

## Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 40:21-31

<sup>21</sup> Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? <sup>22</sup> He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. <sup>23</sup> He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. <sup>24</sup> No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. <sup>25</sup> “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One. <sup>26</sup> Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. <sup>27</sup> Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God”? <sup>28</sup> Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. <sup>29</sup> He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. <sup>30</sup> Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; <sup>31</sup> but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

**40:21-31** Sixth-century Israelites in Babylon lived in exilic hopelessness (e.g., Psalm 137). Full of despair, the people doubted if the Lord could free them and bring them home. Is 40:12–20 announces that the Lord was—and is—the one and only God. He is transcendent over creation (40:12) and history (40:15–17). He is unlike the idols of Babylon (40:19–20); indeed, the Lord cannot be compared with anyone or anything else (40:18). The Lord is the Creator and King who exercises a full monopoly of power and authority. Contrary to the gods and goddesses of Babylon, the Lord is not a nationalistic deity or an individualistic idol. He is the only true God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

**40:21-23** These verses build on the theme set forth from 40:12–15. Not even the rulers of the nations, many of whom claim to be gods, are of any consequence compared to the Lord. The phrase “sits above the circle of the earth” (v 22) refers to the vault of the heavens, which—to the naked eye—appears to stretch from horizon to horizon. This is where the Lord sits, enthroned above the world. From this point, people look like grasshoppers (cf. Num 13:33). This vault is merely a curtain or tent canopy, which, one day, the Lord will tear up in order to reveal himself to the world (cf. Is 51:6; Rev 19:11). Marduk, the creator god in Babylonian religion, had to work by committee. He consulted with Ea, “the all-wise,” before making any decision. The Lord needs no one with whom to discuss his decisions. Compared to his mighty works, human authorities are *tohu* (“emptiness”; cf. Gen 1:2). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

**40:21** DO YOU NOT KNOW...NOT HEARD...BEEN TOLD...NOT UNDERSTOOD – The four questions of this verse are blunt challenges to all who create God in their own image and make idols. God has not hidden Himself. He has revealed Himself from the beginning. (PBC)

Rhetorical questions. Things they obviously should know. Not only could God's "eternal power and divine nature" be clearly perceived (Rm 1:20), but He also revealed Himself by His holy prophets (Lk 1:70). (TLSB)

There is certain tone of impatience, and even exasperation here. The prophet is speaking of certain elementary truths concerning which there should really be no need that he instruct the people of God. (Leupold)

This is the rebuke which follows the refutation. "Are you so mad and foolish? Have you not heard from the beginning? Have you not understood even though it has been sufficiently shown to you? Now you should know it. How are you going to excuse yourselves for your error?" It is as much as saying, "The very thing you worship ignorantly, that you do not know." In John 8:54 f. Christ says, "Of whom you say that He is your God. But you have not known Him." They confess that they have a notion of God, but they do not have knowledge of God. So he says here: "Since you have heard it said often enough, why do you do these things? God already exists, He cannot be formed, but He Himself gives breath and life to all." Every ungodly person grants: "If there is a God, He gives and helps and does not want to be helped." This is what the heathen demonstrate. Each one begged his own idol, Mars, Jupiter, and Venus, to help him. How, then, do you want to choose and shape God, to give Him things and help Him, when you should rather beseech Him in your needs and call upon Him? Why, then, do you invent a way in which you want to shape Him, as if He were not already God? (Luther)

These questions assume that the Spirit (40:13) is working through the Word of forgiveness (40:1) to enable the audience to understand Yahweh's will and ways. (CC)

*from the beginning.* God's work as Creator is emphasized in the rest of the chapter (cf. 37:26; 41:4, 26). (CSB)

Connections to Isaiah 6 that were in 40:1-11 continue in 40:21-31. This last section of chapter 40 implies that the curse of 6:9-10 is reversed by the power of the Gospel now proclaimed. (CC)

**40:22** *sits enthroned.* Cf. 66:1; see 37:16 and note. (CSB)

*circle.* Or "horizon." See Job 22:14; Pr 8:27. (CSB)

Firmament. Everything appears small before God. (TLSB)

This refers to the vault of the heavens, which – to the naked eye – appears to stretch from horizon to horizon. The cosmology revealed to Israel in the Scriptures is at home in the ancient world rather than in the modern world. In some ways the cosmic geography of the OT is comparable to that of Israel’s neighbors, although it is distinct in its revelation of how Yahweh operates in the world. (CC)

LIKE GRASSHOPPERS – Humans are like so many grasshoppers. Because of their sin, they are nothing like God. They are finite, temporal, imperfect, subject to changes of all kinds, and mortal. What arrogance for finite creatures to fashion God! If we want to know about God, we must humbly listen to what He tells us. (PBC)

He sits above the cherubim, and in His eyes we are grasshoppers that whirl and buzz with their wings. The prophet thus rejects most vehemently every kind of righteousness that despises the measureless mercy of God, which is beyond comprehension. This comparison with grasshoppers is frequently used in the Scriptures, as if to say, “Grasshoppers are easily shooed away.” All inhabitants of the earth are like this in the sight of God. They cannot bear God’s least judgment but are scattered by one word and breath of God. (Luther)

*stretches out the heavens ... like a tent.* See 42:5; 44:24; 51:13; Ps 19:4; 104:2. (CSB)

Possible references to the heavenly tabernacle (Heb 8:1–2). (TLSB)

As a man might with infinite ease spread out a light veil, so it in days of old cost the Lord no more effort when He for the first time created and “spread out the heavens.” Or, as a man pitches a tent, with ease in quick order, this being a common occupation among men, with the ease the Lord spread out the heavens like a tent to dwell in. (Leupold)

The prophet repeats himself in various ways to confute the daring of those who attempt to fashion God, because there is simply no comparison between the greatness of God and our littleness. (Luther)

**40:23** *princes ... rulers ... to nothing.* See v. 17; 2:22 and notes; cf. Jer 25:17–26; Da 2:21. (CSB)

Translated “emptiness” (v 17), “wasted” (24:10), “empty” (45:18), “void” (Jb 26:7). (TLSB)

God takes us and His prophet one step further. Even the great leaders of the world are nothing compared to God. The princes and rulers of this world come under the control of the God of the heavens. He controls their history. God exists far above the world He created; He rules the universe as a powerful monarch above all creation. (PBC)

In the ancient Near East, the monarchy was frequently considered to be a source of restoring divine order in the world. But Isaiah maintains that pagan potentates are the

cause of disorder. They often corrupt societies and lead them into darkness. Political heavyweights are less than lightweights (cf. Jn 19:10-11). (CC)

He is not condemning the princes and rulers but rather their plans. For their plans will be תהו, that is, nothing, as if they did not have root, sprout, or seed. Although these words can be understood as applying to the mercy of the princes, it is best to refer them to their plans. The ungodly are not so, not so but like dust which rises from the ground, as Christ says (Matt. 15:13): “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted, etc.” Where are all the princes, Sadducees, and Pharisees? There is nothing left of them except the little that is remembered concerning them on earth. It must come out as though it had neither root nor seed. (Luther)

**40:24** In vv 6–7, people are like grass in its full growth, but here they are cut short, seen as barely sprouted seeds. (TLSB)

*whirlwind ... like chaff.* See 17:13 and note; 41:15–16. (CSB)

The storm blows the dried grass away as chaff. Cf Ps 1:4. (TLSB)

This echoes the earlier comparison of people to grass and flowers in 40:6–8. Princes and rulers—those who posture themselves as the real “power brokers”—are transient and nothing compared to the Lord (cf. Jn 19:10–11). Contextually, the stubble refers to Cyrus’s enemies (41:2), one of which is Babylon (47:14). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

In another powerful figure their (princes & rulers) vanishing is described. They are likened to plants, which have just scarcely been planted or sown, or have just begun to take root, when, because He is done with them, the Almighty One blows upon them and before the hot blast of His mouth they first wither and then are carried away by the storm. How great must He be who disposes of earth’s mightiest men with such consummate ease! (Leupold)

This is taken from Ps. 1:4. Not only will they be uprooted and pulled out of the ground, but also the whirlwind and breath of God will blow upon them, as you heard above and as you have already experienced. When the truth flowers again, all kinds of sects will wither like grass. (Luther)

Isaiah is so confident because he knows that when Yahweh delivered Israel from Egypt, His east wind blew locusts all night, (Ex 10:13), and it blew all night to part the Red Sea (Ex 14:21). This same wind shatters Tarshish ships (Ps 48:7; cf Ez 27:24-26) and dries up vegetation (Hos 13:15; cf Ez 17:10; 19:12). There is nothing Yahweh’s Spirit cannot do! The specific verb “to blow” that Isaiah employs appears elsewhere only in Ex 15:10. In this way, Israel is called to look at Babylon and other worldly superpowers from the perspective of what Yahweh did to the superpower Egypt at the Red Sea. When the people do so, they will realize that there is really only one Superpower. His name is Yahweh! (CC)

**40:25** See v. 18. Apparently some Israelite doubters were comparing their God with the gods of their captors, and they believed that the Lord was failing the test. (CSB)

Isaiah returns to the question he first raised in verse 18, but now it is a question God Himself asks. God, the Holy One who is high above and separate, has always wanted His creatures to know who He is and what He has done. (PBC)

The incomparable greatness of the Lord is still under consideration and now in light of a realm which He alone controls. But this is introduced by a reminder that nothing has in the present investigation been found to be in any sense worthy of comparison with Him or is in any sense actually like Him. (Leupold)

*Holy One.* See 1:4 and note. (CSB)

One of Isaiah's favorite titles for the Lord (1:4; 5:19; 10:17; 29:19; 43:3; 55:5). He is different and set apart from everyone and everything else. (TLSB)

Similar ideas to v 18, but here the Lord is "the Holy One," one of Isaiah's favorite titles (e.g., 1:4; 5:19; 10:17; 29:19; 43:3; 55:5). As the Holy One, the Lord is set apart from everyone and everything else—not only in essence, but also in moral perfection. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

The title "the Holy One" is the final assault against those who dare to compare Yahweh with the manmade deities. A more common title is "the Holy One of Israel," one of Isaiah's favorite titles for Yahweh. As the Holy One, Yahweh is poles apart from everyone and everything else. This title separates the uncreated Yahweh from His creation, since it is now tainted with sin. Likewise, Jesus, the uncreated, coeternal, and sinless Son of God, is called "the Holy One of God" in Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34; Jn 6:69 (see also 1 John 2:20; Rev 3:7). (CC)

**40:26** LIFT YOUR EYES – Now the prophet proceeds to encourage the weak, as if to say, "See how much you have when you do not set your hope on your own powers." Here the stars of heaven are spoken of not so much as regards their number and greatness but rather as regards their durability, because otherwise all are on the move and are changed, one after the other, while the stars are so fixed and established that not one of them will fall. So great is the permanence and durability which you must look for in Christ that even in corruptible things this example is applied. (Luther)

Since the Babylonians were astrologers, Isaiah urges that the stars do not rule history; rather, the Lord *alone* controls the destinies of people and nations. Israel had been warned not to worship the astral cults of her neighbors (e.g., Deut 4:19; 17:3), yet they succumbed (2 Ki 21:3), bringing about exile. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

*created.* See vv. 21–22 and notes. (CSB)

Yahweh's challenge "see who created these things (stars)" is a frontal assault against Babylon's worldview. [Yahweh warned Israel not to worship the astral deities of her neighbors (e.g., Deut 4:19; 17:2-5), yet the people succumbed to this temptation (e.g., 2 Kg 17:16; 22:1:3; Jer 7:18; 8:2; 44:17, Amos 5:26). And such idolatry brought about both the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles (e.g., 2 Kg 17:5-23; Jer 25:1-14).] The Babylonians were astrologers, and much of their intellectual and religious life was tied to astral worship (47:13), but the prophet maintains that stars do not rule history. Yahweh alone controls the destinies of people and nations. "Not one of the planets or stars dares be idle on parade when Yahweh is the drill sergeant. So why do obeisance to the infantry when the commander-in-chief invites your attention? Since the stars are part of Yahweh's army in heaven (24:21; cf. 45:12), He is able to deploy both heavenly and earthly powers (i.e., Cyrus and the Suffering Servant) to rescue Israel. (CC)

*brings out.* The Hebrew for this expression is used for bringing forth the constellations in Job 38:32. (CSB)

*starry host.* Also worshiped by the people (see 47:13; Jer 19:13). (CSB)

What a contrast to those who think that the stars control their destinies and who consult their horoscopes to discover what life will bring them. God controls the stars and us; the orbits of the planets and stars do not control us. (PBC)

*each by name.* See Ps 147:4. (CSB)

They are like a huge army that appears overhead as if created anew every night. The stars march across the sky in unbroken ranks. Nations viewed the stars as visible representations of the gods (Am 5:26). Israel succumbed to the temptation of worshiping the stars (2Ki 17:16; 21:3), which in turn brought about exile. (TLSB)

Amazing, isn't it! According to the *World Book Encyclopedia*, "with large telescopes astronomers can photograph over thirty billion stars. And we think there must be billions more beyond the reach of our most powerful telescopes." Not only is He able to name each one but also brings out each one every night.

One of the realms that is under His control is "the host of heaven." What makes this comparison all the more meaningful is the fact that especially in the land of the Babylonians, where the children Israel had been in bondage, the heavenly bodies were regarded astrologically, as controlling the affairs of men, that transpired down here on earth. Their control of these affairs was absolute, far beyond that of the gods themselves. Not so in the religion of Israel. There they appeared first of all merely as a part of the creation of God. "Who created these?" allows for only one answer: the God whom Israel worshipped. And as they once originated with Him, so they forever remain under His control, His, "who brings forth their host by number." The spectacle of the starry skies, night after night, is, frequently speaking, nothing other than a case where the Almighty Maker of the universe brings them out as a shepherd brings forth his flock.

Besides, the count is made, as it were, night after night, and the sum-total remains the same invariably. The figure may be regarded as blending into another one at this point: the Lord of this heavenly host is a shepherd, who calls forth these sheep of His, night for night, as the shepherd, who calls forth His sheep one by one out of the fold. As it were, in His astronomy He has them all named from the time when they were created and He may be thought of as remembering their name. It is not due to the laws of nature and their normal operation that the stars all appear nightly. It is rather the “result of the greatness of His might and the abundance of His strength” that “not one of them is ever missing.” The utmost simplicity of argument is blended with the greatest of insight in this illustration. (Leupold)

An ancient Near Eastern proverb states: “Many are the stars of heaven whose names no man knows. (Words of Ahiqar) Though they appear to be innumerable (cf. Gen 15:5; Heb 11:12), Yahweh created them all and calls each one by name (Ps. 147:4). Scientists estimate that the Milky Way is 104,000 light-years across and contains over 100 billion stars. To count them one by one would take a person over three thousand years. According to the latest probe of the Hubble Space Telescope, there are hundreds of billions more galaxies in Yahweh’s universe! The point is this: If Yahweh recalls each star by its name, how could He ever forget Israel (cf. 49:14), whom He also calls by name (43:1)? Jesus likewise knows our names (cf. Jn 40:12-26) and assures us that our heaven Father has numbered the very hairs on our heads (Mt. 10:30). (CC)

HIS GREAT POWER AND MIGHTY STRENGTH – It has never been discovered that one star since the beginning of the world ever got tired, because theirs is an infinite duration and power, so that each stays in his perfect orbit and performance. We, too, should be consoled in our faith in the greatness of God through the spoken Word of God, which conceals for us that limitless righteousness of God which consists in the forgiveness of sins and His free grace. (Luther)

*not one ... missing.* See 34:16 and note. (CSB)

By asserting the greatness of Yahweh and the smallness of idols, rulers, and the hosts of heaven (40:12-26), Isaiah has paved the way for his argument in 40:27-31. The prophet-poet, after having taken the intellectual and existential doubts of the people seriously, demolishing the credibility of all rivals and celebrating the incomparability of God, thus brings the disputation to a close with the most eloquent poetry of all. (CC)

**40:27–31** As in many psalms of praise, Isaiah now stresses the goodness of God after describing his majesty (vv. 12–26). Such a God is able to deliver and restore his distressed people if they will wait in faith for him to act. They are to trust in him and draw strength from him. (CSB)

**40:27** God’s promises seemed meaningless to His chosen people. However, their complaint showed a lack of faith that is reproved and challenged by God’s question: Why do you say such things? (TLSB)



WHY DO YOU...COMPLAIN – All too often we fail to depend on God’s power and tender interest in the affairs of His created world. God’s people are not beyond complaining that such a powerful and boundless God has forgotten them. Jacob and Israel are names for God’s people that recall the love of God and the origins of God’s OT people. God cared for Jacob, blessed him, and protected him. God wrestled with him and changed his name to Israel. Then God repeated the promise that the Savior would come through his descendants. All this God did out of grace and mercy. Jacob did not deserve any of it. (PBC)

*way. Condition. (CSB)*

In view of the way God cares for the stars of heaven and in view of the care God demonstrated in the past for His people, their complaints were groundless. If God can call the stars by name, He certainly could care for His people. If God demonstrated such love for the ancestor of His people, He would continue to care for them. God had pledged Himself to His people; He had bound Himself to them by promise. No matter what difficulties they faced, He was powerful enough to care for them. He loved them too much to abandon them. (PBC)

*hidden ... disregarded. Cf. 49:14; 54:8. (CSB)*

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick” (Prov 13:12). Israel will hit rock bottom in the exile because the people’s hope for return appears forever deferred. From the standpoint of Jacob/Israel in the sixth century BC, Jerusalem will be a pile of rubble (cf. Is 44:26-28) with Babylon firmly in control. The people will grow weary of Yahweh and will no longer call upon Him (e.g., 43:22). Imperial supremacy will appear endless, while any chance of returning home will look pointless. The scattered people will think that Yahweh can’t see them or that Yahweh doesn’t care. Yahweh counters this lament (like doubts in 49:14, 24) by affirming that He is both able and willing to rescue His people. (CC)

The Lord is the Creator and preserver of all things; he oversees the natural world, the nations, and all people (vv 21–26). So why do the exiles doubt his power? Here and elsewhere, they maintain that the Lord had forgotten them (e.g., Is 49:14–16). Just as “Jacob” (employed by Isaiah twenty-seven times in chs 40–66) sojourned outside the Promised Land (Gen 27:41–31:55) and eventually returned (Gen 32:1–35:14), so the sixth-century exiles will return home to Judah and Jerusalem. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

**40:28-29** The questions of v 21 are repeated here, and the argument from this section is summarized. The Lord is the Creator, and far from being either disinterested in the plight of his people or unable to help, he (unlike the passing creation, which grows weary) has both the strength and the understanding to save Israel. Those who admit their weaknesses are recipients of Yahweh’s strength and power (Ps 147:10–11; 2 Cor 12:9). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)



**40:28 DO YOU NOT KNOW...HAVE YOU NOT HEARD** – Once again, two questions appear. The questions direct us back to what God reveals about Himself in the Scriptures. That's where we can discover who God is. There God reveals Himself as "the Lord," Jehovah, the God of the free and faithful grace. (PBC)

*everlasting God.* See 9:6. (CSB)

The Lord is the sole Creator, possessing the unchangeable energy shown in the first six days. (TLSB)

Before creation Yahweh was there, and He will be after this world ceases to exist. [Motyer writes: "His ways belong to eternity, we to time; His vision is for the world, we are local; His ceaselessness keeps Him always ahead of the point we have reached" – The Prophecy of Isaiah, 307] His eternal nature provides the foundation for additional claims in Isaiah 40-55. Yahweh's Word is everlasting (40:8), as is His salvation (45:17; 51:6), His righteousness (51:8), His covenant love (54:8), and the unconditional covenant He will establish for all people based on His merciful promises to King David's line (55:3). [Isaiah refers to these gracious promises to the line of David to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ also in 7:13-14; 9:6-7; 11:1-16; 16:5; 22:20-24; 37:35; 38:5; 55:3.] Contrast this with Babylon's claim, "forever I will be" 47:7. How blasphemous! (CC)

*Creator.* See vv. 21–22 and notes. (CSB)

God has unlimited power and uses that power for the benefit of His creatures. He gave them life and provided a beautiful world in which to live. (PBC)

"I have made all these things, they are My creatures, they are under My control, they cannot touch the least hair of your head. Do not be afraid." The flesh says: "The opposite is true. You are barely God in a flea and in a nook." So it seems to the flesh and reason. Nevertheless, the Word of God proclaims what is contrary to our view, and therefore we must believe it, that we may easily regard and grasp God and His very efficacious Word. Therefore our boasting remains in the Word. We are foolish, sheep for the slaughter, weak. Our God is wise, a liberator, living and strong. We are poor and wretched, Christ is rich and cheering. (Luther)

*ends of the earth.* See 11:12 and note; cf. 5:26; 41:9; 43:6. (CSB)

*not grow tired.* Contrast 44:12. (CSB)

His power was not exhausted by creation nor does He grow tired with the continuous care of the world in which we live. (PBC)

This is a wonderful proclamation concerning God, but it seems mad to reason. The prophet is, however, depicting God in terms of our senses, as if he were saying: "We get tired and are worn out by Satan's plotting and cunning tricks. But you have a God who does not get tired. He will set you free from the incessant stratagems of Satan.

Satan and the world are our relentless enemies. They keep after us until at last they exhaust us. Here God consoles those who labor and are wearied: 'I will not become weary. I have always been active, I am fresh and new. I can help you.' You, then, may conclude in opposition to what appears: 'If I am a sinner, Christ is holy, etc.' " Thus a certain nun by the name of Mechtild kept repelling the onslaughts of Satan with one word: "I am a Christian." So I, too, must say: "I am dead, but Christ lives; I am a sinner, but Christ is righteous, because I believe in Jesus Christ and was baptized in His name. Thus when we are fatigued, let us run to the fresh and untiring Christ and not remain with ourselves. (Luther)

HIS UNDERSTANDING NO ONE CAN FATHOM – He is holy. Humans know there is a god; the psalmist says, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no god'" (Psalm 53:1). But the full truth about God lies beyond our empirical investigation. God must reveal Himself if we are to know anything about Him, beyond the fact that He exists and He is great. (PBC)

While God both loves His people and has power to save them, His plans unfold in ways we would not imagine. (CC)

The Hebrew בִּינָה means understanding, the power and acuteness of wisdom. It is as if He were saying: "Let them be as wise and acute as they wish. I will be more than a match for them and be wise. Just stay with Me. Look at Me as you would at a mirror. In you there is death, sin, despair, destruction. In Me there is life, righteousness, consolation, and deliverance. Since My Word is everlasting, cling to it. Do not dwell on your own thoughts." It is natural for us who are beset by sins to struggle in our own thoughts. "But you must not give place to them. Instead, drive them out by the Word. Do not pursue your own thoughts in tribulation, because then you will fall into a sea of temptation. Rather, keep thinking of Me, because there is no search of the understanding directed against you. I will be more than a match for them. They first have to overpower Me." Our wisdom may say, "Yes, I easily believe that You are strong, but how shall I receive Your strength?" (Luther)

**40:29** GIVES STRENGTH TO THE WEARY – God turns Himself toward His creatures. He gives blessings to them out of love for them. (PBC)

Yahweh is the Creator and, far from being either disinterested in the plight of his people or unable to help, He has both the strength and the understanding to save them. Those who confess that they are weak receive Yahweh's strength and power (Ps 147:10-11; 2 Cor 12:9). Jesus affirms Yahweh's invitation with these words: "Come to me, all who labor and heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28). (CC)

He not only does not lack strength. He supplies it, supplies every bit of strength that man may ever need or has needed. (Leupold)

"I who am speaking to you and whom you hear am the kind of God who gives strength to the faint and the powerless." Here you must understand what it means to be faint and

impotent, in opposition to carnal reason, which wants to be strong and most powerful. If our flesh were like this, how would God come to us? He does not give power to the powerful and unwearied, but He comes to the aid of the faint and powerless. “You are wearied and impotent, but not I. Indeed, I will come to your aid.” Reason willingly hears one thing—that God gives strength, but it does not want to be worn out and nothing. So all the self-righteous willingly receive strength from God, but they do not want to be faint, as if God would not give strength to the weary. What need is there for the secure to receive strength? But God gives strength to the weary, the oppressed, and the troubled. The emphasis lies on the word “faint,” but we look for the stress on the word “power.” It is as if God were saying: “You must be weary and emptied, so that there is no way out for you. Then I will give you strength. First you must become nothing, then consolation and strength will come.” This happened to me, Martin Luther, who against my will came up against the whole world, and then God helped me. Summary: The Word of God is the Word of strength, righteousness, power, etc. Therefore it can reign nowhere but over those who are lying under sin and weakness. Therefore let us learn to console ourselves when we are afflicted and say, “What I do not have and what I cannot do, that Christ has and can do.” (Luther)

**40:30-31** But why should we place such absolute trust in Yahweh? Because He commands a highway to be built (Is 40:3), clears the way (40:4), leads the way (40:5), victoriously processes (40:10), and tenderly carries His people (40:11). To make this happen, Yahweh will renew His people with strength (cf. 51:10; Rom 12:2; Titus 3:5), and the deportees will fly and run home. The weak and discouraged people are invited to turn from nations, idols, rulers, and stars, and seek Yahweh alone. (CC)

Jesus made a similar promise: stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Lk 24:49). Ten days later the waiting was over. Luke describes the coming of the Holy Spirit like the sound of a rushing wind, and the Spirit delivered all the gifts won through the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2). Simeon and Anna are two NT examples of faithful waiters, and they were not disappointed (Lk 2:25-38; cf. Rom 5:5). (CC)

Robust young men in their prime faint and fall down exhausted (v 30). On the other hand, v 31 announces the good news that those who wait on the Lord will again have strength. The Lord will replace (*chalaph*) their weakness with strength (cf. 2 Cor 5:21). For the third time in vv 28–31, Isaiah employs the words *yaga'* (“to be weary”) and *ya'aph* (“to faint”). In v 28, they appear as attributes the Lord does *not* have, while they describe youths and young men in v 30. In v 31, those waiting on the Lord “shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” Simeon and Anna are two New Testament examples of those who wait faithfully on the Lord (Lk 2:25, 38). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

**40:30** *grow tired ... stumble*. See note on 5:27. (CSB)

We are creatures, not the Creator. We grow weary and weak. We can understand some things, but we are often confused and ignorant. We must learn; God knows all

things. Without the Lord the best humans will stumble and fall. The young appear to be tireless and energetic; yet they too will certainly grow weary and stumble. To such limited creatures, God promises to give strength. (PBC)

The prophet argues from the opposite. *Youths*, or young men. They must be understood to refer to whatever in the world relies on its own strength, which is like the young and the strong time of life and lives at the height of vigor and presumption, just as a youth is very brash in his age. There you have the strong and cocky young men, who seem ready to complete the job. They are the ones to do it. But I say that these youths will fall short and come to grief, because it is nothing but a mask and outward show. Just when they think they are sitting most securely, they will fall. Thus if I should say today that the most vigorous youth is nothing against the Turk, the flesh would not believe it. The illustration of Abraham in the next chapter will show how Abraham hardly had the strength to chase away the flies, and yet he conquered four kings. (Luther)

**40:31** *hope in*. Trust in or look expectantly to (see 5:2; 49:23). (CSB)

Hope in Him. “Wait” and “hope” in Hbr come from the same root word. (TLSB)

Namely, those who look to their God in the midst of weakness and impotence and in faith wait against all enemies. (Luther)

*renew*. Lit. “exchange.” Their weakness will give way to God’s strength (v. 29). The Hebrew for this verb is used of changes of clothes (Ge 35:2; Jdg 14:12), which can symbolize strength and beauty (Isa 52:1). Paul tells believers to clothe themselves with Christ (Ro 13:14; cf. Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). (CSB)

Faith in the Lord brings this strength. When we rely on human strength, we will stumble. When we trust in the Lord for strength, he gives it. Not only will believers receive strength; they will renew their strength. They will arise from the ashes of grief and suffering to run and walk again. (PBC)

That is, they will be adorned with a heavenly victory against the resources of the world. (Luther)

*eagles*. Known for their vigor (Ps 103:5) and speed (Jer 4:13; 48:40). (CSB)

Believers are pictured as eagles soaring in the blue sky. Eagles ride the air currents as they stretch out their wings and soar. God promises to be the wind beneath the wings of His people. What a wonderful comfort for all “who hope in the Lord!” The entire life of God’s people – their walking, running and soaring – is filled with the boundless and tireless strength of God. Even in death, they mount on eagle’s wings and soar to God in heaven, where God gives them joy forever. (PBC)

This is our supreme consolation. While they are falling, tiring, and failing, we shall be very swift with the flight of an eagle, very swift and very nimble in running. Thus, then, is

depicted the consolation of all who are afflicted because of the Word and work of God, of all who lie prostrate under their enemies and are apparently without hope. These, I say, in the midst of the darkness of the Word lay hold of Christ, who is wealthy, strong, and vigorous. It is for us to seem faint and inadequate and as nothing in the eyes of the world. As our adversaries are moved to complain about us, so let us become fit for the divine consolation. (Luther)

They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles. (Isaiah 40:31 RSV)

Often when we think of courage, we think of it in connection with someone else and not ourselves. We might think of the soldier who gives his life to save his platoon. We think of firefighters, police officers, and others who risk their lives for welfare of the public.

Is real courage restricted to such displays of valor? Real courage runs deeper than specific heroic acts. As a matter of fact, heroic courage often goes unnoticed and unpublicized. Think of the wife who doesn't give up after her husband dies. Think of the person with a terminal illness who nevertheless maintains inner peace and concern for others. This list can go on and on.

The above instances have a common denominator: courage. Courage comes from trusting in God or, as our text puts it, "waiting for the Lord." Christianity doesn't ask us to overlook our difficulties nor does it teach simply the power of positive thinking. It does teach us to face our problems by relying on God's promises. This is courage. It is not something developed by us. Real courage is given—from God Himself. We receive this courage through God's Word and the sacraments. We join the apostle in asserting, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31 KJV).

**On Eagles' Wings** I bore you on eagles' wings. (Exodus 19:4 RSV)

Sometimes we are fearful to try our wings in a new area of endeavor. We are frozen with the fear of another failure.

One day a fisherman watched a mother eagle drop a young eaglet into the canyon below. The eaglet plummeted and fluttered. It seemed about to be dashed to its death on the rocks below when out of the sky the father eagle plunged and caught his offspring on his broad back. Then he flew up high and dropped the young one again. This time the mother eagle caught the little one on her back. The routine was repeated until the little eagle learned to fly.

God gives us opportunities to try our wings so we might learn to fly on to greater and higher experiences. Often these flights are adventures together with our Lord in ministry to others. Our Father always watches over us and spreads His wings of protection beneath us.

God, who sent His Son to die for us and to lead us through death to life eternal, will certainly not forsake us on our earthly flights.

Mount up with wings like eagles! The Lord will sustain you.

*O Lord, when I grow weary, lift me up on Your wings. Give me the courage and strength I need for today. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

In the summer of 2008 while on vacation with my family I was sitting at the pool looking up at the sky. I saw three eagles (parents and a young eagle) flying high in the sky. I noticed that every once in a while the young eagle apparently needed a rest and would fly up on the mother's back and sit there for a while. After a brief respite the young eagle would resume flying on its own. This cycle of events was done a number of times until they eagles fly out of site or landed somewhere. (Site – Eagle Resort on Eagle Lake just outside of Eagle River, WI – EWB)

*run ... walk.* They will accomplish their purposes, as God wills. (TLSB)

**40:9–31** Israel has an incomparable God who watches over her. Though the Lord may use His power for condemnation, He acts as your Good Shepherd for your salvation. • Lord, renew the strength of faith in me, that I may renew my service to Your everlasting purposes. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – 1 Corinthians 9:16-27

**<sup>16</sup> Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! <sup>17</sup> If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. <sup>18</sup> What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. <sup>19</sup> Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. <sup>23</sup> I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. <sup>24</sup> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. <sup>25</sup> Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. <sup>27</sup> No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.**



**9:16** *I am compelled to preach.* The Lord had laid on Paul the necessity of preaching the gospel (Ac 9:1–16; 26:16–18; see also Jer 20:9 and note). (CSB)

ἐὰν μὴ εὐαγγελίσωμαι—This aorist subjunctive verb contrasts with the present subjunctive εὐαγγελίζωμαι in the first clause of 9:16. It has been suggested that the aorist implies this: “if I were once not to preach.” However, that addition of “once” is reading too much into the colorless aorist tense, which is the usual tense with the subjunctive mood. (CC)

Paul could not boast of his activity as a Gospel preacher, for he was under compulsion (1 Cor 9:16). That could be traced back to his divine call to be an apostle of Jesus Christ with a special commission to the Gentiles. His preaching of the Gospel, then, was simply discharging the debt that had been laid on him (Rom 1:14). As one commentator has explained, there are two ways of incurring a debt. The first is when we borrow money from someone; the second is when someone entrusts us with money that he asks us to hand on to someone else. Until we actually hand it on, we stand indebted to the person for whom it is intended. Paul’s debt was of this second kind. He had been entrusted with the Gospel and was obligated to preach it to others. If he failed to discharge that debt, then “woe” (1 Cor 9:16) to him; he would have to face God’s wrath. The burden incumbent on him to preach the Gospel is reminiscent of Jeremiah, for whom the word of the Lord “became in my heart like a burning fire, shut up in my bones. I grew weary of trying to contain it, and I am not able” (Jer 20:9). (CC)

Paul can claim no credit for his preaching; he is under orders to do it. God told Ananias before he baptized Paul, “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15). (PBC)

*no ground for boasting ... necessity.* Paul did not choose to become a preacher of the Gospel; Christ called him directly (Gal 1:15–16; Ac 9:15–16). The glory for Paul’s work belongs to Christ alone. (TLSB)

**9:17** *willingly...unwillingly.* ἐκὼν ... ἄκων—Paul may have selected these words for their paronomasia. ἐκὼν means “willing(ly), glad(ly)” (BAGD; cf. Rom 8:20), while the antonym ἄκων means “unwilling” (and is here to be translated as an adverb, BAGD). Because of the context, in which Paul refers to compulsion and reward, the best translations for these words here are “voluntarily” and “involuntarily.” (CC)

Just as there are two ways of incurring a debt, so there are also two ways in which a person can carry out a task: either as a free person or as an involuntary conscript. If a person is free and does the work voluntarily, then he is entitled to a reward. But this is not the case with Paul. The first sentence in 1 Cor 9:17 merely sets up the contrast with 9:17b, which does apply to Paul: “but if [I do it] involuntarily, I am entrusted with a stewardship.” Paul understood himself as a slave of Jesus Christ (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:1). He had no choice but to preach the Gospel. He was a “steward” entrusted with “the mysteries of God,” and he was expected to carry out his commission faithfully (1 Cor 4:1–2; see also Eph 3:2). (CC)

*entrusted with a stewardship.* Called by God to preach Christ (Gal 1:11–12). (TLSB)

He cannot expect a citation simply for having done his duty. Like a steward he was simply carrying out his responsibility. (PBC)

**9:18** *my reward ... in preaching the gospel.* Paul's reward in preaching is not material things but the boasting that he has preached to the Corinthians without charge and has not taken advantage of the rights he deserves: food and drink, shelter and pay (vv. 3–12). (CSB)

That Christ would be preached with no tangible benefit to Paul. No one could reject the Gospel as something Paul had created for his own benefit. (TLSB)

**FREE OF CHARGE** – Paul wanted to show how grateful he was for what had made of him. He needed to do something voluntarily, beyond the call of duty, to show such gratitude. By sacrificing his salary, to which he had every right, Paul was doing something of his own free will to show his love for his Lord. (PBC)

*Make full use of.* καταχρήσασθαι—It is a verb in 7:31, its only other NT occurrence. Here the verb could have the nuance “to use fully, make full use of,” or, as in 7:31, it could mean “exploit, abuse,” which seems most appropriate in this context. (CC)

Although Paul saw himself as a man under compulsion and therefore unable to expect any reward for his services, he nonetheless found enormous satisfaction in presenting the free Gospel free of charge (1 Cor 9:18). That was sufficient reward for him. Under those circumstances, he did not need to exploit his rights in the Gospel. Consequently no one could impugn the purity of his motives; his selflessness was incontestable. Obviously he was not just another religious peddler, but a man of sincerity (2 Cor 2:17). (CC)

Our contemporary application of Paul's argument in 1 Cor 9:1–18 needs to be well balanced. There are two messages here, one for the church, the other for the minister. On the one hand, the principle that “the laborer is worthy of his wages” (Lk 10:7) certainly applies today. Churches must realize that ministers of the Gospel are entitled to their salary and benefits. The church benefits greatly when its ministers are sufficiently compensated so that they may devote themselves single-mindedly to the Gospel, free of worldly cares. Also, Paul freely chose not to accept what was owed him. The church did not pressure him to forego compensation; in fact, the pressure from the church seems to have been for him to accept pay. (CC)

On the other hand, as one commentator warns, “the objective of this text” should not be “lost in concerns over ‘rights’ that reflect bald professionalism rather than a concern for the gospel itself.” No “hindrance” (1 Cor 9:12) should be put in the way of the Gospel. There may be circumstances today, also, when the church servant will decide to forgo some of his rights. Indeed, for the Gospel's sake—when the situation has called for it—many of God's servants have worked for minimal pay or even supported themselves from their own resources. The minister is given the model of Paul's selfless and sacrificial labor free of charge, which in turn imitates the ministry of Christ himself. (CC)

Paul has been defending his high calling and special standing in the church as a free apostle of the Lord Jesus (9:1–18). By maintaining his financial independence (9:15–18), he has made sure he is beholden to no one but his Lord. No one could manipulate him on the basis of favors rendered or owed. (CC)

Thus in not seeking favors or financial privileges, even those he had a “right” to expect (9:4–6, 18), Paul had shown in every way the mind-set of a servant, in response to Jesus’ challenge: “Whoever among you wishes to be great should be your servant, and whoever among you wishes to be first should be your slave, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:26–28). Paul and his colleagues saw themselves as the Corinthians’ slaves for Jesus’ sake (2 Cor 4:5). Theirs was a ministry of service. By this humble approach, Paul aimed to win as many as possible for the Gospel. To be sure, the church would never be more than a minority in the community (“some,” 1 Cor 9:22). But Paul had been assured that the Lord had “many people” in the city (Acts 18:10), and the apostle’s ministry was designed to make good on that assurance by winning all he could for Christ. (CC)

Paul now gives four illustrations of how he had adapted his mission strategy to win different groups: (1) the Jews (9:20a); (2) those under Law (9:20b); (3) those without Law (9:21); (4) the weak (9:22). (CC)

His first concern was for his Jewish kinsmen. Although his calling was to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 11:13; cf. 1 Tim 2:7), Paul still saw himself as under obligation to “the Jew first” (Rom 1:16). To the Jews belonged “the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the promises, and the patriarchs . . . and from them according to the flesh [came] the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever” (Rom 9:4–5). With their background as God’s chosen people, they should have had an affinity for Christianity. After all, the faith Paul preached was the fulfillment of Israel’s ancient hope (Acts 26:6–7; 28:20). The Jews, then, were natural branches unnaturally cut off from their own olive tree because of their unbelief; God’s desire is to graft them back in again (Rom 11:17–24). It was a constant source of sorrow to Paul that most of them had rejected the Gospel. He even wished he could be accursed if that would bring about their salvation (Rom 9:1–3). That they might find salvation was the constant burden of his prayers (Rom 10:1) and a high priority in his ministry. (CC)

Thus it was his policy in each town to begin his ministry in the synagogue, appealing to the Jews first, and then to the Gentile God-fearers present at synagogue worship. In fact, he did not hesitate to magnify his mission to Gentiles before Jewish audiences, in order to provoke his kinsmen to jealousy and thus save *some* of them (Rom 11:14). (CC)

**9:19–23** Highlights Paul’s complete focus on the needs of the people to whom he was preaching. (TLSB)

**9:19** *I make myself a slave to everyone.* Not only did Paul not use his right to material support in preaching the gospel but he also deprived himself—curtailed his personal privileges and social and religious rights—in dealing with different kinds of people. (CSB)

*Being.* ὅν—The participle, which recurs in 9:20–21, is concessive, hence “*although I am.*” (CC)

Paul was willing to give up his own habits, preferences, and rights so that nothing would keep people from responding to his preaching of the Gospel. “The community of God in every place and every time has, according to its circumstances, the good right, power, and authority to change and decrease or increase ceremonies <that are truly adiaphora>. They should do this thoughtfully and without giving offense, in an orderly and appropriate way, whenever it is considered most profitable, most beneficial, and best for good order, Christian discipline, and the Church’s edification. Furthermore, we can yield and give in with a good conscience to the weak in faith in such outward adiaphora” (FC SD X 9). Luther: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all” (AE 31:344). The Gospel not only frees us from sin but also frees us for service. Every aspect of our lives (v 22) is to be adapted to the needs of others so that they might come to faith in Christ. Paul is not advocating changing the Gospel message to suit the hearers. There is only one name given under heaven by which we must be saved (1:18–31; Ac 4:12). However, the changeless Gospel empowers us to sacrifice our own rights, tastes, interests, and preferences so that others might hear the message of Christ in all its power. (TLSB)

*to win.* To bring to Christ. (CSB)

τοὺς πλείοναζ—Normally this comparative of πολὺς means “the majority, most” (10:5; cf. BAGD, s.v. πολὺς, II 2 a α). However, in this context it means “more”—more than Paul could have gained by another approach. (CC)

ἵνα ... κερδήσω—κερδαίνω (“to win; to gain, make a profit”) and κέρδος (“a gain”) are expressions from the world of commerce. Paul had once considered all his achievements as a Pharisee to be κέρδη, “gains,” but after coming to know Christ he dismissed them as ζημία, “loss” (Phil 3:7–8). The expression “to gain [κερδαίνω] one’s brother” for Christ was used earlier by Jesus (Mt 18:15; 16:26). Compare a similar usage in 1 Pet 3:1. The NT also uses words for “profit” (κερδαίνω, κέρδος) and “loss” (ζημιώω, ζημία) to describe gaining Christ as the gaining of a great treasure. Fee points out that Paul’s use of κερδαίνω in 1 Cor 9:19–22 is probably a play on the μισθός (“reward”) metaphor in 9:17–18. (CC)

After stating that by not accepting a salary he is free from any obligation to those who provide such support, Paul tells us his purpose in relinquishing his rights go far beyond gaining satisfaction in his ministry. His higher purpose is to save souls. (PBC)

**9:20** *Jews.* Though himself Jewish, Paul refers specifically to religious behaviors through which the Jews defined their relationship to God. Paul had already abandoned such rites as circumcision (7:19), food laws (8:8), and the observance of certain days (Col 2:16). However, to prevent people from dismissing his preaching of the Gospel, Paul did on occasion “practice” some of these (e.g., his circumcision of Timothy “because of the Jews” in Ac 16:3). (TLSB)

τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις—The definite article before the noun indicates “those [Jews] with whom I had to deal on each occasion.” (CC)

*those under the law.* Those under the OT law and religious practices (the Jews). (CSB)

Repeated for emphasis, showing that observance of “the Law” (as understood by Judaism) was of no value before God. (TLSB)

*I became like one under the law.* For the Jews’ sake Paul conformed to the Jewish law (Ac 16:3; 18:18; 21:20–26). (CSB)

Paul willingly submitted to the Law so that the Gospel might be heard. (TLSB)

To win the Jews, Paul knew he must become “as a Jew” (1 Cor 9:20). Accordingly he was careful never to cause them unnecessary offense. He had Timothy circumcised “because of the Jews in those areas” (Acts 16:3). He also joined four Jewish men in the temple who were under a vow, purifying himself with them and paying their expenses (Acts 21:20–26). (CC)

The second part of 1 Cor 9:20, where Paul speaks of his eagerness to win “those under Law,” is probably an expansion of 9:20 to include not only the Jews but also the numerous Gentile God-fearers who loved the Jewish people, attended synagogue, and willingly subjected themselves to many aspects of Jewish law. These people were attracted to Christianity in great numbers. Although Paul had turned his back on a punctilious observance of the OT ceremonial law and no longer saw himself as “under Law” but as “under grace” (Rom 6:14), he did not make an arrogant display of his new freedom but reached out to God-fearers in a sympathetic way, humbly identifying himself with them in order to win them for the Gospel. (CC)

**9:21** Likewise Paul had become “to those without Law like someone without Law” (1 Cor 9:21). Gentile converts, he insisted, had no need to practice circumcision and observe the Jewish food laws, festivals, and Sabbath regulations (Col 2:16). Timothy had been circumcised because he had a Jewish mother and therefore was regarded as legally Jewish. Consequently, not to have circumcised him would have destroyed Timothy’s credibility as a witness to Jews. On the other hand, the apostle was adamant that Titus, whose parents were both Gentile, must not be circumcised (Gal 2:3). As long as Gentiles believed the Gospel and were baptized, Paul was satisfied. After all, what mattered was not ceremonies but “faith active in love” (Gal 5:6). (CC)

When Paul calls the Gentiles “those without Law” and says that he too became as one “without Law” (1 Cor 9:21), he is not condoning immoral behavior. In 1 Corinthians 5, for example, Paul stated in the strongest terms that Gentile Christians must conform to God’s moral Law, and that was also affirmed by the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:20, 29). The expression in 1 Cor 9:21 refers to the Gentiles’ status as people who lacked the Mosaic Law. To be sure, Gentiles had some sense for the requirements of natural law; “the work of the law” was written on their hearts (Rom 2:15). But the Jews had an advantage in that the divine law had been spelled out for them in a written code. They had been entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom 3:2). (CC)

Lest his readers get the impression that Paul does not care about God’s Law, he adds the qualification that he is “not without God’s Law but obedient to the law of Christ” (1 Cor 9:21). By this he means he is subject to the law of love, the pattern of self-sacrificing love which Jesus

had inculcated and exemplified by his death on the cross.<sup>14</sup> Paul bears the burdens of others and thus fulfills “the law of Christ” (1 Cor 9:21), the “royal law” (Gal 6:2; James 2:8). In his outreach to Jews, God-fearers, Gentiles, and the weak, this royal law governs everything Paul does. (CC)

I BECAME LIKE A JEW – When Paul became a Christian, he became a free man in Christ, free from all the laws and regulations that bound God’s people in the OT. But to win the Jews he lived like the Jews “under the law,” the ceremonial law, though as a NT Christian he was no longer obligated to do so. He kept the Sabbath and festival days; he followed OT regulations regarding eating pork and shellfish; he observed the rite of circumcision. In all this, however, he did not compromise his faith in Christ. (PBC)

*those not having the law.* Those who have not been raised under the OT law (the Gentiles). (CSB)

ἄνομος ... ἔννομος—ὁ ἄνομος and οἱ ἄνομοι, literally, “the lawless,” were common Jewish designations for the Gentiles. The fact that Paul calls them “lawless, without the Law” indicates that νόμος in 9:20–21 refers to the OT, the Torah in particular. Gentiles do have natural law, the testimony in creation and the human conscience, which functions as a kind of law, though imperfect because of human sin (Rom 1:19–21; 2:12–16). But they lack the revealed Word of God. Gutbrod comments: “It is hard to distinguish between a mere affirmation that they do not have the Law and a judgment that they are sinners.” The latter view is evident in, for example, Psalms of Solomon 17:11, 18; Mt 15:28; Lk 22:37. Paul will write to the Romans, “As many as sinned without [knowing] the Law [ἀνόμως], they will also perish without the Law [ἀνόμως]” (Rom 2:12). There is no hope for salvation apart from God’s Word. In 1 Cor 9:21 Paul is simply referring to those who “do not actually know the Law and are not aware” that they are violating it. (CC)

The opposite of ἄνομος is ἔννομος, used in Acts 19:39 of “a lawful assembly” (ἐννόμῳ ἐκκλησίᾳ), and here in 1 Cor 9:21. It means “within the law,” “subject to the law, obedient to the law” (BAGD). (CC)

In 1 Corinthians νόμος occurs only in 9:8–9, 20; 14:21, 34; 15:56, and ἄνομος and ἔννομος occur in 9:21. The complexity of Paul’s concept of “law” and his use of νόμος is shown by him saying in adjacent verses that he is “not under Law” (9:20), but at the same time he is “obedient to the law of Christ” (9:21). In some passages Paul describes the Gospel as a νόμος, meaning that the Gospel establishes an ordered relationship to God governed by God’s Word about Christ, which bestows the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. In that sense Paul speaks of “the law [νόμος] of faith,” which is the opposite of the law of works (Rom 3:27). He also states that “the law [νόμος] of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law [νόμος again!] of sin and death” (Rom 8:2) (CC)

Gentiles, i.e., non-Jews. (TLSB)



The Gentiles did not have to feel that they should become Jewish in order to become Christians. (PBC)

*I became like one not having the law.* Paul accommodated himself to Gentile culture when it did not violate his allegiance to Christ, though he still reckoned that he was under God's law and Christ's law. (By "Christ's law" Paul is probably referring to Christ's teachings, though the term is not necessarily restricted to them.) (CSB)

A play on words. Paul is not "under the Law" (v 20), but neither is he lawless. Rather, he is "under the law of Christ," transformed for a life of service to God and neighbor (cf Rm 7:25; Gal 6:2, 15–16). (TLSB)

**9:22** The Majority Text and a number of other manuscripts insert ὡς ("as") between ἀσθενέστω and ἀσθενής. "To the weak I became *as* weak" (NKJV; emphasis added; similarly KJV). That way Paul would not actually say that he *was* weak. But it is most likely that ὡς was added and is not original. (CC)

In 1 Cor 9:22 Paul now brings the argument full circle to his original concern for the weak Christians in Corinth (8:7–13). Although Paul himself had the "knowledge" that idols are nothing and that meat sacrificed to them is just meat (1 Cor 8:1–6), nevertheless he humbly identified with the weak and avoided anything that would give unnecessary offense (8:7–13). The expression "the weak" may have a twofold aspect—weak in the sense of vulnerable to peer pressure and more easily led into sin (8:10), and also weak in economic status. Most members of the congregation were not well-educated, influential, or of noble birth (1:26–31). Many of them would have worked with their hands for a living. Paul had not held himself aloof from these humble people but had identified with them by taking up his tent-making trade. Thus he exemplified his own maxim, "Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly" (Rom 12:16 NRSV). It is possible that those who were economically "weak" were more likely to be swayed by the actions of the affluent, while those who flaunted their supposed freedoms to indulge in sinful behavior were mostly the well-to-do. (CC)

Paul's flexibility in accommodating himself to all people was governed by one overriding purpose: "that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:22). In this he was modeling himself after his Master, who ate and drank with tax-collectors and sinners (Mt 11:19), accepted water from a Samaritan woman and engaged in conversation with her (John 4), and healed the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7:24–30)—all for the great purpose of seeking and saving the lost (Lk 19:10). Just as Jesus had accommodated himself to those around him, without compromising his message, so Paul showed himself a model of missionary adaptability to the language and thought-forms of his hearers. In preaching to Jews, he made rich use of the OT (e.g., Acts 13:16–41). In addressing the Hellenistic Gentiles on the Areopagus in Athens, he drew instead on his knowledge of Greek poetry and philosophy (Acts 17:22–31). Fluent both in Greek and in Aramaic, he could switch from one to the other in order to captivate an audience (Acts 21:37–22:2). He was thoroughly conversant with both Jewish and Hellenistic culture (his familiarity with the latter will shortly become evident in the illustration drawn from the Isthmian Games in 1 Cor 9:24–27). But Paul carried his learning lightly; he did not allow his familiarity

with the religions, cultures, and languages of his day to stroke his ego. All was placed in the service of bringing salvation to the lost. (CC)

With all his concern to adapt himself to people, nowhere does Paul suggest the Gospel itself may be changed to suit people's religious or cultural tastes (cf. Gal 1:6–9). In 1 Cor 1:18–25 Paul described how God deliberately chose to save people through the preaching of a message that was “foolish” and “weak”—the very opposite of how people might expect God to save. But in the face of enormous pressure to conform his message to the world's wisdom, Paul was determined to know only Christ crucified (2:2). Through the Gospel, and only through the Gospel, do people find salvation. That is why it was so important that those entrusted with the Gospel “be unoffensive to Jews and to Greeks and to the church of God” (10:32). Paul had set the Corinthians a good example: “I please all people in all things, not seeking my own advantage, but that of the many, that they may be saved” (10:33). They should imitate him, as he imitated Christ (11:1). As one commentator elaborates:

To follow the crucified Messiah means Paul must take up his own cross daily, die to self-interest, and serve the One who bought him. One cannot properly promote the gospel any other way. To promote it this way—by dying to self-interest, giving up all insistence upon the sacredness of one's rights, and striving to win as many as possible—is to follow Christ crucified, who died, literally, to *his* self-interest, gave up all insistence upon the sacredness of *his* very real rights, and set himself to win men and women from every people and tongue and tribe and nation. There is no other way of following Christ; there is no other way of sharing in the gospel's blessings. (CC)

In humbly serving the Gospel, Paul hoped that he would join fellow believers in enjoying the saving benefits of the Gospel (9:23). He was well aware of the possibility that he could fail to attain the salvation he proclaimed to others (9:27). Like every preacher of the Gospel, he must remain faithful until “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:8; see also 3:13; 5:5). (CC)

*the weak.* Those whose consciences are weak (8:9–12). (CSB)

Paul affirms the importance of learning about, respecting, and identifying with one's hearers in order to reach them effectively. (TLSB)

*I became weak.* Paul did not exercise his Christian freedom in such things as eating meat sacrificed to idols (8:9, 13). (CSB)

I HAVE BECOME ALL THINGS – Where no principle was at stake Paul was prepared to go to extreme lengths to meet people. Every true servant of Christ must learn from the apostle not to despise anyone, not to permit disgust over foolish weaknesses to enter his heart.

κερδήσω ... σώσω—After using κερδαίνω (“to win”) five times in 9:19–22, Paul concludes this section of his argument with the parallel verb σώζω, “to save.” This makes it clear that what he means by winning people is securing their eternal salvation. σώζω has this same meaning in 1:18, 21. In 7:16 he spoke of the Christian husband or wife saving (σώζω) the unbelieving spouse by bringing him or her to faith. (CC)

**9:22-23.** *all men...πᾶσιν ... πάντα ... πάντως ... πάντα*—The repeated use of the noun and the adverbial form of “all” underlines the apostle’s determination. (CC)

**9:23** *blessings.* The blessings of realizing that he has been faithful to Christ in preaching, of hearing the Lord’s “Well done” (Mt 25:21; Lk 19:17) and of seeing others come to Christ. (CSB)

Salvation and life in Christ. “Knowledge” of God is not sufficient (8:1); those who lead others to sin, and destroy their faith, sin against Christ (8:12). In so doing, they destroy their own faith. (TLSB)

The Greek text merely has “in order that I may become a joint sharer of it,” namely, of the gospel. That would include the interpretation, “share in its blessings.” (PBC)

συγκοινωνὸς αὐτοῦ—Literally, Paul desires to be “a fellow [συν] participant or sharer [κοινωνός] in it [the Gospel].” For συγκοινωνός, compare Rom 11:17; Phil 1:7; Rev 1:9; and the textual note on εἰς κοινωνίαν in 1 Cor 1:9. Hauck comments: “By faithful work for the Gospel Paul here hopes to be a partaker of the blessings of salvation which it promises.” (CC)

**9:24** *race ... runners.* The Corinthians were familiar with the foot races in their own Isthmian games, which occurred every other year and were second only to the Olympic games in importance. (CSB)

Just as Paul put off his rights in order to share in the blessings of the Gospel (v 23), so should the Corinthians. (TLSB)

οἱ ... τρέχοντες—τρέχω here refers to “foot-racing in the stadium” (BAGD, 1).

ἐν σταδίῳ—NIV translates the phrase, “in a race.” But “in the stadium” is more precise. Cf. ἐν μακέλλῳ in 10:25. Fee explains: “The στάδιον was first of all a measure of distance (about 185 meters); it was naturally transferred to the arena itself, which measured the length of a στάδιον, the basic distance in the races.” (CC)

*run.* A Pauline metaphor for living the Christian life. (TLSB)

οὕτως τρέχετε—Literally, “so run ...” This verb in the second person plural could be either indicative or imperative. It is most natural, however, to take it as an imperative, as do most English versions. (Cf. Phil 4:1: οὕτως στήκετε ἐν κυρίῳ, “stand firm in the Lord in this way,” NRSV.) (CC)

TO GET – katalabnte – intensified reception, as if to make one’s own. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 13, Part 1)

ἵνα καταλάβητε—καταλαμβάνω can mean “seize, win, attain, make one’s own” (BAGD, 1 a). It is a compound of λαμβάνω, “receive,” in 9:24–25. Here its most suitable meaning is “to win,” and it is in a purpose clause: run in such a way “that you may win.” (CC)

*prize*. In ancient times the prize was a perishable wreath (v. 25). (CSB)

βραβεῖον—BAGD defines this as a “*prize* in a contest.” It has this same meaning in Phil 3:14. (CC)

Whether they were wreaths of laurel, or wild olive leaves, or even of parsley, they were paltry prizes compared with the unfading glory of the heavenly prize toward which the Christian strives. (PBC)

**9:25** *competes*. πᾶς δὲ ὁ ἀγωνιζόμενος—BAGD, 1, defines ἀγωνίζομαι as “of a(n athletic) contest, lit[erally] and fig[uratively] *engage in a contest*.” From ἀγωνίζομαι are derived the English words “agony” and “agonize.” The Greek verb and its related nouns (ἀγών, ἀγωνία) are used not only of athletic contests, but in a more general sense of a “*struggle, fight* only fig[uratively] of suffering for the gospel Phil 1:30 and struggle in its service” (BAGD, s.v. ἀγών, 2). They imply a strenuous effort. Luke uses ἀγωνία to describe Jesus’ anguish in Gethsemane (Lk 22:44). (CC)

*self-control*. Avoiding what hinders success in the race. Here it is the insistence on “rights” that destroy the faith of others. (TLSB)

πάντα—This accusative of general reference (BDF, § 154) answers to the πάντα in 9:23. Pfitzner sees this as the “catchword” of chapter 9. Fee comments, “As the athlete exercises self-control in ‘all things’ for the sake of the victor’s wreath, so Paul does ‘all things’ for the sake of the gospel. By implication [Christians] must also do ‘all things’ in order to obtain the prize.” (CC)

*wreath*. Lit, “crown.” Olympic athletes received a wreath of olive leaves; other games used laurels, etc. (TLSB)

φθαρτὸν ... ἄφθαρτον—Cf. BAGD, s.v. φθαρτός: “*perishable, subject to decay or destruction*.” These adjectives occur also in Rom 1:23; 1 Cor 15:52, 53, 54; 1 Pet 1:4, 18, 23. The words φθείρω, φθορά, and φθαρτός are “often used to denote the corruptibility of man, his subjection to death.” Whereas God is ἄφθαρτος, “incorruptible” (Rom 1:23), people as creatures of flesh and blood belong to this corrupt aeon which, with all its creatures, is passing away. The body is sown in corruption (φθορά, 1 Cor 15:42, 50) but is raised in incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία, 15:42, 50, 53, 54). In the new aeon the dead will rise “incorruptible,” ἄφθαρτος (15:52), in Christ and receive an inheritance which is ἄφθαρτος (1 Pet 1:4). (CC)

*crown that will last forever*. See 2Ti 4:8; Jas 1:12; 1Pe 5:4; Rev 2:10; 3:11; 4:10 and notes. (CSB)

The eternal prize of life with God through faith in Christ (cf v 23). (TLSB)

Aphtharton – imperishable, not subject to decay or death. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 13, Part 1)

**9:26** So. τοίνυν—Cf. BAGD, s.v. τοίνυν: “inferential particle *hence, so, indeed.*” (CC)

*I. ἐγώ*—Placed at the beginning of the sentence, the personal pronoun “I” is emphatic. Again Paul is picking up the theme of his personal example (cf. 1 Cor 9:15–23).

*not ... running aimlessly.* See Php 3:14. (CSB)

Continuing the metaphor, Paul says that training for no purpose will not produce the desired result, which is life with God (cf v 25). (TLSB)

ἀδήλως—Cf. BAGD, s.v. ἀδήλως: “*uncertainly ... of a race οὕτως τρέχω ὡς οὐκ ἀδήλως not aimlessly*, i.e., not as one who has no fixed goal.” The adjective ἄδηλος means “not clear, unseen” (BAGD, 1) and is used of graves which are not seen (Lk 11:44). It can also mean “indistinct” (BAGD, 2) and is used of an indistinct sound from a trumpet (1 Cor 14:8). Paul uses the noun ἀδηλότης of the “uncertainty” of riches (1 Tim 6:17). (CC)

That is not running straight for the goal. (PBC)

*Fight.* πυκτεύω—The verb is used only here in the NT. In secular Koine Greek it denoted fistfighting, and the related noun πυκτής denoted a boxer. Boxing was a sport done in the stadium and in athletic clubs (MM, 559). (CC)

*Beating the air.* ἄερα δέρων—δέρω means to *beat* and is used of the beatings to which the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles were subject (e.g., Mt 21:35; Jn 18:23; Acts 5:40). The sophists of Alexandria are accused of only “beating the air.” (CC)

**9:27** *I beat my body and make it my slave.* Here Paul uses the figure of boxing to represent the Christian life. He does not aimlessly beat the air, but he severely disciplines his own body in serving Christ. (CSB)

ὑποπιάζω μου τὸ σῶμα—Literally, “I give my body a black eye.” This is an extension of the imagery from boxing (9:26b); the verb, used symbolically, means to “treat roughly, torment, maltreat” (BAGD, s.v. ὑποπιάζω, 2). (CC)

δουλαγωγῶ—Most English versions soften this verb (e.g., REB: “bring it under strict control”; KJV: “bring it into subjection”). But NRSV renders it precisely (“enslave it”), as does NIV (“make it my slave”). This rendering preserves the connection with the theme Paul enunciated in 7:22, that the free Christian is nevertheless the slave of Christ (δοῦλος ... Χριστοῦ), a pattern Paul has exemplified in his own ministry (9:19; cf. Gal 5:13). (CC)

To live with a purpose, to intentionally seek the good of others. “He clearly shows that he was keeping his body under control, not to merit forgiveness of sins by that discipline, but to keep his body in subjection and prepared for spiritual things, for carrying out the duties of his calling” (AC XXVI 38). (TLSB)

He forces his unwilling and rebellious body to his will. He gives it a knockout blow and he “makes it know its master” (NEB)

*not be disqualified for the prize.* Paul realizes that he must with rigor serve the Lord and battle against sin. If he fails in this, he may be excluded from the reward (see 3:10–15). (CSB)

ἀδόκιμος—The adjective means “not standing the test . . . disqualified” (BAGD). Here Paul may be alluding to δοκιμάζω in 1 Cor 3:13, where he spoke of each person’s work being tested by fire on the Lord’s day. But there he is speaking of Christians, each of whom will be saved, even if his work does not pass the test (3:15). Here in 9:27, Paul refers to the possibility that he could lose the salvation in Christ which he preached to others. (CC)

The result of seeking one’s way and destroying the faith of others; summarizes vv 23–24. (TLSB)

Paul proceeds to illustrate the need for self-discipline if he is to reach the goal of saving as many people as possible (9:22). As a resident of Corinth in A.D. 50–52, he had probably witnessed the Isthmian Games in the spring of A.D. 51. This prestigious event, second only to the Olympic Games, was celebrated every two years about ten miles from Corinth. The basic athletic events included racing, wrestling, jumping, boxing, hurling the javelin, and throwing the discus. Paul begins with an illustration from the footraces in the stadium. A number of runners competed in each event, but only one could win the prize. The analogy to the Christian life is, of course, imperfect, for in the Christian race all believers are prize winners. But Paul uses the analogy only to point to the exertion and self-discipline required of the successful runner. He challenges the Corinthians: “Run that you may win” (9:24). (CC)

Every entrant in the Olympic Games was required to devote ten months to strict training. Presumably the same rule applied to the games at Isthmia. As is well known from such contests both in ancient and modern times, the competitor must renounce not only bad habits, but give up many things that are fine in themselves, in order to focus totally on preparation for the goal. The theme of self-control applies equally to the Christian life (9:25). Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit that should be found in the lives of all Christians (Gal 5:23; 2 Pet 1:6). It is one of the qualities essential in a minister of the Gospel (Titus 1:8). Whereas contestants in the Isthmian Games exercised self-control in order to win a wreath of withered celery and some ephemeral honor and glory, it is infinitely more worthwhile for the Christian to practice self-control, for the crown awaiting him—if he completes the race—is the imperishable gift of eternal life (2 Tim 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10). (CC)

Paul now applies the imagery of the stadium to his own example as the Corinthians’ apostle (1 Cor 9:26). It was not his practice to run the race of the Christian life aimlessly (2 Tim 4:7), like someone with no clear goal. Rather, he pressed on “toward the goal for the prize [βραβεῖον, as in 1 Cor 9:24] of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14). (CC)

Likewise, in fighting “the good fight” (1 Tim 1:18; 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7), he did not behave like a boxer flailing the air and never landing a blow. We cannot be certain whether Paul has in mind



the poor boxer who continually misses his opponent or the man who prefers shadowboxing at home or in the gymnasium and never steps into the ring. Paul could see no purpose in activities that did not serve the Gospel and the edification of the church. (In 1 Cor 14:9, Paul will tell those who speak in tongues without an interpreter, “you will be talking into the air.”) (CC)

By contrast with such feeble efforts, his practice is to keep his body in check, so that it continually serves the great goal (cf. Heb 12:11–12). Paul is not here advocating asceticism or self-flagellation as a means to the individual’s private spiritual ends. Rather, he is calling on Christians to give up whatever does not advance the cause of the Gospel. Paul himself gave up many things that he could have claimed a right to have (1 Cor 9:4–6, 11–12, 15, 18). He calls on Christians to avoid doing anything that offends others (8:9–13). Christians should forego their rights “*for the sake of others in the community,*” placing their bodies at God’s disposal as a “living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1) devoted to winning others for the Gospel. (CC)

By thus disciplining himself, Paul’s faith was active in loving service to all. If he were to live a life of self-indulgence, he would endanger not only the salvation of others, but also his own. The danger of being disqualified is real. Disqualification would mean nothing less than missing out on the crown of life, as the context makes clear (1 Cor 9:24–25). Paul has been devoting his life to commending the benefits of the Gospel to others. These benefits are worth having; Paul wants a share in them himself (9:23). What a tragedy it would be if, after preaching to others, he would be found to be no longer “in the faith” (2 Cor 13:5–6), because he had become complacent and fallen in love with the things of this world (James 4:4)! The implication for the Corinthians should be obvious: it would be a tragedy if they forfeited their salvation by ceasing to exercise self-control and thus relapsing into idolatry. Paul will now elaborate that message in 1 Corinthians 10. Christians must constantly exercise self-discipline, restraining their sinful nature and putting it to death by the power of the Spirit, so that they may live for God—now and in eternity (Rom 8:13). (CC)

**Ch 9** As founder of the Corinthian Church, and as an apostle, Paul is perceived to have more “rights” than anyone else. Yet he consistently sets an example for the Corinthians, encouraging them to put off their own rights in order to serve one another. This is taught and modeled by Jesus Himself (Mk 10:45). His death and resurrection transform our lives so that we do not seek our own good but the good of others (Php 2:1–11). • Praise God, who Himself became human like us in order to save us! Strengthen us, O Lord, to serve others in all things, so that all people might come to know the power of Your death and resurrection. Amen. (TLSB)

#### GOSPEL – Mark 1:29-39

**<sup>29</sup> As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. <sup>30</sup> Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. <sup>31</sup> So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. <sup>32</sup> That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. <sup>33</sup> The whole town gathered at the door, <sup>34</sup> and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.**

**1:29-39** Jesus' first public act is an exorcism (Mk 1:21–28) and is followed by healing (vv 29–31). Exorcisms and healings are crucial aspects of Jesus' ministry. Both activities are instrumental in implementing Jesus' major objective: bringing the kingdom of God to earth (1:14–15). The usurping "ruler of this world," and his evil works and ways, are cast out. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 1)

It is noteworthy that Jesus performs the first exorcism in a man and his first healing on a woman. The kingdom will embrace both male and female. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 1)

In discussing the threefold office of Christ (Prophet, Priest, and King), the explanation of Luther's Small Catechism answers thus to question 125: "As Prophet, Christ preached personally during His life on earth, validating His word with miracles, especially His own resurrection; through the preached Gospel today [Christ] still proclaims Himself to be the Son of God and Redeemer of the world" (pp. 124–25). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 1)

Take note of the cross-reference materials for the pericopes, especially Lk 4:38–39, 42–43, which is clarified in the Concordia Commentary *Luke 1:1–9:50* (Arthur A. Just Jr. [St. Louis: Concordia, 1996], pp. 197–202). Crowds of people see in Jesus' words and actions the Messiah, the Son of the living God. He is the ultimate Prophet. Jesus' whole compassionate life—preaching and healing—is the will of God. The account of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple indicates the necessity of widespread preaching, teaching, and learning to carry out the Father's plan of salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 1)

The reactions by the demons demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus didn't allow his enemies, the demons, to speak. But Jesus, the divine Apostle, instructs his disciples and sends them out as apostles to speak the Good News to everyone for him. They are his missionaries. Jesus sees no distinction between body and soul in regard to his healing or preaching. Demon-possession, sickness and illness, sin and death are all signs of mankind's bondage to sin. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 1)

God the Father anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit at his Baptism and sent him to preach the Good News of the kingdom of God (salvation) to the poor from one town to the next. That is why he came. The poor who receive the Good News include the men who are demon-possessed, Peter's mother-in-law, and others who are sick. Jesus releases those who are held captive by Satan and disease. The presence of God is found in Christ Jesus (Immanuel). The message that Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, preaches embodies everything that is of the heavenly Father. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 1)

In regard to preaching, in *What Luther Says* (compiled by Ewald M. Plass [St. Louis: Concordia, 1959]), Martin Luther tells us that the message of the Word from a faithful servant of the Word is the message of God (pp. 1125–26). God uses men to be his agents or instruments of communication. Preachers should confine their message to the

Word of God. Good preaching centers in and exalts Christ, not the preacher. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 1)

The disciples in Mark: Out of the four Gospels, Mark's portrayal of the disciples is the harshest. More often than not, they don't "get it" and fail to understand Jesus' mission of bringing salvation. At 6:52, they are even described as hardhearted. The time they spend with Jesus doesn't seem to help, as James and John ask for the best places at Jesus' right and left hands in 10:35–45. At the end, in 14:31, all the disciples (not just Peter) confidently assert they will not deny Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

**1:29** *to the home of Simon and Andrew.* Jesus and the disciples probably went there for a meal, since the main Sabbath meal was served immediately following the synagogue service. (CSB)

From the synagogue they (Jesus, Peter, Andrew, James and John) went immediately to Peter's house. The most natural way to take this verse is that Simon and Andrew owned this house and that Peter's mother-in-law lived with them, This assumes that Peter's father was already dead. It could be that she, a widow, owned her own house in Capernaum and was staying temporarily with daughter and son-in-law. (Buls)

At any rate, the words seem to indicate that Jesus, James and John had been invited to eat the evening meal at the house of Peter and Andrew, The Jews customarily ate a festive meal when the Sabbath was over at 6 p.m. (Buls)

"Simon's mother-in-law." While Lutherans have used this passage to argue against Roman Catholic theology about a celibate priesthood in that Peter, the first "pope," was married, the text does not have that purpose in mind. This miracle could simply be showing that Jesus responds with compassion to individual need, including that of a feverish woman. It also emphasizes Jesus' authority that had been evident in the synagogue (1:21–28) with his teaching and casting out the demon. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

**1:30** *Simon's mother-in-law.* Peter was plainly a married man. 1 Corinthians 9:5 clearly says that Peter took his wife along on his preaching tours. (Buls)

IN BED WITH A FEVER – Often symptom of a serious illness. (TLSB)

"In bed" means that she was bedfast. "With a fever," a predicate participle, gives the reason. Luke 4:39 says that the fever was intense. Note another "told him." No sooner had Jesus entered the house when they informed Jesus about her fever. Luke adds that "they besought Him for her." Note how plain the humanity of Jesus is in all of this. (Buls)

**1:31** "lifted her up." The vocabulary is also used for the resurrection of Jesus and those who believe in him, but that would be reading back into this text what is yet to come.

More prominent is that the miracle was immediately effective in that she began to serve them—to carry out her vocation in this home. We do not know what the fever was, but the lack of medical resources would make any fever a serious situation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

Note both the humanity and divinity of Jesus. He grasped her by the hand. That is so human. But raising her up was more than human. A person with a high fever is very weak. Jesus did not lift dead weight by grasping her hand. His divinity, working through His humanity, caused her to rise. Luke adds that "He rebuked the fever," the same verb, in Greek, used to rebuke the winds and waves. His Word brought the fever to an end. (Buls)

Touched her. This is similar to how He revived Jairus's daughter (5:41-42). (TLSB)

FEVER LEFT HER...BEGAN TO WAIT ON THEM – Indicates the completeness and instantaneousness of her recovery. (TLSB)

"Left" at Mark 1:31, is plainly resultative. It is the same verb used for "forgive." When God forgives, the sins are no more. When Jesus spoke, the fever was no more. The Koine text, followed by KJV and NKJV adds the word "immediately." If it is not textual, it is implicit in the text. She did not become well gradually but immediately. (Buls)

"She began serving them," that is, the guests. The text would seem to imply that Peter's wife had prepared the evening meal and that now her mother assisted her. (Buls)

Ylvisaker: The mother-in-law of Peter is the first woman who performed the service of evangelical deaconess. (Buls)

**1:32** *the people brought.* They waited until the Sabbath was over (after sunset) before carrying anything (see Jer 17:21–22). (CSB)

Here we have a genitive absolute of time denoting about 6 p.m. "After sunset" is a subordinate clause of time, making the time more specific, at sunset. Obviously the meal was over. (Buls)

The miracle of driving out the demon (verses 23-28) had caused a great stir in Capernaum. Perhaps by this time the people had also heard about Jesus' healing Peter's mother-in-law. "They began bringing." It is clear that they waited until the Sabbath was ended at 6 p.m. Note that the sick and the devil-possessed are clearly distinguished. Devil possession is not merely illness. And devil possession may or may not be caused or accompanied by illness. (Buls)

Because of Sabbath regulations, the people most likely waited until sundown to come to Jesus with the sick and demon-possessed. Once they started, the imperfect verb tense indicates they kept bringing people to Jesus—a continuous stream arriving at Peter's home. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

**1:33** WHOLE TOWN GATHERED – Note the perfect paraphrastic verb. "Whole" means the city in its entirety gathered at the door of the house of Peter. Mark alone reports this. Such a large gathering at the door of a house is unique in the Gospels. Mark 2:2 is similar to it but not so extensive. (Buls)

Fahling: Parents, children, husbands, wives, brought, led, and carried their beloved sick. A peaceful scene of faith and hope. But also a scene of suffering humanity. (Buls)

So much suffering has sin caused in the world! (Buls)

Stoeckhardt: The preaching of the Gospel was His chief prophetic work, and His miracles served to confirm His doctrine. That the kingdom of God had come, showed itself also in this that now the power of God, and the power to do miracles was effective on earth. The great prophets of the Old Covenant performed miracles. . . But Jesus did miracles in overabundance. . . His very nature produced them. (Buls)

Perhaps verse 33 indicates not only the sick and demon possessed and those who brought them but also additional people who came to witness what was happening. (Buls)

**1:34** HEALED – From Matthew 8:16 and Luke 4:40 it is clear that the word "many" here in Mark 1:34 does not mean that Jesus healed only some, but that He healed all who were brought. Mark is stressing that the number was very large. It must have been a magnificent sight. (Buls)

"Various" shows that the kinds of sicknesses were many. Despite all our modern medical know-how, there are so many kinds of illness, even many species of one genus. So long as there is sin in the world (and that will be til its very end) there will always be many diseases. (Buls)

*therapeuō, therapeia*, "to heal; healing." In secular Greek, the word means "to serve, to cure, to care for the sick, to treat," and the most common, "to heal." Philo of Alexandria refers to healing of both body and soul. The Messiah brings more than medical treatment. He brings real healing. It is no less a part of his ministry than preaching. Driving out demons is a form of healing. This is done by his Word. The healing is total. Disciples are commanded to heal the sick. Pastors heal through the Word and Sacraments. Compiled from *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds.; translated and abridged by Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985]) (pp. 331–32). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 1)

DROVE OUT - *ekballō*, "to cast out." Literally, in Greek, the word means "to throw out, expel or repel." While Judaism had a series of formulas to effect exorcisms, Jesus simply uses his word and his full power over demons. Jesus also commissions his apostles to cast out demons. Compiled from *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds.;

translated and abridged by Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985] p. 92). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 1)

Note that Mark distinguishes between ordinary illnesses and demon-possession. Even the verbs are different. He healed diseases but expelled many demons. Matthew says that He expelled them "with His Word." Luke adds that as the demons came out they cried "Thou art the Son of God." When Mark says that Jesus was not allowing the demons to speak he means that He would not allow them to call Him the Son of God. Look at the well-attested Greek text variant for this verse: "Because they knew that He was the Christ." Why would Jesus not allow the devils to call Him by His titles? Not only because the confession came from an unholy mouth but also because they might have applied the title wrongly. Perhaps they would have diverted the people from Jesus' true mission by saying that He was a Messiah to their liking, something like the incident at John 6:15. Satan used the title "Son of God" only to divert Jesus from His true mission. Cf. Matthew 4:3.6. He tempted Jesus to be a self-serving and popular Savior. (Buls)

The devils did not "realize" but "knew," without anyone telling them, that Jesus was the Son of God. Cf. James 2:19. They knew much but did not assent to it nor put their confidence in it. (Buls)

And it is sad to note that none of the people who were healed or witnessed the healings acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God. Luke 4:23 tells us of the many works Jesus performed in Capernaum. Matthew 11:23.24 and Luke 10:15 tell us how cold and impenitent these miracles left these people. Their judgment will be worse than that of Sodom. "He came unto His own but His own received Him not." John 1:11. What a grief that must have been to Jesus Who was not only divine but also human! (Buls)

*because they knew who he was.* Luke says, "because they knew he was the Christ" (Lk 4:41). Jesus probably wanted first to show by word and deed the kind of Messiah he was (in contrast to popular notions) before he clearly declared himself, and he would not let the demons frustrate this intent. (CSB)

It begins the references to the "Messianic secret." Jesus does not want to base his ministry on the testimony of demons or others who offer their own slant on his mission. He wants his words and deeds to speak for themselves (Jn 10:25, 38). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 1)

Jesus did not allow the demons to speak. He wanted those who were healed and those who witnessed the healings to draw their own conclusions directly from his words and actions and thus to come to the realization he was more than just a healer of the body; he was the promised Savior from sin. (PBC)

Not only did he not let them speak because the confession came from an unholy mouth and also because they might have applied the title wrongly. Perhaps they would have diverted the people from Jesus' true mission by saying that he was a Messiah to their liking, something like the incident at John 6:15. (B)

**1:29–34** Jesus' first day of public ministry—the Sabbath—is a busy one. Given the endless series of things to which Jesus attends, we sometimes imagine that He is too busy for us and our problems. But Jesus knows and cares for each of us individually. He actually commands us to lay all our needs before Him and stands ever willing and able to help us. • Lord, teach us to turn to You in every need. Then give us grateful hearts so that, after receiving Your kindness and healing, we thank and serve You. Amen. (TLSB)

**<sup>35</sup> Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. <sup>36</sup> Simon and his companions went to look for him, <sup>37</sup> and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" <sup>38</sup> Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." <sup>39</sup> So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.**

**1:35-38** These verses have several interesting concepts within them. One is the emphasis on Jesus going off by himself to pray—a pattern that would repeat itself many times. There is also the suggestion of a conflict between Jesus and the disciples (cf. the conflict between Paul and the Corinthians). They "pursued" (*v 36: katediōxen*) Jesus because they wanted him to come back to his place of triumphs. But he has other plans—to go to nearby villages. As was St. Paul, Jesus is under divine compulsion to fulfill his mission. He does not exercise freedom to go wherever and do whatever he pleases, or do as the crowds please. Even he is a Servant. In exorcising, healing, and preaching the kingdom of God comes. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 1)

**1:35** SOLITARY PLACE, WHERE HE PRAYED – Though Jesus had plenty to do in Capernaum (vv 29-34), He nonetheless retreated into the wilderness in order to pray. The Gospels repeatedly depict Jesus spending time alone in prayer (cf 6:46; Lk. 5:16; 6:12). (TLSB)

Jesus must have worked until late at night, healing the sick and casting out devils. (Buls)

Lenski: The remarkable thing is that there were so many, all in this one city. This affliction (devil possession) did not appear only in rare and isolated cases; it was prevalent and well-known as distinct from any form of disease. (Buls)

After this strenuous Sabbath Day Jesus very likely got at least a little sleep at the house of Simon Peter. The words mean "very early while it was still night." The verbs are graphic: "After he got up He went out (of the house) and went away." "Solitary" always means "devoid of people." He wanted to be alone. "And there He began and continued to pray." Obviously Jesus prayed about the situation in which He found Himself, just as He prayed alone in the Garden of Gethsemane about the situation in which He found Himself. Evidently He foreknew (Luke 4:42) that the people wanted Him to stay there. A man who could cure all their diseases and drive out all their demons was very attractive. (Buls)



Fahling: It was, however, not His purpose to establish a clinic at Capernaum. This seems to have been what the people at Capernaum expected. (Buls)

After the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:15) when they wanted to make Him King by force He went away, all alone, to pray. Why? For strength to overcome this temptation. Mankind always wants a Messiah of its own making, for better earthly conditions such as no sickness, better wages, more food, etc. (Buls)

It literally means “wilderness place.” The description is in appropriate geographically, for the land about Capernaum was cultivated during this period. Its reference is to a place of solitude which in some sense recalls the wilderness. This and other texts suggest that Jesus deliberately withdraws from the people to return to an area which has the character of the wilderness where he encountered Satan and sustained temptation. The nature of the temptation in each instance may be related to the clamor of the crowds, who are willing to find in Jesus a divine-man who meets their needs and so wins their following. He turns from their acclaim, returning to a place which recalls his determination to fulfill the mission for which he has come into the world. In Mark’s Gospel Jesus is seen in prayer only three times: at the beginning of the account, when his ministry was defined (1:35), in the middle after the feeding of the 5000 (6:46), and near the conclusion when Jesus is in Gethsemane (14:32-42). These three occasions have the character of a critical moment. The setting for Jesus’ prayer is quite alone in spite of the three disciples who are separated a short distance from him. The situation again recalls the wilderness when Jesus confronts the temptation of Satan, and is sustained by help from God. His strength is in prayer through which he affirms his intention to fulfill the will of God, which means his submission to the judgment of God on behalf of the many who return to the wilderness without understanding. (Lane)

The desolate place is most likely a secluded place outside of town. *Erēmos* is the same word used for the desert when Jesus was tempted, but we cannot say if this is the place where Satan confronted Jesus during the forty days. However, in Mark when Jesus retreats in prayer, it is because he is being tempted with abandoning his messianic mission (6:46; 14:32–42). It is desolate not just because of its physical appearance but also because of what Jesus goes through there. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

That Sabbath had been an exceptionally busy one for Jesus, yet he did not sleep late the next morning. It may seem strange to us that Jesus the Son of God felt the need to spend time in praying to and communing with his heavenly Father, but only until we remember he was also truly human. As such he too was dependent upon God. However in one respect his prayers were not identical with ours. They were not prayers for forgiveness of sins, for he had none. In his prayers he talked with his heavenly Father about the work that lay before him and thus found strength for his task. On this particular morning he may well have discussed with the Father whether he should remain longer in Capernaum or begin taking his message into other areas of Galilee. The Father’s answer was clear in the words of Jesus to his disciples and in his subsequent action. (PBC)

**1:36** *companions*. Andrew, James, John and perhaps Philip and Nathanael (cf. Jn 1:43–45).(CSB)

"Went to look for" means "to pursue strenuously." "Companions" evidently means Andrew, James and John and maybe even Peter's wife and mother-in-law. (Buls)

Hendriksen: Excitedly the disciples inform Jesus about this. The result, however, was surprising. (Buls)

THEY FOUND HIM – That they found him suggests that they were aware of his practice of going apart by himself to pray. (PBC)

**1:37-38** The temptation here involves the people's (including the disciples') expectations. They wanted to set Jesus' priorities in terms of personal needs and/or a nationalistic utopia. The temptation would be to use his growing popularity and authority to walk a different path than suffering and death. His response is to move on to the next town to preach, and his message was set forth earlier in the chapter: repent and believe. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

**1:37** EVERYONE IS LOOKING FOR YOU! – What are you doing here when you should be in the midst of the multitude who are clamoring for you? A very considerable impression had been made in Capernaum, and in the mistaken thinking of the fishermen it was this response which Jesus had sought to elicit. Jesus' answer indicates their failure to understand him or his mission. The crowds that gathered in Capernaum had made their decision, but it could not be the appropriate one because it involved not repentance but attraction to Jesus as a performer of miracles. That is why Jesus interrupts the miracles to go elsewhere to proclaim the gospel. His purpose is not to heal as many people as possible as a manifestation of the kingdom of God drawn near in his person, but to confront men with the demand for decision in the perspective of God's absolute claim upon their person. (Lane)

They said: "All are seeking you." It would seem that Hendriksen is right. The disciples so impressed and so excited about the "seeking" of all. But cf. John 6:24. The seeking was very likely only for selfish reasons. The disciples needed to learn a lesson. The text does not say that the people were seeking to have Him do more miracles but merely that He should not leave them (Luke 4:42). (Buls)

**1:38** GO ELSEWHERE – Jesus refused to stay within the friendly confines of Capernaum. He was committed to preaching, exorcising demons and healing throughout Israel. (TLSB)

The antecedent of "us" is obviously the disciples. Jesus was primarily a Herald, a Preacher. Luke 4:43 explains: "I must preach the good tidings of the Kingdom of God to the other cities also." "I came" plainly means "I came out of heaven into this world" as Luke 4:42 clearly indicates. (Buls)

SO I CAN PREACH – *kērusso*, “to proclaim.” The New Testament uses many words to mean the proclamation of the Gospel message. This word can mean “to cry out loud, declare, announce, or preach.” It involves the declaration of an event. It stresses dynamic proclamation. Here proclaiming God’s Word is Jesus’ stated mission. He delivers the message as the prophet of fulfillment. His proclamation is an event. His Word is a creative force. It gives what it declares. Those whom Jesus heals tell others what has happened, even though he orders them not to do it (vv 44–45). It seems that Jesus did not want to have the amazement over the miracle replace faith (pp. 432–33). Compiled from *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds.; translated and abridged by Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985]). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 1)

**1:39** *throughout Galilee*. The first of what seem to be three tours of Galilee (second tour, Lk 8:1; third tour, Mk 6:6 and Mt 11:1). (CSB)

Josephus described Galilee as a land of great villages: “The cities lie very thick and the very many villages that are here are everywhere so very full of people, because the richness of their soil, that the very least of them contained more than 15,000 inhabitants. (Lane)

PREACHING IN THEIR SYNAGOGUES – Wherever Jesus went on this tour, he entered the synagogues. This offered him many opportunities to preach the gospel, since synagogue services were not only conducted on the Sabbath but also on Mondays and Thursdays. In connection with his preaching he also drove out demons for they were the opponents of his message. Our Lord saw the need for taking the gospel message beyond Capernaum. That reminds us we too are not to keep the gospel to ourselves, but to share it. (PBC)

Nestle 25th edition Greek text makes this the final verse of the preceding paragraph. The 26th edition makes it the first sentence of the following paragraph. (Buls)

"So" denotes attendant circumstance, what He constantly did. "Preaching" is the static use, meaning the same as always. Jesus always preached where people congregated. Read Matthew 4:23-25 for a fuller account of this tour throughout Galilee. Jesus preached, healed, drove out devils. People came from Syria, Galilee, Decapolis, from beyond Jordan and even from Jerusalem. (Buls)

We conclude with a few sentences from Stoeckhardt.

With sin Christ has also carried all the consequences of sin. Vicariously He had taken on Himself all the miseries of this life, and through His entire living in the flesh, through His suffering and death He atoned and made satisfaction for what we have broken and deserved. With the healing of the sick and the casting out of the devil, He not only showed Himself as a Prophet, mighty in word and deed, but also as a faithful High

Priest, who came to redeem His people from all their sins. Through Christ we are freed and delivered from all fetters of sin, and of the devil, and of hell. And although we still suffer in the flesh, if it is the Lord's will, yet no suffering of this earth can harm and consume us, and no death can kill us; for we conquer all because of Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us. (Buls)

**1:35–39** Though Jesus has much more to do among the people of Capernaum, He makes time for private devotion and then insists on moving on to visit other towns and villages. His unswerving adherence to the right priorities stands in sharp contrast with our own tendency to lose focus, allow others to set our agenda, and put lesser things above what is most important. Given our weaknesses, it is reassuring that Jesus keeps things straight. His highest goal was, and is, to fulfill the Father's command that He save the lost. • Lord, preserve us from misplaced priorities. Keep us focused on Your Gospel, that we may know and do what is pleasing in Your sight. Amen. (TLSB)