



A BIBLE STUDY ON JAN HUS

Confessor and Martyr

“JESUS CHRIST, OUR BLESSED SAVIOR”

(TLH 311; LW 236; LSB 627)

(Rom. 5:9–10; 1 Cor. 11:23–29; John 6:50–57; 1 John 1:9)

“Jan Hus ... [has] been burned, yet to this very day the Gospel remains.”

— Martin Luther

One hundred years before Martin Luther posted the 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, the Bohemian reformer Jan Hus (John Huss) suffered martyrdom at the Council of Constance for his unwavering proclamation of the Gospel. Hus paralleled Luther in many ways, calling the Roman Catholic Church back to the authority of Scripture and the centrality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Legend holds that at his death (July 6, 1415) Hus was prophetic in announcing, “You may very well burn this goose, but in a hundred years a swan will come that you will not be able to silence.” That singing swan was Martin Luther.

Recognizing Hus as an important confessor and reformer of the Church, Luther wondered if he, too, would be required to give his very life for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. In 1524, Luther completely revised the text of an old Latin hymn attributed to the Bohemian goose; Luther’s adaptation of this hymn about the teachings of the Lord’s Supper has been included in Lutheran hymnals ever since.

STANZA ONE AND TWO

1 Jesus Christ, our blessed Savior, / Turned away God’s wrath forever, / By His bitter grief and woe / He saved us from the evil foe.

2 As His pledge of love undying, / He, this precious food supplying, / Gives His body with the bread, / And with the wine the blood He shed.

Our Lord Jesus Himself makes the closest of connections between the institution of His holy Supper and His once-for-all sacrificial work upon the cross: “Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’” (MATT. 26:26–28).

1. Christ’s pledge to His own on Maundy Thursday was much more than a pious wish. What is the gift given by the Lord at the holy table and at the cross? How does Jesus reveal Himself as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, reclining at a wooden table and then reclining on a wooden cross? What words and phrases are repeated in the Gospels in the Holy Spirit-inspired accounts of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday?

2. As the congregation comes to the altar rail to receive the Lord’s Supper, what does she sing about the Pascal Lamb and the deliverance won and freely given to all who will receive it in faith (1 COR. 5:7; EX. 12:43–51; LEV. 16:20–22; JOHN 1:29; 2 COR. 5:21; ROM. 5:9–10)?

STANZAS THREE AND FOUR

3 Jesus here Himself is sharing, / Heed then how you are preparing, / For if you do not believe, / His judgment then you shall receive.

4 Praise the Father, who from heaven / To His own this food has given, / Who, to mend what we have done, / Gave into death His only Son.

The Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions announce that all who receive the Lord’s Supper receive the same thing: the very body and blood of Christ Jesus in, with and under the bread and wine of the altar.

3. Immediately after faithfully reporting the words of our Lord, St. Paul reminds the church that reception of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner is a sin against the Lord’s very body and blood. Why is God-given faith in Christ and His Word necessary for the proper reception of the Lord’s Supper (1 COR. 10:3–5)?

4. Luther’s Small Catechism couldn’t be clearer about what the Scriptures teach: “Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: ‘Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.’ But

anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words ‘for you’ require all hearts to believe” (“The Sacrament of the Altar”). (See also 1 COR. 11:27–29; 2 COR. 13:5.)

STANZAS FIVE AND SIX

5 *Firmly hold with faith unshaken/That this food is to be taken/By the sick who are distressed,/By hearts that long for peace and rest.*

6 *Agony and bitter labor/Were the cost of God’s high favor;/Do not come if you suppose/You need not Him who died and rose.*

Self-examination is the responsibility of those who receive Christ’s true body and blood in the Lord’s Supper (1 COR. 11:28). It is not the weak in faith that are commanded not to partake of the Lord’s Supper, but those who do not believe they are poor, miserable sinners who, outside of Jesus and His saving gifts, can never enjoy lasting peace and eternal rest.

5. How does the Bible proclaim deliverance from sin, death and the devil as completely free? How does the Bible proclaim deliverance from sin, death and the devil as the most costly thing in human history?

6. How does Jesus and His holy cross and Supper bring distress to the comfortable? How does Jesus and His holy cross and Supper bring comfort to the distressed?

STANZAS SEVEN AND EIGHT

7 *Christ says: “Come, all you that labor,/And receive My grace and favor: /Those who feel no pain or ill / Need no physician’s help or skill.*

8 *“For what purpose was My dying/If not for your justifying?/And what use this precious food/If you yourself were pure and good?”*

Martin Luther believed that in the holy Supper, “Our Lord is at one and the same time chef, cook, butler, host and food.” It is Jesus alone who reveals Himself as the bread of heaven given for the life of a sinful and dying world.

7. The living bread that came down from heaven confers His righteousness upon those who have no righteousness in themselves (JOHN 6:50–57; 1 COR. 1:30).

8. What does St. Paul argue in Phil. 3:1–11 about his outwardly righteous behavior under the law and its power to save and deliver? What does true Christian faith tightly hold to instead of trusting in weak and helpless sinful flesh?

STANZAS NINE AND TEN

9 *If your heart this truth professes/And your mouth your sin confesses,/You will be your Savior’s guest,/Be at His banquet truly blest.*

10 *Let this food your faith so nourish/That its fruit of love may flourish/And your neighbor learn from you/How much God’s wondrous love can do.*

In Christian faith, our mouths and our hearts bear witness to Christ’s substitutionary death and resurrection.

9. How is partaking in the Lord’s Supper a public witness? Why are St. Paul’s words in 1 Cor. 1:26 often spoken immediately after the words of institution (Divine Service, Setting One)? What significance does “professing” and “proclaiming” have for us as Christians gathered around the Lord’s Table?

10. How was true faith in Jesus and His cross and Supper a witness to those witnessing the last hours of Jan Hus? How is true faith in Jesus and His cross and Supper a witness to our neighbor?