

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The Lord promises through the Prophet Isaiah “I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem.” Watchmen are necessary when the kingdom is threatened. They guard the walls. They tirelessly patrol, watch after watch, day and night, to warn the kingdom of the onset of an enemy attack. When the attack comes, the watchmen cry out – loudly, boldly, rousing the sleeping. Their cry is a warning, that the citizens of the kingdom might defend themselves against the attack.

God promises such watchmen to guard the faithful of the Kingdom of God. God Himself needs no protection. But you do. The Apostle warns “... your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” The enemy never rests, always seeking to breach the wall. As the Lord Himself says, the violent take the Kingdom by force.

Hear then, the cry of a watchman sent by God: “Unless I am convicted by scripture and plain reason--I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other--my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot, and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me. Amen.”

This is the warning cry of a watchman ordained by God, sent to warn the Church Militant of an enemy attack. But Isaiah promised that the watchmen would not cease to cry out. And some 70 volumes of the American Edition of *Luther's Works* testify to that fact.

He did not cease to cry out. He was faithful to the end, until that time at which it pleased the Lord of the Church to take him to His nearer presence. But before he succumbed to physical death, he thrice prayed the Words of Psalms 23 and 31: “*Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum. Redimisti me, Deus Veritatis*” – “Father, into Thine hands I commit my Spirit. You have redeemed me, O God of Truth”. Three times he prayed it and then fell silent.

Justus Jonas and Michael Coelius, at Luther's bedside, cried to him “Reverend Father, is it your intention to die steadfast in Christ and His doctrines as you have preached them?” “Yes”, Luther replied, drew a deep, gentle breath, and gave up his spirit. Later would be found the scrap of paper on which Luther wrote, mixing Latin and German: “*Wir sein Bettler, Hoc est Verum*”, “We are beggars, this is true.”

We are beggars before God. We, because of our sin, have no right to ask or expect anything from God, especially his favor, most especially a Christian death. St. Paul testifies to it: “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” All have sinned. He means you. You have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

You have succumbed to the attack of the evil foe, and that willingly, for it is in your flesh to do so. God gave you watchmen – the Prophets and Apostles and Evangelists. God gave you a watchman - your conscience. But the sin in which you were born, the sin which you have daily added to it, drowned out the voice of warning, and you opened the gate for the enemy to enter.

“Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” These Words, dear Christian, are the sweetest of Gospel. These too are the Words of a watchman sent by God.

For the Church was beset with false doctrine a millennium and a half before Luther was born. False teachers, however well meaning, had perverted the clear Word of God and changed the Christian religion into one of works, a religion in which sinners atoned for their own sins, as if that were possible.

Paul stood on the wall and cried out to the Kingdom “For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourself, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man boast.” Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel, even as he died for it, for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. It is the power of God unto salvation for you who believe.

For the Law and the Prophets, the Old Testament, witnessed to a righteousness of God apart from the Law, a righteousness through faith in in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. Abraham believed, and it was credited to him as righteousness. By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice. Adam and Eve believed the Promise of the Seed.

Yes, their works testified against them. Their failures were just as sinful as yours. But in the mercy and love of God, they were saved. They were saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ. So too were the Prophets and Apostles and Evangelists. And so too are you. You are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. It is He, and He alone, that is just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Him.

All the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And John’s testimony was like unto theirs, but John saw what many prophets and righteous men desired to see, and did not see it, and to hear, and did not hear it. John saw the Christ, God Incarnate, the Seed promised of old, the Savior promised by all the Prophets.

John heard His voice. John saw and believed in the new and better Lamb, the new and better ram. For the Christ he saw and proclaimed would not be caught in a thicket, but would willingly be placed on the cruciform altar of wood, the Only-begotten Son making the once-for-all sacrifice, reconciling the world to His Father by the shedding of His Blood.

Those that cried “Crucify!”, the armed guards that arrested our Lord, the hands that drove the spikes, and the soldiers outside the sealed tomb were among the violent men that tried to take the Kingdom by force. But their strength was not enough. Even death could not hold the Author of Life.

And as He lives, so does He give life to all those who believe in Him, through the forgiveness of sins. Through the forgiveness of your sins, which He grants to you simply by believing in Him, He makes that life, eternal life, your life. Not by works, lest any man boast. By grace, through faith in Christ.

Many God-sent watchmen have gone before you with the sign of faith. Their cry, however, still rings out. For the grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God remains forever. That Word, the Saving Word, still alerts you to the wiles of the evil foe.

That you be safe, protected in His Kingdom, kept until the day of your Lord's return in Glory, He places Himself with earthly elements this night that you taste of heaven. Believing, you eat and drink, and all the benefits of His cross and empty tomb are made yours. The King Himself preserves you, His Blood-bought subjects. And by His grace, the Kingdom ours remaineth.

*Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Sola Scriptura, Solus Christus.*

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.