

THE PRESENTATION OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

June 25, 1530

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EXEGETICAL, TEXTUAL NOTES ON THE SERMON

MATTHEW 10:26–33

It is hard to imagine the pressure of being publicly challenged to confess our faith in Jesus Christ—or else. But, in many ways, that’s what was happening when the Augsburg Confession was presented on June 25, 1530. There were all kinds of political things happening in the world of that day. There were wars and rumors of wars. There was a public price to pay for not “confessing” things, even the things of faith, the way the Empire wished, as well as the Church hierarchy. But, God has always cut through all the messes that we’ve made of things and offers a clear message of salvation for all to believe. That Confession “took its stand” that day for all to see, and many millions of people throughout history have been blessed because it did. The names change down through history, but the challenge remains for the Church, for people like you and me, to confess Christ, because it is good for our souls, our very lives. It’s a message that will bring salvation to all who believe, just because we were willing to share it with them too. That’s what this day of public confession means . . . So, confess away!

THE CONTEXT

1. **Don’t forget the context.** This discussion about “confessing Jesus” is a discussion about the reality of confessing the name of Jesus Christ publicly. Yes, it is good for your soul. Yes, it has the backing of the very Lord who will honor that faith, that confession, eternally before the Father. But, even more so, it is a duty (better, a joyful opportunity) of those who know and believe to share *this Good News* with anyone and everyone, even though there is sometimes fear, even temporary retribution from enemy forces. Why? Because this news saves. It is the power of God for life and salvation in spite of it all.

The key for all public confession of the Gospel is this: remember, the authority is Christ’s. See Matthew 10:1; 28:18–20. The key for the Church’s confession is always that it is faithful to the words of God in Scripture. The message, the gifts that deliver the message, they all are given to us by His authority. That authority rests on the person and work of Jesus Christ. That’s why this message has power. That’s why this message can be delivered even through “unworthy” vessels such as ourselves. (See 2 Corinthians 4:7–18—earthen vessels with the treasure of God’s Grace.)

Share this Good News! There is a “missional” dimension to all confession. It is not merely for our own sake, our own blessing, but also for those who hear the Good News of Jesus proclaimed from our churches or in our lives.

Application: We go to church not just for ourselves but also for our neighbors, because committing ourselves to publicly hear the Good News of Jesus for ourselves assures the fact that there is a church that others can go to when they need it too.

The Message is Good News. It needs proclaimers! See Matthew 9:35–38:

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

Part of our task as confessors of Jesus is to pray that more workers would be raised up among us for the unique task of spreading the Gospel from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth. Prayer keeps us focused on the fact that the scope of this message is bigger than any one of us, but we are privileged to be a part of the mission and ministry of Jesus with gifts and opportunities that He uniquely makes possible in and through our lives.

2. **Jesus sends out His sheep among wolves.** There will be challenges, obstacles, even persecutions, associated with this task. There is a price to pay to share the Gospel. But the Good News is that Jesus paid the full price for the message itself; think about it, someone else paid the price to “deliver it” to you. All present obstacles must be put in the context of Jesus’ overwhelming eternal victory and loving care as the ultimate Lamb among wolves who has already won the victory of salvation for us all. (See Matthew 10:32–33; Romans 8:31–39; Revelation 7.)

Application: Whatever we face in this life—whether fear from opposition, intimidation, or the struggles with our own sinful flesh and inadequacy—Christ Jesus fights for us, holds on to us, and assures us that whatever price we pay to receive and share His Good News, His is a message worth standing up for, even dying for—for ourselves, yes, and for the purpose of others receiving it too.

3. **Don’t forget Law/Gospel clarity.** Keep the statement of Jesus about “Confessing you before the Father, denying you to the Father” (cf. Matthew 10:32–33) in terms of the Gospel impact of this whole section. These words are not meant ultimately to be a warning to believers as much as they are a comfort. Earlier in the passage, Jesus spoke about the reality of being loved. “Are you not worth more than the sparrows?” (cf. Matthew 10:31). In the context of knowing “how loved you are,” to those who will confess Him before others, Jesus makes a promise, not a threat!

But that’s not to say that this message isn’t vitally important. So, the reality is this: to confess Christ, to believe in Christ, means life with the Father forever. Deny Him, deny

the life that only He can give. There is no middle ground. But, thanks be to God, the ground upon which we stand is big enough for all who will believe.

Application: Confessing Jesus should always flow from a thankful heart that knows that we are saved by grace through faith in Him alone.

4. **Homologeo:** to say the same thing. This is a key dynamic in Christian worship and life. We live in Christ alone. We trust in His Word. We literally think of ourselves as He speaks of us. Because we are baptized, we bear His name and all that that means. Because He has forgiven us, we are forgiven and restored in Him. Whatever He says, we speak back to Him in faith, knowing that what He says, that's what is true for us, now and forever. For Lutherans, then, the joy of life is to let Christ's Word have its say in our lives and its way through our lives to others. To say the same thing is a very "dynamic" (not static) way to believe and live if we understand the biblical use of the word.

5. **Phobos:** fear. There are times in the Bible when being in the very presence of Jesus causes fear. Remember the stilling of the storm when the disciples "filled with great fear" (Mark 4:41)? Then there are times when being Jesus' disciple causes fear as we realize that we are believers by grace alone, 100 percent sinners and saints, totally dependent on God and often afraid of what Satan, the world, and even our flesh can still do to us. The key: "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). And that perfect love is God incarnate in Jesus Christ for you. When you are totally at the mercy of God in Christ, that's the place to be. Don't be afraid!

ILLUSTRATION

The following is a humorous illustration of God's message having its way with us! It illustrates the power of confessing and sharing this message.

A preacher stood on the street corner preaching to anyone who would listen. A man approached him who looked like he had lived on the street forever.

"Can I help you?" asked the preacher.

"I think you can," said the bum.

"Would you like me to tell you about Jesus?"

"No."

"Would you like me to pray for you?"

"No."

"If you don't want me to tell you about Jesus, and you don't want me to pray for you, how can I help you?"

"You can give me your Bible."

"Why would you want my Bible if you have no interest in knowing more about Jesus?"

"I noticed that the pages of your Bible are very thin; I can use the pages to wrap a cigarette."

Wisdom came suddenly to the preacher, who said, "I'll give you the Bible if you will agree to read a page before you smoke it." The bum agreed, took his new Bible, and left.

The preacher thought he had seen the last of the bum and his Bible, but he could get another Bible.

Several months passed, and the preacher was on the street corner once again. A man came up to him dressed in a three-piece suit. “You don’t know me, do you?” said the man. “No. I’ve never seen you in my life.”

“Yes you have. I’m the man you gave a Bible to about four months ago.”

The preacher couldn’t believe his eyes and ears. “What happened? Tell me what happened!”

“Well, I smoked Matthew, and then I smoked Mark, and then I smoked Luke—and then John smoked me.”

Sometimes we forget that all of us had barriers at one time or another to receiving the Gospel that someone had to overcome. We might not have taken the Word seriously when it was first shared. We might have even made fun of the people who first shared it with us. Or we might have devalued its power at certain points in our lives. The point for all of us is that this message is the power of God to break down barriers, to overcome our weaknesses, to grant faith and salvation where there was only sin and death. Thank God that He didn’t “smoke” us, but as with those disciples on the way to Emmaus, He set our hearts on fire with the Good News of His grace. When that fire burns in our hearts, we can’t help but confess with our lips what we know is true in Jesus.

SERMON

CONFESS JESUS— IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR SOUL!

Matthew 10:32–33

So everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father who is in heaven.

Pastor: Christ is Risen!

Congregation: *He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!*

And the confession of His name by faith literally saves your life for eternity. Amen!

At the end of the movie *Braveheart*, there is a scene where the heroic character William Wallace utters a confession on his deathbed that shakes the world of his day. It is a moment that has come after years of seeing his people suffer at the hands of the ruling class in England, a moment that has come after years of warfare where he led armies of resistance seeking to free themselves and their people from such injustice. But, in the final scene, Wallace is now merely a captured insurrectionist, a rebel with nowhere to run. The priest comes to him right before his execution and demands of him a “confession.” The thinking of that compelling moment is this: “Confess, Wallace! It will be good for you to acknowledge the error of your ways, the futility of your fight. It will also be good for your people to see that your way ends *this* way. Confess Wallace, confess!” With Wallace’s last breath, he does utter a confession—and what a confession it was! But it was a confession of freedom, a proclamation that liberty was worth fighting for and yes, even at this point, worth dying for. His confession was that the slavery of injustice faced by his people would not last forever. With his last breath, he reminds all who would hear that this freedom would, in the end, prevail.

Wow, what a moment in history. What a compelling confession. Powerful stuff. If you have ever seen the movie *Braveheart*, you know what I mean. But as compelling as that scene is, it pales in significance to the power of confessing not just freedom in general—or political freedom or even personal freedom in particular, but confessing a freedom that has eternal ramifications. And that is the freedom that comes by the confession that Jesus Christ is your Savior by grace alone through faith alone!

That’s the confession that we are celebrating this day. Today, we are reminded that at another crucial point in history, men of God took their stand on the freedom that comes in and through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ alone. They were willing to die for it because there was nothing more important in this life than the proclamation of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus alone.

Today, in our message, we celebrate the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession on June 25, 1530, a day almost 500 years ago, when Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, and

German leaders of the Church put their lives at risk so that the Gospel of Jesus would be heard loud and clear again. The message was too important for them to remain silent. It was too important to compromise. It was time to confess, to proclaim the truth of Jesus' Good News and let the chips fall where they may.

As Margrave George the Confessor, a signer of the Augsburg Confession, said to the Emperor, "Before I would deny my God and His Gospel, I would rather kneel down before your Imperial Emperor and let you cut off my head."¹

Wow! What a moment . . . but better, what a *freedom*, the freedom that comes by faith in Jesus alone, a confession that was worth it. In that moment, those who confessed the teachings of the Augsburg Confession were doing what the Church has always done down through the ages—they were "saying the same thing that Jesus Christ had spoken in His Word" because their very lives, and the lives of all who believe, depended on it.

The word *confess* . . . it is often "under-translated" in people's minds as only "confess your sins." That's part of it for sure. But the word *confess* simply means to "say the same thing." And in the context of the Bible, it means to say the same thing that "Jesus says, that His Word says." Why? Because in Him is life. His words are living and active, and even faith in the name of Jesus will save your very soul. Confess Christ, say the same thing as Christ Jesus. It's good for your heart, for your soul, for your life, now and forever.

And so, now as then, believers in Jesus (His Church) have always been willing to go on record and confess the truths of the Bible no matter what. If the Bible said that God created the world, then we as believers would confess, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth." If the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh come to redeem and restore all people back to Himself, then believers would confess, "I believe in Jesus Christ, true God and true man, who for us, came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary for our salvation." To confess Him in faith is to receive all that He has accomplished for us before the Father. To confess Him is to hear the beautiful promise:

Everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:32–33)

But our text reminds us that there are ramifications to such a confession. Jesus reminded the disciples that there would be challenges and obstacles to face in proclaiming His Good News in their own lives and even greater obstacles to face in sharing that Good News with others.

In ministry, how many times have we seen the Gospel transform a person's life, but then create new challenges in family relationships, in personal relationships, even in the tension that comes when one seeks to live a different life than the one lived before becoming a believer. And how many times, too, have we seen the community around us caricature the Church, speak maliciously about its teachings, even its people, making

¹ Quoted in E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times* (St. Louis:Concordia, 1950), p. 725. Also quoted in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (July 1980): 157-58, note 9.

efforts to share Christ even more difficult as well. There's a lot of fear that comes with such changes, such challenges.

In the event of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, it wasn't merely difficulties the Lutheran princes and theologians faced. No, there was real danger. Especially for Luther this was a life-threatening moment. And even though persuaded not to be physically present at the event because to do so would mean his capture, possibly his death, Luther was surely there in the presentation of confession! Indeed, he lived much of his life under the threat of violence just for proclaiming Christ's Good News!

So, I think that it's fair to ask: Why would these people risk their lives for this public confession? What would anyone do that for?

I'm so very glad that you asked! The reason that Christians have publicly proclaimed this Jesus as their Savior no matter the risk is because, in Him alone, there is a freedom worth living and even dying for. In Him alone, there is a salvation that lasts. In Him alone, there is life, now and forever!

You'll see this clarity every time you read through the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke . . . because, as each one of the writers shares the events and words of Jesus, they climax that presentation with a question that Jesus Himself asks all of us: "Who do you say that I am?" When Peter says, "Lord, you are the Christ, the Son of God!" Jesus tells him, "this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:15, 17). Elsewhere, Peter got it right again when he said of Jesus, "Lord . . . You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). The point? There's nowhere else to go for what really matters.

So, let me continue to remind you, without exaggeration, of who this Jesus is who is doing the asking, who is calling us to the confession of faith in Him . . .

So, let me continue to remind you, without exaggeration, of who this Jesus is who is doing the asking, who is calling us to the confession of faith in Him. Hymnwriters down through the ages have said it well. Followers of Christ have sung His name in the midst of virtually every circumstance in life. Of Him, we say, we sing . . .

This Jesus . . .

He is Christ, Mighty Savior. He is Lord, King of Kings.

He's the one who breaks the darkness, liberation is in His wings.

He's the one who frees the prisoners, turning blindness into sight.

He's the one who preached the Gospel, by His cross, now there's day, by His cross,
no more night.

He is my Redeemer, my hope, my brother, my friend. He is my Savior, my peace,
my joy.

He is my courage in times of trouble, He is the light to light my way. He's my strength
when I feel weakness, He's my leader in the fray.

There is no other like this Jesus, fully man and fully God. He is one who knows my
struggles and overcomes them with His Word.

Trust Him . . .

When facing immovable obstacles, He's the one to make a way.

When overcome with guilt and shame, He's the one to whom we pray.

When facing temptation and trial, stand in the power of His name.

When at your wits' end, when there's nowhere else to turn, be comforted that the Lamb who was slain, has begun His reign, and there now is no stain, no pain, only gain for you IN HIM.

Jesus is my all in all, your all in all, when you are left only with Him, you have all that you need for life, now and forever.

That's the Jesus who holds us. That's the Jesus whom we hold dear . . .

And this Jesus . . . concerning this confession . . . He wants you to say the same thing, for He is your very life and salvation. That kind of confession is good for your soul, your life.

You see, Jesus . . . concerning this confession . . . He wants you to say the same thing, for He is your very life and salvation. That kind of confession is good for your soul, your life.

Why else would those men that day in 1530 confess this Jesus despite the dangers? It was good for their souls. But they weren't there just for themselves. No! They also knew and believed that others needed to hear this Good News for their very lives too.

The whole context of this teaching in Matthew 10 is in the midst of Jesus sending out His disciples to proclaim His message of salvation by grace for the whole world. These disciples were unsure of themselves, even afraid of what might happen as they did. But Jesus comforts them with the knowledge that,

“Whoever confesses Me before others, I will confess before My Father!” (cf. Matthew 10:32)

As He tells the disciples later, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). The message you share will not only bless others, it will keep you as well. Don't be afraid!

Now, one final thought. We do need to be careful with this word *confess*. Sometimes people make a big deal about “Did you confess properly?” as if “how” we confess, or how passionately we confess, or how loudly we confess, has anything to do with the salvation that comes with our confession of Jesus by faith. We even tend to take Jesus' words, “whoever confesses Me before men, I will confess them before My Father, whoever does not, neither will I confess them before My Father” (cf. Matthew 10:32–33) as a warning or a demand. No, it's just statement of reality, and better, it's a promise of His enduring love for you.

I think that what He is saying is “**Confess away**. Don't worry about whether I will confess you before My Father—I do! After all, I lived and died for you before you deserved it. Confess away! Not out of any guilt or fear or even any desire to somehow game the religious system. My love doesn't work that way. My salvation and life don't happen that way. Confessing My name is the most natural thing to do, when you know how much God loves you in Me.”

Confess away! It's good for your soul. It's good for others too, so don't be afraid of their initial reactions, or even if they ultimately reject you.

But as you confess away, be even more ready to rejoice in their responses when they receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior just because you shared that Good News with them.

Confess away! Confess the freedom, life, and salvation that come from knowing Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, by grace, through faith, in Him alone. It's good for your soul, it's good for your life, it's good for others too. Just think about it— many of us know Jesus as our Savior this very day because, nearly 500 years ago, a few people were willing to stand on this message, risk their lives for it, and share it with anyone who would listen. Thank God!

Confess Christ. That's a message worth dying for, worth living for, because *in Him* is life and salvation, now and forever to all who believe. Confess away.

AMEN!

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Published by Concordia Publishing House  
3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968

1-800-325-3040 • [www.cph.org](http://www.cph.org)

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