

*For the Life of the World*  
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## **When God Takes Aim**

What can you do when life crashes in? How do you keep going when everything you hold near and dear is taken from you? What happens when health is jeopardized, when you lose your job, when someone you love dies, when you face intractable physical or emotional pain? What if you feel like God is out to get you? What then?

Job's friends, you will recall, thought they knew the source of his suffering. The problem, they contended, was his sin. God punishes sinners; therefore if Job was suffering, he was the victim of his own sin. Job set them straight: behind his suffering was none other than God Himself.

God gives me up to the ungodly and casts me into the hands of the wicked.  
I was at ease, and he broke me apart; he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces; he set me up as his target; his archers surround me.  
He slashes open my kidneys and does not spare; he pours out my gall on the ground. He breaks me with breach upon breach; he runs upon me like a warrior.  
...although there is no violence in my hands, and my prayer is pure.  
(16:11-17)

Lutherans take death seriously. We are not glum-faced pessimists, but we're not pie-eyed optimists either. We are realists. We have no need to whitewash the uglier parts of human existence, we take our reality straight. Theologians of glory call good evil and evil good, Luther wrote in his 1518 Heidelberg Theses, "A theologian of the cross calls a thing what it actually is." (citation)

The world we live in, for all its joys and utter beauty, is enemy-occupied territory. Satan, the father of lies, the great deceiver, persuaded our first parents that they knew better than God. They considered their personal happiness the most important thing in the world, and that's how they brought sin into the world, and death by sin. "And so death spread to all men because all sinned." (Romans 5:12)

Now, there's the problem right there. In fact, this is the core problem of all humanity. Sinners die; that's the long and the short of it. Not just that one day our bodies cease to live, but that each and every day we're impacted by our own and others' sin. We can grin and bear it, we can smile and hope it goes away, but it doesn't. And it won't. Sorrow and pain are here to stay – until Jesus comes again in glory, that is. One day all trouble and sorrow shall be vanquished, but not yet. For now we enter the kingdom just as everyone who's gone on ahead of us -through much tribulation.

The “T word” is not in the vocabulary of much contemporary Christianity. We hear a lot of talk about purpose and fulfillment, but tribulation and hardship doesn’t seem to fit into the picture. The Jesus portrayed in much of popular Christianity in our time is a hero, a coach, and mentor - our example to help us reach our full potential.

There are two problems with that kind of Jesus. First, he is not the biblical Jesus, the one who came to do battle with sin, death, and hell, to wrestle victory from the jaws of defeat at the cross. Second, Jesus the coach is of no help when life caves in. What good will it do, after all, to put on our happy faces and play a game of “let’s pretend?” You can’t wish away evil. You can’t pretend that pain doesn’t hurt. You can’t just wave a wand and make everything all right when it’s not.

No more games, then. The way we live a stable life in an instable world is to tackle things head on. To call evil what it is and not whitewash it. To know a good thing when we see it, and embrace it as such, even when it hurts.

That’s the way it was for Jesus, you see. He did not enter into glory without first enduring the cross and pain. Many who saw Jesus as their hero and friend were shocked last year at what they saw in the blockbuster movie “The Passion of the Christ.” They weren’t prepared for all the blood and the gore, the suffering and the pain. But that’s just the point: Jesus is our Redeemer first and foremost. He came to be our ransom out from under sin, death, and hell. And the ransom price? His passion; His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.

No movie, of course, could capture the full agony of Calvary which remained hidden to the human eye. No camera could capture the immense spiritual agony the sinless Son of God endured as He was made to be sin for us, bearing the full brunt of the Father’s wrath against the sin of all the world, abandoned by His God and Father in His death because He took upon Himself the sins of all the world in His cross and by His death.

God took aim at God at Calvary. Jesus, the eternal Son of the Father, one with God from all eternity, was the target of His Father’s wrath. Though He had not one sin of His own, He took the sins of all mankind into Himself. Therefore He was stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. (Isaiah 53:4)

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” Most of us know that verse quite well. But perhaps we have never pondered the full depth of its meaning. What it means is that God put His only begotten Son in our place and punished Him instead of us. God the Father put His own beloved Son into the crosshairs of His wrath, then squeezed the trigger - to free us all from the penalty of our own sin.

The real Jesus is no mere example, coach, or cosmic buddy. Risen now triumphantly and victor over sin, death, and the devil, He is both our Savior and our Lord - for He has purchased us with His own blood and made us to be a kingdom to serve His God and Father. Now we belong to Him, and He to us. There is nothing in all creation that can ever separate us from His love.

And that “nothing” includes everything you can think of. Every doomsday scenario of pandemic, plague and terrorist attack – all those private fears for family, support, and health – all the personal pain and distress that seem to arise on every side; there is nothing anywhere in all the universe that can come between us and the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. So when life caves in, we remember this: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32)

God pours out His love in amazing ways. He brings life by means of death. He gives glory in the cross, exalts by bringing low, and comforts under cover of suffering, loss, and affliction. No, God’s not out to get you. He already has you as His own and will never let you go.

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