



A BIBLE STUDY ON HANS & MARGARETHE (LINDEMANN) LUDER

PARENTS OF MARTIN LUTHER

“WHY SHOULD CROSS AND TRIAL GRIEVE ME?”

(LW 428; LSB 756)

(1 Peter 1:6–9; James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 4:12; Matt. 11:29–30)

Hans and Margarethe Luder were typical parents of their time. A harsh and unforgiving world had made them strict and pragmatic parents of their children and especially of their son, Martin. Wanting the best for their own family, Hans and Margarethe sacrificed much to provide the best opportunities for young Martin to get ahead. Studying to be a lawyer seemed to promise much in the way of financial security for everyone involved. Because Hans was convinced that this was the right path for his son, Martin was sent to better-than-average schools and commanded to be a better-than-average pupil. But Hans and Margarethe were not the only strong-willed personalities in the Luder household. Young Martin was wrestling with crosses and trials of his own in addition to the strict discipline of his parents: the sudden death of a close friend, a near-fatal injury, a close encounter with a lightening bolt — all on top of the wide-spread belief that the horrific judgment of the world by the Almighty was surely just around the corner.

But God’s good and gracious will was being done in Martin and those around him. Moses was doing his Law work, that Christ would then do His Gospel work. Through fallen and weak parents Martin not only experienced the condemnation of the Ten Commandments, but the beginnings of abandoning his own attempts to create for himself and his family a blessed future.

STANZA ONE

Why should cross and trial grieve me? / Christ is near / With His cheer; / Never will He leave me. / Who can rob me of the heaven / That God’s Son / For me won / When His life was given?

True God-given faith can sing of the Christian’s triumph over cross and trial only because it first sings of Christ’s triumph over cross and trial. The cross our Lord has freely taken upon Himself is the cross we deserved to bear. Jesus willingly bears the sins and just consequences of those sins and in victory announces from the cross that redemption is fulfilled in His innocent suffering and death.

In His Word and Sacraments Christ is near with His abiding presence and promise. Even under the suffering in this world that comes even to Christians, Christ remains redeemer and deliverer.

1. Young Martin knew full well the severity of transgressing the laws laid down at home and in school. Our old nature understands that the Law is present to show what is to be done and what is not to be done, and the severe consequences of disobedience. (1 TIM. 1:9; ROM. 2:14–15; ROM. 6:23)

2. Martin Luther found himself in an impossible situation. Should he fulfill the promise made to St. Anne and become a monk, or break that promise and obey his parents’ wish to pursue a law degree? Who’s wrath — heaven’s or his parents’ — should the young Martin allow to reign down upon him? Christ will later reveal that even in his disobedience, all is moving to produce good where there was no good to begin with (HEB. 11:3; ROM. 8:28).

STANZA TWO

When life’s troubles rise to meet me, / Though their weight / May be great, / They will not defeat me. / God, my loving Savior, sends them; / He who knows / All my woes / Knows how best to end them.

Martin Luther was baptized on November 11, the feast day of Martin, Bishop of Tours (AD 336–397), who was famous for his Christian charity as a Roman soldier, cutting his cloak in half to clothe a poor beggar. While the veneration of St. Martin of Tours was popular in Luther’s day, the Roman Catholic miners of Mansfeld looked to St. Anne (whom legend holds to be the mother of Mary) to be their patroness; looking to her for protection in their dangerous work beneath the earth. Young Martin may have believed that St. Anne was also the saint who protected believers — especially sailors — from storms.

3. In his *Large Catechism* Martin Luther will later write that one's god is what we cling to when we are tempted to despair in the face of suffering. When Christ is seen as a stern judge who is distant from the lives of Christians on earth, we are tempted to look elsewhere for help and rescue. Martin grew up being taught the common myth that St. Anne was more merciful than Christ. What shrines to false deliverers are we tempted to set up in our own homes and communities?

4. Martin made a quick contract with St. Anne on that fateful day when lightning brought the young man to his knees. "Save me, St. Anne, and I shall become a monk!" The devil, the world and our own fallen nature can do nothing but attempt to make a two-way contract with the Almighty. "I promise to do this if you will do that." This is not the way of the Gospel but the way of the Law. How are all the world's religions nothing but variations on this "contract under the Law" way of salvation? Why is the pure Gospel completely different? Why is so much of what calls itself Christianity today actually re-wrapped "if you do this, then God will save you"?

STANZA THREE

God gives me my days of gladness, / And I will / Trust Him still / When He sends me sadness. / God is good; / His love attends me / Day by day, / Come what may, / Guides me and defends me.

God's will towards His children is always best. This is what we confess when we offer a petition with the words, "according to your good and gracious will." We also learn in the explanation of the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer that God tempts no one; it is the temptations of the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh to believe that Christ is "not being fair." True faith says that whatever the Lord may bring or allow to come into our lives, He will continue to be my merciful defender and protector.

5. It is reported that this hymn by Paul Gerhardt is based in Ps. 73:23: "Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand." True Christian faith believes "nevertheless." Why is it so important to believe that — despite what my sinful nature tells me (even in the face of stern parents) — I will trust in the free gift of mercy and grace in Christ? (**HEBREWS 11**)

6. What does the Scripture and *Small Catechism's* explanation of the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer say about the difference between testing and temptation? (**JAMES 1:2-3; ROM. 13:14; 1 COR. 10:12-13; MATT. 18:7; GAL. 5:17**) What is the devil's desire when he tempts us? What is Jesus' desire when he tests us? What promise of Christ do we hold on to in the face of trial and temptation?

STANZA FOUR

From God's joy can nothing sever, / For I am His dear lamb, / He, my Shepherd ever. / I am His because He gave me / His own blood / For my good, / By His death to save me.

God spared nothing in securing salvation for us and for the world. Christian joy in the Gospel is a fruit of Christ's joy in redeeming us from eternal death and separation from his heavenly Father. As the beautiful Lutheran hymn "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth" proclaims, Christ gives his very life for us willingly, without complaint, saying, "All this I gladly suffer."

7. The Lutherans from Salzburg are reported to have sung this hymn of comfort while fleeing persecution, exiled by the local Roman Catholic authorities (1731–1732). (Polack. *Handbook to The Lutheran Hymnal* 368)

8. Young Martin would later learn the true joy of being Christ's precious lamb when he was graciously lead to discover the true Gospel of Christ and His Cross. How is the redeeming gift of Christ's life-blood given on the cross the sure and certain foundation for true Christian joy and peace?

STANZA FIVE

Now in Christ, death cannot slay me, / Though it might, / Day and night, / Trouble and dismay me. / Christ has made my death a portal / From the strife / Of this life / To His joy immortal!

Christ's death and resurrection in our place has redeemed everything. Although death appears to have the final word on the believer's life, the fruits of Christ's resurrection given to us at our Baptism will triumph on the Last Day. Even the great enemy of death has been defeated, despite the fallen world's belief that our Christian hope in the resurrection is nothing more than a silly fairy tale.

9. Martin Luther's family was surely acquainted with suffering and death. Life was harsh and fragile for the people of their day. What does the Christian's confession of faith in the words of the Creed say about the world's belief that death is the final end? Why is this our constant hope and joy?

10. The dying prayer of the author of this hymn, Paul Gerhardt, was the fifth stanza of this hymn; his memorial in the town of Gräfenhainichen in German Saxony is inscribed with the first line of the same stanza: "Kann uns doch kein Tod nicht töten." (Polack. *Handbook to The Lutheran Hymnal* 368)

