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ACTS OF GOD.

The acts of God are of two kinds, *internal* acts and *external* acts.

INTERNAL ACTS OF GOD.

The internal acts of God are again of two kinds, *personal* internal acts and *essential* internal acts.

The personal internal acts of God are those acts which terminate within the Godhead and pertain to the divine Person or Persons by whom they are performed as peculiar to such Person or Persons. Thus in Ps. 2, 7 we read: "*The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day HAVE I BEGOTTEN thee.*" Here the act of begetting is predicated of THE LORD, but of the Lord as distinguished from another divine person, whom he addresses by the personal pronoun, *thee*, and names *his Son*, which implies that the Person speaking is the *Father* of the Person spoken to. The act whereby the Father is personally the Father is the act of generation or begetting, an act which is not an act of the Son, nor an act of the Holy Ghost, but a definite act of the first Person in the Trinity. This act is truly an *act*,

The Pulpit.

SERMON ON 1 PET. 3, 15.

“Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.”

Dearly Beloved in Christ:—

Dr. Luther says: “A preacher must not only *feed*, in such a way that he instruct the sheep how they shall be true Christians, but besides this he must ward off the wolves that they may not attack the sheep and seduce them with false doctrines and introduce error, since the devil does not rest. Now we find many people nowadays who like to see that the Gospel is preached, if we only do not cry out against the wolves and preach against the prelates. But even if I do preach rightly and do feed and teach the sheep faithfully, yet this is not watching and guarding the sheep sufficiently, that not wolves may come and again lead them astray. For what do I build up, if I pile up stones and then look on while another one pulls them down again? The wolf likes to see the sheep fed well, he loves them the more because they are fat; but this he cannot bear, that the dogs raise a hostile bark.”

God has made me an overseer of His flock to feed the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood. Acts 20, 28. My first and most blessed duty, then, is this, to proclaim unto you, my dear friends, the sweet and glorious Gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ; to feed you with the bread of heaven and to lead you to the waters of life which ripple from the cross of your Redeemer. And would to God there were no other duty for me to perform! But alas! we, you, my flock, and I, are not yet in heaven.

We are still wandering in the wilderness of this wicked world, beset on all sides by hungry wolves and roaring lions, who go about seeking to devour us, by leading us away from the narrow path of truth down into the gruesome depths of error, despair, unbelief and eternal perdition.

On the one hand we are surrounded by the ungodly world, which endeavors to induce us to run with them into their excess of riot, such as lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings and abominable idolatries. 1 Pet. 4, 3. 4. Against such enemies of your souls I must earnestly and persistently warn you, and exhort you in the Lord: Be not conformed to this world! Rom. 12, 2. Love not the world, neither the things that are in this world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 1 John 2, 15.

On the other hand we are assailed by spiritual wolves, who persistently try to break into the fold of our Church, that they either by cunning craftiness or by open force may carry some of our members away into their dens. These spiritual wolves are the false prophets, men who, coming in sheeps' clothing as angels of light, boast of great godliness, creep into private houses and established congregations and lead captive those who are not firmly founded in the word of truth, by corrupting the Word of God with their lies and false dreams. And so the Holy Ghost warns the Christians on almost every page of the Bible to beware of all false prophets and their lies and corrupt doctrines, even so it is my bounden duty to stand on the battlements of Zion, to sound the trumpet of warning, that my people may not be taken unawares by the enemy. I am bound to do this by the pains of God's wrath and my own damnation. For thus saith the Lord of the Church to everyone of His ministers: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth and give them warning from me;" and then He adds the awful threat that He will require the blood of all those who die in sin

because they have not been warned by the minister at the hands of such unfaithful watchman. Ezek. 3, 17—21. More than this. God's Word does not only command the minister to preach the pure Word and to warn his hearers against all error, it also requires him to "*stop the mouths*" of such false teachers, Tit. 1, 11, "to rebuke them sharply," v. 13, and to refute (convince) their teaching, v. 9.

It is my firm resolution to execute as best I can this solemn command of my Master, in whose vineyard I have been called to labor and who will ask me to give an account of my stewardship. With the help of God I will so fulfill my duties as a shepherd and watchman that on the last day I may "take you to record . . . that I am pure from the blood" of you all, Acts 20, 26; that I have not only faithfully fed you with the bread of the Gospel, but also have warned and defended you against the grievous wolves and their perverse doctrines. And above all will I unto my dying breath beg, exhort and warn you not to fall away from the pure and glorious confessions of our beloved Lutheran Church.

The Word of God tells us expressly that in the last times perilous days shall come, and that there shall come a general falling away and departing from the faith; that many will not endure sound doctrine but rather give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. Yes, our blessed Savior tells us that there shall "arise false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders: insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Matt. 24, 24. And he closes his admonition with these warning words: "Behold, I have told you before!"

The first aim and purpose of all false prophets is to cause doubt to arise in our hearts concerning God's Word and to induce us to sacrifice our faith either in part or entirely. Now, we are Lutherans. We know and are sure that we have the pure, unadulterated Word of God and the true and uncorrupted Sacraments. We openly confess be-

fore all the world that this is our firm conviction and refuse the hand of church fellowship to everybody who does not accept our faith as his own, or who holds and defends false, unscriptural doctrines. This position of ours is furiously assailed from all quarters. We are branded and denounced as a sect, as obscure, ignorant, thick-headed barbarians; as bigoted fanatics, as uncharitable hypocrites. We are openly charged with placing obstacles in the way of reform movements by refusing to lay aside our "denominational prejudices" and join the work of other churches who attempt to bring about the millennium. We hear the cry raised on all sides: Away with all creeds and confessions! Down with these barbaric barriers! Welcome everybody as a brother in Christ who confesses Christ to be the Son of God and accepts the divine obligation of the sabbath! But this is not all. It is even charged that creeds are an obstacle, a hindrance to come to a full and blessed union with Christ. From pulpits and platforms the watchword has been given out: "Give us less dogmatical theology and more practical Christianity! Let us have *less* creed and more Christ!" The real meaning of this is apparent. It is a cunningly devised snare; and as far as our Lutheran creed is concerned it is a flagrant falsehood standing in absolute contradiction to God's clear and most emphatic command. It is my purpose to faithfully warn you not to be deceived by such cunning and crafty words.

It is my purpose to answer this question to you to-night,
 WHAT DOES GOD'S WORD TEACH US CONCERNING CON-
 FESSON OF FAITH?

- I. *It most emphatically commands us to confess our faith;*
- II. *It most emphatically commands us to hold fast such profession without wavering.*

Thou, O Lord, sanctify and confirm us in Thy truth;
 Thy Word *is* truth. Amen.

I.

The terms "creed," "confession of faith," "symbol" all denote the same thing, only from different points of view. Now, what is a creed? The term comes from the latin word *credo*, which means: "I believe," and with which the Apostles' Creed begins. A creed, then, is "a definite summary of what is believed" (Webster, sub *creed*). This believing, of course, takes place in the heart and is invisible to the eyes of man. But as soon as I declare that which I believe in my heart with words of my mouth I have made this creed a confession or profession of my faith. It is possible, however, yea, even probable, that not all men will agree with me and my belief, and yet it is my desire and my duty to unite with those who hold the same faith as I do. How can this be done? Only in this way, that I confess and declare that which I believe to be God's revealed truth in certain definite and unmistakable terms and then invite all who accept this as their faith to come and unite with me or allow me to unite with them. In this way the *creed*, the confession of faith has become a "*symbol*" i. e., a standard or ensign by which those that hold the same faith are known and distinguished from those who differ from them.

Now, this faith of a Christian is not a vague, indefinite sentiment; no hypothetic opinion or view; no philosophical theory. It is a firm, unwavering conviction; an unconditional acceptance of and reliance in the absolute infallibility of every word written in the Bible. "Faith," says St. Paul, "cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Rom. 10, 17. Hence: Faith begins where the written word of Scripture begins; it accepts absolutely nothing but the written word; it believes every word as it is written; and finally, it stops where the written word stops. For the only object of faith is the written word! Whatever is taught and accepted in spiritual matters without a clear word of God written in the Bible is not faith but

unbelief and false. "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it," says our Lord.

But one might say: That is all well and true, of course, every one who would be a Christian must believe certain things contained in the Bible; but he need not noise his convictions about. I would reply: In the first place, a Christian must not only believe "certain things contained in the Bible," *he must believe the whole Bible, each and every word of it*; and he must do this under pain of God's displeasure and wrath. For the Bible is His word; He gave *all Scripture* by inspiration, 2 Tim. 3, 16, and He is *absolute Truth*. By doubting or refusing to accept one word of this, you insult His majesty by impeaching His veracity. Remember we are now not speaking of how much of the Scriptures a man must know and believe in order to be saved. That is quite another question. The question here is this: If I have the whole Bible; if I know its contents; if I know that it claims to be the revealed word of God, may I then knowingly reject any part thereof, and yet be a good Christian? Or, to bring the point out still clearer, is it true—as the Rev. Dr. D. . . . said last Sunday in his sermon on "Biblical Stumblingblocks"—is it true that "no belief or disbelief on such a subject as Samson's foxes or Jonah's whale, can affect man's salvation?" I say most emphatically, it is not true. It is a flagrant insult to God, a self-conceited criticism of His wisdom and power. And by disbelieving these passages of Scripture you as surely and as effectually deny your God, as if you denied the Gospel of Christ's atonement; for both are the word of one and the same God.

On the other hand, you are bound, strictly bound to make profession of such your faith before men. Our text says: "*Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.*" It is difficult to see how anyone who still claims to be a Christian can deny the necessity of a clear confession of faith;

or how he can advocate and participate in so-called "unsectarian" or "undenominational" churchfellowship in the face of such unequivocal and emphatic command of God! Let me warn you, my friends, never to forget, that it is your bounden duty to "always give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." You must confess your faith, whether such confession bring you friends or foes, weal or woe, honor or disgrace. And this confession must encompass not only a thing or two contained in the Bible, no, it must be thus: It is written! And whatsoever is written, that do I believe. If you do not this, you deny your God, and disobey His command.

But this is not all. If you are a true believer, you cannot help it, you must make such confession. Faith must speak out loudly the reasons of its hope. David says: "I believed, *therefore* I have spoken." With faith the desire to confess such faith is linked so closely together, that the one cannot be without the other, even as the flame cannot help giving out heat and light. St. Paul expresses this truth thus: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Rom. 10, 10. Now, what must follow from this? This, if you claim to have faith and refuse to confess it you then and there give evidence that your claim is a falsehood.

But it is argued: "We are opposed to creeds and confessions because they are the products of men; and we will not be bound by human rules and standards. The Bible alone is our guide." How now? Does this brilliant argument not place us poor confessionalists in an awful dilemma? Hardly. If you will examine it but for a moment in the light of God's Word, you will find that it is nothing but a miserable subterfuge of vain reason, which thereby hopes to gain the privilege of believing or rejecting whatever it pleases. Let me illustrate. You are approached by a man who says to you: "I believe the world has existed forever, what do you believe concerning this question?"

You answer: "I believe that God created the world out of nothing in six actual days." Now what is this? It is a confession of your faith concerning the creation. But how dare you, a sinful mortal, make a creed of that kind? You will say: "Why, I have but stated in a *few words* what the Bible, the Word of God, teaches in so and so many passages, which I believe to be the truth." Now, these last words are another confession of faith, another creed, for in them you declare it to be your belief, that the Bible is the Word of God, and, therefore, infallible truth. But your opponent is not to be silenced by such answers. He asks with a sneer: "Well, now tell me what do you believe concerning Samson's foxes, and that jawbone of an ass?" You promptly reply: "I believe that Samson caught three hundred foxes; tied them in pairs, tail to tail; fastened a firebrand to the tails, and then, letting them go into the fields, burnt the corn, olives and vineyards of the Philistines. I also believe that Samson actually slew a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass." But how dare you make such "*un-essentials*" articles of your faith? Simply because the Word of God clearly and expressly relates it in the 15th chapter of the book of Judges!

And right here it might be in order to say a few words about the question, why and how creeds and confessions originated in the Church. Already in the days of the Apostles false teachers, who, whilst they pretended to accept the Gospel, secretly corrupted the Word of God by introducing their own opinions. In order to guard against such heresies the Church of the first centuries formulated the so-called "Apostles' Creed" as a true and definite summary of the Christian doctrine. — Soon, however, men like Arius arose and under the guise of accepting and subscribing to the Apostles' Creed taught false doctrine concerning the divinity of Christ. They used the same terms as the orthodox Christians but gave them an entirely different meaning. To preserve and defend the true doctrine of the

Gospel concerning the person of Christ and to condemn and reject these blasphemous heresies, the Church, or the Synod of Nicea, A. D. 325, again publicly and solemnly confessed the scriptural truth in this important question by formulating and publishing the so-called "Nicene Creed;" which some years later was augmented by what is known as the "Athanasian Creed."

Then came popery, that abomination of Anti-Christ, and under an outward display of great concern for the Confessions of the Church it, in the course of time, corrupted and adulterated almost every fundamental doctrine of the Christian religion confessed in those creeds, especially the central doctrines of the Gospel, of sin and grace, of Christ's redemption and a sinner's justification before God. Luther's great life-work was to again bring forth and proclaim these Gospel truths; and being called upon to do so, he and his co-laborers compiled and published that glorious testimony of our beloved Church, the *Augsburg Confession*. They presented this document to Charles V and the world at large, not as a statement of their private *opinions*, but as a brief and clear explanation and exposition of God's Word. Yea, they close that grand confession of their faith with these words: "If any one should be found who has an objection to them" — the foregoing articles — "we are ready to give him further information with *reasons from Holy Writ*," i. e., they stand ready to prove every statement in their confession from the Scriptures, whence it had been taken.

Ere long, however, grievous wolves arose in the very midst of our *own* Church having been infected by all manner of calvinistic, sacramentarian, synergistic heresies began to undermine the foundations of the true Lutheran Church. Although they formally and nominally subscribed to the Augsburg Confession, still they taught doctrines which were expressly condemned therein as being un-scriptural. Then the Lutheran Church once more set to work and from the Fountain of Truth, the Bible, set forth in a clear, con-

cise, exhaustive and conclusive manner the great doctrines of the Gospel, especially those of sin, free will, conversion and justification, the Sacraments and the election of grace, in that much despised but nevertheless sublimely grand confession, the *Formula of Concord*.

You see from this sketch that confessions were formulated by the Church because she, the handmaiden of the Lord, in obedience to her Master's command, cheerfully and boldly made profession of her faith, testifying to the truth and rejecting and condemning as heretical and false every doctrine repugnant to the Word of God. True, if our confessions were mere fabrications of men's fancies, then they would not be worth the paper on which they were written, much less could they bind our conscience to conformity. What Bible-Christian cares a whit for all the matter contained in the ponderous volume of the popish canonical law, in the decrees and canons of the Council of Trent, in the papal bulls? They have no ground in God's Word. And this holds good of all other confessions or parts of confessions which do not agree with the Scriptures. But such is not the case with *our* confessions. For 337 years the defiant challenge of our Church has stood before the world, that whoever thinks that he is able to do so shall come forth and prove that they contain *one* doctrine which is not in absolute harmony with God's Word! But this proof has never yet been brought.

Therefore, my dear Lutheran friends, we, you and I, do no more than God commands us to do, if we boldly and steadfastly confess our faith before all men *always!*

II.

It is highly improbable that we would incur the displeasure and scorn of our adversaries in such a degree as we do if we were ready to say to them: "This is *our* honest belief and confession. But we do not pretend to have the truth alone. You believe just about the *opposite* of what

we believe; but that shall not keep us from conceding that you have the full truth also." Satan is well satisfied to see the truth preached—if he cannot help it—as long as error is not exposed, testified against and condemned. He knows very well that men will a thousand times sooner follow his lies than the truth of God. You will find this statement confirmed in the history of the Church. As soon as God's witnesses lifted up their voices and cried out against false doctrines, lies and abomination in holy places they were doomed to hatred, persecution and death. And in our unionistic and indifferent times, thousands join in the syncretistic chant which runs thus: "In essentials"—but you must not ask for a definition of these essentials, that would bring disharmony into the "sweet music"—"in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in *all things* charity!" And this hymn is sung to the old satanic tune: "We all believe in a deity—the Christian, Jew, Turk and Parsee!" It is said: whatever the form of our religion, whatever the name of our deity may be, whether Jehovah, or Buddha, or Shiwa, or Manitou, or Allah, or Supreme Architect of the universe, that makes no difference, for we all mean the same one and only God.

My friends, you shudder at such fearful blasphemy. But I ask you before God, am I not saying the truth? Did we not behold this sickening sight at the so-called Parliament of Religions at Chicago, where Christians, Jews, Turks and Heathen sat and prayed together and said all kinds of nice things about universal brotherhood to each other? Was not this abomination originated by a man who claims to be a minister of Christ? Was it not endorsed and fostered and promoted by men, high and low, who bear the Christian name?

But why go into the distance! Let us look about in our immediate neighborhood. Do we not behold this same pitiful spectacle right here at our very doors? Do we not see Christians sitting in assemblies which force them by terrible oaths to "leave their religious prejudices at the

door;" to never speak of their creed in such assemblies, and never to refuse to join with Jew or Turk or Agnostic in the "worship at one common altar?" Do we not see the spectacle of Christian ministers desecrating their holy office by sitting together with those who ridicule their faith and brand it as "old fogyism"? Yes, have they not even opened their pulpits to such lying spirits, male and female?

Oh, my God, has it come to this? Has the Church of God been brought so low that she, the beautiful bride of the Lord, must cringe at Satan's throne; that her servants burn frankincense before the devil's shrine? If that be the case, and it is, oh, then let us pray the Lord that He come with His last day and put an end to such misery!

But, meanwhile, what can *we* do? What will we do? What *must we* do? This: we must hold fast to the profession of our faith without wavering! This is God's clear command. Our faith rests entirely on God's Word, and therefore we cannot sacrifice one jot of our confessions; for by doing so we would concede that at least in some respects our faith is not derived from the Word of God. The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible is the source and norm of our faith. By sacrificing *one word* of it we deny it all. Therefore, before we can give up a single article of our faith we must be convinced from clear passages of Scripture that it is false; otherwise we dare not and must not sacrifice it by pains of eternal damnation. We must say as did Luther before Charles V at Worms: "Unless I be convicted of error by clear testimonies of Scripture . . . recognizing as I do no other guide than the Bible, the Word of God—I cannot and will not retract. . . . Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen!" *That*, my friends, is holding fast the profession of faith without wavering. No, instead of sacrificing any part of our faith, we must rather contend, *fight for it*, fight earnestly, fight valiantly, fight to our dying day! For thus says the Word of our God: "I exhort you that ye should earnestly

contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Jude 3. And in Revelations our Savior says: "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown," chap. 3, 11.

But here comes a would-be friend of ours and advises us: "Well, then, keep your faith for yourselves as strictly as you please, but do not let that keep you from keeping fellowship with us in external works of the Church, such as missions, charities, social reform movements," etc. My friend, we cannot do that either. For, in the first place, God expressly demands of His children that their union be a unity of the *Spirit* (Eph. 4, 3); that they have one faith and one baptism (v. 5); that they be like-minded (Rom. 15, 5); *all of one mind* (1 Pet. 3, 8); that they all *speak the same thing*; that they be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the *same judgment* (1 Cor. 1, 10). Isn't that plain enough? But here is another Word of God, which is still plainer, and to which I would especially call your attention: "A man that is an heretic . . . *reject*," Tit. 3, 10. And again: "If a man teach otherwise and consent not to the wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness . . . *from such withdraw thyself*," 1 Tim. 6, 5. And why *must* we withdraw from such a man? Listen: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed, for he that biddeth him God speed is *partaker of his evil deeds*," 2 John 10, 11.

I have done. I have testified to you the clear command of your God, as to how you must stand concerning your faith. I can do no more. He that will not heed my warnings and sacrifice his faith does so at his own peril. I am pure from his blood. But God grant that we all may constantly heed the solemn warning of the Holy Spirit:

"*Hold fast to the profession of your faith without wavering.*" Amen.

J. A. F.

DEDICATION SERMON.

GEN. 28, 17.

"This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

[The *Exordium* of this sermon, having been designated for a special occasion, is here omitted.]

With the aid of God's Holy Spirit the subject of my discourse shall be:

A TRUE LUTHERAN CHURCH,

- I. *a house of God, and,*
- II. *a gate of heaven.*

I.

It was Jacob the patriarch, the son of Isaac, who says in our text of a certain place, "*This is none other but the house of God.*" How did Jacob come to say this, and of what place did he say it? Jacob, as the previous context shows, had left his father's house and was traveling to a strange land where he had never been before. He had not run away from home. His father and mother had told him to go to his uncle's and stay there, because it was no longer safe for him to remain at home, his brother Esau having in mind to kill him. His aged parents wept and kissed him and blessed him when he bade them farewell. All by himself did the young man proceed on his journey, and after traveling on foot all day, when night came on and the sun was set, he stopped at the place where he chanced to be and made preparations to stay over night. "He took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep." And what came to pass? What happened to Jacob in that place? The Lord God appeared unto him in a dream, which was not an ordinary dream but a vision. He plainly saw the Lord God and heard Him say, "I am the Lord God of Abra-

ham, thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed." And when Jacob awoke from his dream, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." And he was afraid and said, "How dreadful"—he meant to say, How awe-inspiring—"is this place! this is none other but the house of God." So Jacob believed and for his own person was sure that the Lord was in the place where he had slept, and that that place was the house of God. And why did Jacob take that place for the house of God? Because God had there appeared unto him and had given him His divine promises.

Where, then, is the house of God? The house of God is in every place where God graciously manifests His divine glory, where He appears, where He speaks, where He makes His divine promises, as He did at that place where Jacob had slept, at the place which Jacob afterwards named Bethel, that is, house of God. I say, the house of God is in all such places. For did not David call the tabernacle and Solomon the temple where the Lord God manifested His glory and gave His divine promises the house of God? Did not God say explicitly in the 20th chapter of the book of Exodus, "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee and bless thee?" To be in the house of God you, therefore, need not necessarily enter a gorgeous cathedral with stained glass windows, frescoed walls and lofty spires. The most humble house of worship, the most unpretentious home, yea, the open field where there is no house at all, is the house of God, if God deals with you there and speaks to you and gives you His gracious promises, as He did at Bethel.

And now, to come down to the point, how about this Lutheran church edifice? Can this church be called the house of God? Most assuredly. For here, in this place, the very same things are being done that were done at Bethel. Here God will manifest His divine glory, here God

will speak to us, here God will make and even seal unto us His divine promises. This is a Lutheran church. And what is the first fundamental doctrine of the true Lutheran Church? It is this: The Bible, the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God and the only infallible source of Christian doctrine and rule of Christian life. Our motto is, the Bible, nothing but the Bible, and the whole Bible. The true Lutheran Church pledges its pastors to preach the Word of God and to interpret Scripture by Scripture. When a Lutheran pastor assumes a charge he must publicly affirm before his congregation that he will proclaim the divine Word and base upon the divine Word alone all his teaching, and faithfully perform his duty.

So the reason why this church must be called the house of God is, because the voice of God shall be heard in this place. The holy Word of God shall be proclaimed here in its purity and nothing taken therefrom and nothing added thereto. Never shall this pulpit be desecrated and defiled by a discourse on secular topics of a sensational, political, or philosophical character. Whosoever fills this pulpit to speak to an audience, shall stand here as an ambassador of the Lord and as a servant of Christ, and voice not his own sentiments, but the will and counsel of the Almighty as laid down for all generations unto the end of time in the Book of books, in the old reliable and never-erring Bible. Even as the Lord manifested Himself unto Jacob at Bethel and spoke to him in a dream, so shall the Lord God manifest Himself unto us in this place and speak to us, not in dreams, having given us the Scripture, but in His plain written Word which His servants proclaim for Him.

And not only because the Word of God is taught here in its purity, is this church the house of God, but also because the holy Sacraments are administered in this place according to God's ordinance. In the two Sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, administered according to their divine institution, God Himself is present and gra-

ciously deals with us. For in baptism God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the heavenly element, and in the Lord's Supper we receive Christ's true body and blood. Does not God graciously deal with us and seal unto us His divine promises by these Sacraments which He has commanded us to perform and to celebrate? Does not St. Paul say in his epistle to Titus, "God saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost"? and in his first epistle to the Corinthians, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"

Now the true Lutheran Church is just as scrupulous about the correct administration of the Sacraments as it is about the correct preaching of the Word. In this place the holy Sacraments are to be administered strictly according to their divine institution, and the doctrine of the Sacraments is to correspond strictly with the plain words of Scripture. Never shall this altar be defiled by substituting water for wine in the Lord's Supper, or by any other perversion of Christ's Sacrament. Never shall human reason here be permitted to object and say, as regards baptism, How can water do such great things and wash away sins? and concerning the Lord's Supper, How can Christ who ascended into heaven give us His body to eat and His blood to drink? What God says and demands in the Bible concerning these Sacraments is to be adhered to, maintained, and executed to the letter, and thus God will deal with us here, even as He dealt with Jacob at Bethel, when He appeared unto him and sealed to him His divine promises. This church is, therefore, the house of God in the truest sense of the word.

II.

And where God is, there is heaven. Where there is the house of God, there is the gate of heaven. And this is the second point in my discourse, to show you that this

church, being a true Lutheran church, is also the gate of heaven.

What was it that led Jacob to call the place where he had slept the gate of heaven? It was this. In his dream he beheld a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached into heaven. And he saw the angels of God ascending and descending on that ladder. Not only did the Lord God speak to him from the top and thus address him from afar off, but heaven and earth were connected by that ladder and one could ascend into heaven upon it. It was this that caused Jacob to call that spot, where in his vision the ladder rested upon the ground, the gate of heaven.

In the New Testament we are informed that on a certain time Christ passed the very place where Jacob had seen this remarkable vision. And what did Jesus say? He made the remark, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." Christ evidently meant to say, I am the true ladder that reaches into heaven. Whosoever believeth in Me he shall not fail to reach the heavenly mansions.

Jesus Christ, then, was prefigured by that ladder which Jacob saw in his vision. Jesus Christ is the connecting link which unites heaven and earth. Jesus Christ is the Mediator between God and man. To be admitted into heaven you must necessarily first pass through this gate which is Christ Jesus. You will never get to heaven on the strength of your own righteousness. The general idea among most people is that you must be good, that you must lead a moral life, that you must do the best you can to make yourself worthy of heaven, and that such good behavior and moral deportment will take you to the place of eternal happiness. But this idea is a delusion and a snare. Of course, you must lead a moral life, God demands it, it is your bounden duty. But the only ladder upon which you can ascend into heaven is Christ Jesus. You must accept

and believe what Jesus did for you, when in your stead He fulfilled all the precepts of the divine law and when by His innocent suffering and painful death on the cross He paid the penalty for your transgressions. You must admit before God that you are a sinner both by nature and by practice, and come to Jesus as a sinner and step upon and mount the ladder as a sinner, and thus you will ascend into heaven in spite of your iniquities.

This, my friends, is the great cardinal doctrine of the true Lutheran church, the doctrine that we can not be saved by our own good works and righteousness, but by Jesus' blood and righteousness alone. This is the doctrine which made Luther secede from the papacy, and the doctrine with which the true Lutheran church stands and falls. It is the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Where this doctrine is set forth, where Christ is thus presented to the people, where this ladder is set up with its top reaching into heaven, there is the gate of heaven, and nobody can miss the home of eternal bliss, if he ascends by faith.

And this precious saving doctrine is to be proclaimed in this church. Christ is to be Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end here. Every sermon preached here is to have Christ in it, Christ crucified, and every discourse is to contain the correct answer that must be given when the question is asked, What must I do to be saved? Ah, that Christ were preached in every church and from every pulpit! It must pain a true Christian to the heart when in the daily papers he reads some of the subjects upon which noted divines will preach on the following Sunday, when he beholds the trash upon which they endeavor to feed the immortal souls that are entrusted to their charge. A prominent preacher of England writes: "There are some preachers who can manage to deliver a sermon and leave out Christ's name altogether. Surely the true believer will stand like

Mary Magdalene over the sermon and say, They have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him! Take away Christ from a sermon and you have taken away its essence. The marrow of theology is Christ. The very bone and sinew of the Gospel is preaching Christ. A Christless sermon is the merriment of hell. A Christless sermon is a fearful waste of time. It incurs the blood of souls and dyes that man's skirts with gore who dares to preach it. But too much of Christ we cannot have. Give us Christ always, Christ ever. The monotony of Christ is sweet variety, and even the unity of Christ hath in it all the elements of harmony. Christ on His cross and on His throne, in the manger and in His tomb—Christ everywhere is sweet to us. We love His name, we adore His person, we delight to hear of His works." This is what an English divine has to say, and where is there a true Christian who must not agree with him in his denouncement of Christless sermons?

My friends, I have shown—and, I hope, to your satisfaction—that a true Lutheran church, such as the one in which we are assembled now, is the house of God, because there the Word of God is taught in its purity and the holy Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution, and that is also the gate of heaven, because Jesus Christ, who is the only way to heaven, is presented there as the Savior and Redeemer. May the Lord grant unto us all His grace and lead us in the narrow way that will take us into eternal glory. Amen.

H. S.
