British naval officer and they became engaged. Not long before the wedding, William had eye surgery in the hope that the operation would restore his sight. If it failed, he would be blind for the rest of his life. William insisted on keeping the bandages on until his wedding day. The first thing he wanted to see was his bride's face. As she came down the aisle, William's father began to unwind the bandage from around his son's head and eyes – still not knowing if the operation was a success. As William looked into the face of his new bride, he saw her for the first time and his words echoed through the cathedral, 'You are more beautiful than I ever imagined'. One day the bandages that cover our eyes will be removed. When we stand face to face with Jesus Christ and see His face for the first time, His glory will be far more splendid than anything we have ever imagined in this life.*

Which is why Paul can say, *'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us'* (Rom. 8: 18).

What can the righteous do today? David says, don't flee; don't fear; don't fret because of evil doers; don't focus on the crumbling foundations; don't focus on the enemy's success. But, *'Fix your eye on Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God'* (Heb. 12: 2).

This psalm was, of course, known and understood by Jesus. It is ultimately about Him. If ever a man was tempted to run away and flee from painful trial – it was Jesus. Remember His conflict in the garden; *'If it be possible let this cup pass from Me'*. Remember how throughout His ministry wicked men bent their bow to kill Him. Remember how they slandered Him and caused Him enormous pain. When He was on the Cross it seemed that the foundations were destroyed as evil men succeeded in their nefarious deeds. It seemed as though Heaven was against Him as it rained down fire and sulphur and a scorching wind. Even when He was on the Cross His enemies taunted Him to flee, *'If you are the Son of God come down and we will believe in you'*. But He didn't. He committed His righteous soul to God. He said, '**In the Lord I take refuge**' (1). His faith was vindicated. He was raised from the dead and has ascended to glory where now He beholds the face of the Father. He sits at God's right hand – the place of honour and authority. Because He reigns – we can say – '**in the Lord I take refuge**'.

## SEARCH WORK

### SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate omit questions 7 and 8

#### MATTHEW 8

1. What did the leper say to Jesus and how did Jesus answer? (2 verses)
2. Why did Jesus marvel at the centurion's faith?
3. Write out the verse in Isaiah 53 which was fulfilled by Jesus' healing the sick.
4. What did Jesus say and do when the disciples woke him during the storm?
5. When the two men possessed with demons met Jesus, what did they say to him?
6. What happened to the swine when the demons went into them? MATTHEW 9:1—13
7. What did Jesus do in order to show that he had power to forgive sins? How did the sick man respond? (2 verses)
8. How did Jesus answer when the Pharisees asked why he ate with sinners? (2 verses)

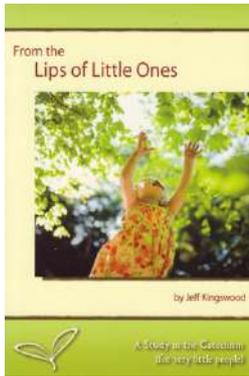
#### JUNIOR

#### MATTHEW 8

1. What did Jesus say as he touched the leper?
2. When Jesus told the centurion he would come and heal his servant, what was the centurion's answer? (2 verses)
3. What did Jesus do when his disciples woke him during the storm?
4. What happened to the swine after the demons went into them?

Answers to be sent to: Mrs Irene Steel, PO Box 942, EPPING NSW 2121 or Email: iesteel@gmail.com





**BOOK REVIEW**  
**From the Lips of Little Ones, A Study in the Catechism (for very little people).**

By Jeff Kingswood, a minister of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, in Canada, published 2008 by Crown & Covenant Publications. ISBN 9781884527241

*Reviewed by Anna F Ward*

The catechism on which this book is based is the Children’s Catechism of 1840, by Joseph Engels (1793-1861) who was a Presbyterian elder and school Principal in America. Jeff Kingswood has taken these questions and answers and added to them to make a helpful and beautifully designed book for systematically teaching Bible truths to little children. There are 145 questions, arranged over 73 weeks. Questions included are on creation, the Trinity, sin and salvation, the commandments, the Lord’s Prayer and the sacraments. Each week has a comment for the parents, then 1 to 3 questions and answers, then a Bible reading and short notes for each day from Monday to Friday.

I am not sure whether this catechism has been used much in the PCEA; perhaps most parents started their children on the Westminster Shorter Catechism when they started to read, as we did; and I wonder about the complexity of trying to teach one catechism to toddlers and another to school aged children. Having said that, this is a most useful book for Christian families and its use should be encouraged.

However, living in an age where there is widespread ignorance of the most basic facts about the Bible and Christianity, I think it could have much wider use, with a few changes to make it more adult. For example, for people in our communities who ask us what the Bible is really about – well give them this book. Or for Christians in churches where there is no Bible teaching who want to make a start in understanding. Or for people we meet from non-English speaking, non-Christian backgrounds, who have no idea what Christianity is or whose perception of it comes from the media. When we moved to our present home in 2015 we then had neighbours from mainland China whose daughter (about 9) heard of Christianity at school and her parents wanted to know about it. This would have been a great gift for them. There is a definite place in our society for such a book.

This book is highly recommended and perhaps the author and publisher might consider adaptation for wider outreach. My copy cost \$17.88 including postage, from Reformers Bookshop, Sydney. <[www.reformers.com.au](http://www.reformers.com.au)>



**A recent picture of the Knox Congregation, Wantirna**

1 March 2020

## NEWS FROM THE HUNTER

Messrs Fluit, George and Barnes were ordained and inducted in the Raymond Terrace Church at a combined service with Cardiff on 16 February 2020:



### Office-bearers of the Hunter PCEA

back row: Rev Robin Tso, Mr Ian Miller (Elder) Mr Alex Steel (Elder)

front row: Deacons: Dr John Fluit, Mr Ken George, Mr David Barnes, Mr Ian King, Mr Richard Alley



**Sunday School book awards** for 2019 were recently presented by Mr Tso to our preschool and infant participants. The presentation event and the books were greatly enjoyed by the children.

On the Lord's Day 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, the **Phoebe**, infant daughter of Mrs Amy and Dr Alfred Oringo was baptised by Rev. Robin Tso. The parents and congregation appreciated the attendance of grandparents Mrs Rhoda and Rev George Ball, and Alfred's parents, Edna and Alfredo.

#### Streaming services

The Hunter Congregation started live phone service 3 years ago to assist the sick and infirm in the congregation.

By the Lord's providence and grace, the telephone and online streaming services have proven a blessing to others who reside in areas that have no reformed witness, both within Australia and overseas. On a typical Lord's day, there are 10 to 15 regular listeners/viewers. We continue to pray that the Lord will bless this ministry. Live telephone service (9am, 11am and 5pm): (02) 4905-0620 passcode: 12345# Youtube stream (11am and 5pm): <http://stream.hunterpres.org>

Editor's Note. These news items from Ian Miller arrived at the end of February too late for March and were inadvertently crowded out in April. We are delighted to feature them now. Mr Tso has helped other NSW congregations in regard to the telephone service which has proved very convenient for older folk.