

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 45:1-7

Cyrus, God's Instrument

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: 2 “I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, 3 I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. 4 For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. 5 I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, 6 that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. 7 I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.

Ch 45 Infinitely merciful and patient, God does not tire to repeat Himself. Again and again He promises to deliver His fallen creatures and goes to great lengths to persuade doubting and fainthearted souls to believe the proclamation of their liberation. (TLSB)

45:1-2 The messenger formula in this verse signals a new unit of discourse. In 44:24-28, Yahweh addresses the Israelites who will be exiled. Here he speaks to Cyrus in an oracle that, in some ways, can be compared to Psalms 2 and 110, where Yahweh speaks to his Christ, David’s Lord (cf. 2 Sam. 7; 1 Chron. 17; 1 Ki. 3). While Yahweh uses Assyria to be “the rod of [his] wrath” (Is. 10:5) and Median soldiers (13:17) as “the tools of his wrath” (13:5), in 45:1-8 the scope of Cyrus’ mission is to rescue the Israelite captives from Babylon. How dare our God treat a pagan idol worshiper named Cyrus like one of his brightest and best! However, Yahweh’s ways are not our ways (55:8). (CC)

45:1 anointed. “Messiah” comes from the Hebrew for this word. Cyrus, a foreign emperor, is called “his anointed” just as he is called “my shepherd” (44:28), because God has appointed him to carry out a divine commission in his role as king. Nebuchadnezzar is similarly called “my servant” (Jer 25:9; 27:6; 43:10). The servant—Christ is called “the Anointed One” in Da 9:25–26 (CSB)

This translates into Greek as “Christ,” originally denoted one who had been appointed for a special task in God’s service by pouring oil on the head. The oil perhaps represented the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who would enable the anointed one to carry out his role. However, in the case of Cyrus, it seems unlikely that he was literally anointed. Probably the term is used in a general sense to describe him as a servant of God, as the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar was called (Jer 25:9). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

right hand I have grasped. The Lord takes hold of Cyrus’s right hand, as He did with Israel. (TLSB)

subdue nations – Cyrus’ rise to power began in 550 B.C., when he dethroned Astyages to become the ruler of the Persian Empire. Babylon fell to him in 539 B.C. Thus God subdued nations before him or could also be said “beat down.”). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

The events unfolded as follows. By 555 BC, Cyrus had gained devotion from the Persian tribes with singular ease, and he successfully rebelled against Media in 55 BC. So remarkable was his military

muscle that on one occasion he won a victory over the Lydians, whose horses ran away because they smelled Persian camels! In 539 BC Cyrus' general surrounded the city of Babylon, and the priests submitted descaling Cyrus Marduk's chosen monarch. Then they opened up the city gates and allowed the Persians to walk in. (CC)

Familiar Davidic theme (Ps 2:8–12; 110). (TLSB)

loose the belts. Figurative. A man “girded up” his loins in preparation for battle and donned his weapon (Ps 45:3). The loosening would remove the weapons and make him unprepared to fight. The kings were to be deprived of power. (TLSB)

open doors before him – Remarkably fulfilled in the conquest of Babylon, the gates of the city having been left open during the night of feasting. (CB)

45:2–3 In 539 BC, when Cyrus surrounded the city of Babylon, the priests of Marduk submitted and declared him to be Marduk's chosen monarch. They then opened the city gates to allow him and his army to enter peacefully. Jesus is the ultimate Anointed One, who opens the gates of hell (Rv 1:18) and sets prisoners free (Jn 8:36). (TLSB)

45:2 *level the exulted places* – Means “swollen up places” or “hills.” God promises to go before Cyrus, even as he preceded his covenant people during their wilderness wandering and conquest of Canaan. Note the parallel to Is 40:3-4, which describes the preparations for the coming of the Lord himself in Jesus Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

It is as though the Lord Himself personally took a hand in the issues involved, came down from heaven, led the way for Cyrus and cleared away the obstacles that towered in his path. (Leupold)

What Yahweh opens “no one can shut” (22:22). When guilt stands in the way, he promises, “though your sins are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow” (1:18). When gloom and doom are obstacles, he says, “The people walking in darkness has seen a great light” (9:2). When huge road blocks get in the way, he commands, “Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill made low. And the crooked ground will become level, and the rough places a plain” (40:4). When dryness and deadness are all around, Yahweh opens pools of water in the desert and springs in the parched ground (35:7). For Jacob, locked in his past, Yahweh opens up heaven (Gen. 28:11-22). For a nation surrounded by the enemy, Yahweh opens the waters of the Red Sea (Ex. 14-15). For the people who lament, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished” (Ezek. 37:11), Yahweh brings life to dead bones (Ezek. 38:1-14). And with a loving gleam in his eye, Yahweh promises to open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that his people will lack nothing (Mal. 3:10). (CC)

As Cyrus freed Israelite captives by defeating Babylon, all the more does the eternal Messiah, Jesus, free his people by his defeat of sin, death, and the devil. He sees how sin imprisons all people (e.g., Rom. 7:14-23). At his Baptism, heaven was opened (e.g. Mk.1:10). He proceeds to open eyes, ears, mouths, and hearts. Jesus even opens graves (John 11). But the grandest opening was yet to come. After Gethsemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha he says, “I was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore! And I have keys of death and hell” (Rev. 1:18). Because Jesus is alive, the gates of hell will never prevail against his church (Mt. 16:18). He gives pastors the office of the Keys (Jn. 20:22-23), and they administer his mercy and forgiveness through the Sacraments, absolution, and the preached Gospel. The message is clear. “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!” (Jn. 8:36). (CC)

doors of bronze ... bars of iron. Normally the doors of city gates were made of wood, and the bars were metal. (CSB)

The Lord represents Himself as actually battering down strong bronze gates that seemed to guaranty the safety of the cities and actually hewing in pieces gate-bars, and all this in the interest of Cyrus. (Leupold)

45:3 *give you treasurers of darkness* – A further item of God’s guiding of the destinies of this servant of His is that He allows the conqueror to amass rich treasures, such as are wont to be kept for safe-keeping in dark, sometimes subterranean, chambers, or may be buried in secret places – so to speak, the Fort Knox-in-stallions of days of old. The reassures amassed by Babylon must have been fabulous, for they are also referred to in Hab. 2:6-8; Jer 50:37; 51:13. (Leupold)

that you may know. God’s actions reveal his power (cf. Eze 6:7; 7:27). (CSB)

A careful reading of the text indicates that Cyrus did not know God as his own God and Savior, but he did come to understand that the Lord God of Israel was responsible for his success. In Cyrus’ own edict of 538 B.C., recorded in Ezra 1:2-4, he acknowledges that “the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem” had enabled him to conquer the other nations. God guides world history in such a way that even unbelievers will fear, respect, and submit to him. See Josh 2:9-11 and Phil 2:10 “at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow...”). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

call you by your name. To indicate God’s control of Cyrus’s activities. (CSB)

Yahweh calls Cyrus by name. This emphasizes the importance of Yahweh’ predictive capabilities. He alone is able to foretell the future and bring it to pass (Is. 41:4, 21-24, 26-27; 43:12; 44:7, 26; 45::20-21; 46:9-10; 48:3). Babylonian diviners attempt to peer into the future, but are woefully inadequate (44:25). (CC)

This verse concludes with the first of three reasons for God’s action. The Lord granted Cyrus victories and success so that he would know that it was the Lord who stood behind him. (PBC)

45:4 *my servant.* This verse describes how God uses the left-hand kingdom for the benefit of those in his right. Unbelieving rulers unwittingly carry out God’s plan, as Jesus himself implies about Pilate (Mt 19:11). (CSB)

The Lord clearly identifies the second reason for His action: “For the sake of Jacob My servant, of Israel My chosen.” Notice that God’s people still are precious in the eyes of the Lord. He calls them “my servant” and “my chosen,” special names that reveal their close relationship with the Lord. He has not forgotten them. He has remained faithful to the covenant He once made with Abraham, and He intends to fulfill all the promises He made concerning His people. (PBC)

my chosen – In Hebrew this is theologically equivalent to “elect” in Greek. God guides history for the sake of his elect (Mt 24:22; Rom 8:28; 11:7; 2 Tim 2:10).

my chosen. Perhaps “anointed” (v. 1). (CSB)

For Israel’s comfort, the Lord specifically names Cyrus, who has done nothing to earn his status in the Lord’s sight. (TLSB)

though you do not know me. Cyrus apparently worshiped the chief Babylonian deity, Marduk, whom he praised in his inscriptions. (CSB)

Though Cyrus used the Lord's name in his edict and attributed his success to the Lord, Isaiah notes that his words and actions do not stem from genuine faith. (TLSB)

When Cyrus took Babylon he was ignorant of Jehovah and of the designs which he purposed to accomplish through him, and was only indulging his own ambitious desires. The knowledge which he afterwards had of God, (Ezra 1:2) was doubtless received from the Jews residing in Babylon. God has often employed princes. Who were ignorant of Him and His counsels, to accomplish wonderful deliverances for His people. (CB)

45:5 *I ... there is no other.* This Lordship is not just the kingdom of grace over believers, but also God's kingdom of power over unbelievers.

I equip you – This type of dealing with man on the basis of pure grace is then the distinctive mark of His dealing with mankind. (Leupold)

45:6 *that people may know.* God acts to spread the message of salvation throughout the world because He is the only God for all (Mt 28:18–20). (TLSB)

The sequence of knowing Yahweh begins with the particular, Cyrus (45:4-5), and moves to the universal, all people (45:6). The goal of Jacob/Israel's restoration is that Cyrus, as well as the entire world, may know that Yahweh is the only God and then believe in him. Whereas Ps. 72:8-11 announces that this will come by means of the Heir of the throne of David, Yahweh shockingly links these promises to Cyrus. (CC)

rising ... to ... setting. The whole earth (see Mal 1:11 and note). (CSB)

I am the Lord...is no other – Only the Lord blots out sins. Only the Lord is the redeemer. No other religious idea, no other god, no other theology offers what the Lord offers: forgiveness, life, and salvation. We look beyond Cyrus to this greater work of God. No other God carefully planned the redemption of His people and all the world. The Lord's superiority rests on His plan to send a Redeemer more important than Cyrus. (PBC)

"I am Yahweh" appears frequently in this periscope: in 44:24 and in 45:3, 5-8, 18-19, 21. Knowing Yahweh is a central concern in the OT. From the burning bush (Ex. 3:14) to Ezekiel's ongoing use of "and you/they will know that I am Yahweh" (e.g., Ezek. 6:7, 10, 13-14; 7:4, 27; 13:14, 23). Israel's God demonstrates that he longs to be known. Josiah shows what this looks like concretely, for the king who repented after the rediscovery of the Torah then acts with justice and righteousness on behalf of the poor and needy (Jer. 22:15-16). Yahweh is fully known through Jesus Christ and his great acts of compassion for all people (Jn. 1:18; 14:9). (CC)

45:7 *darkness ... calamity.* Such as the darkness that plagued the Egyptians (see Ex 10:21–23; Ps 105:28; cf. Is. 47:11; Am 3:6). (CSB)

create darkness. Indicates aspect of God that the Vulg translates in v 15 as "the hidden God" (*Deus absconditus*). In His hiddenness, the Lord brings judgment and destruction; in His revealed state, He ushers in light and life (cf Jn 1:14). *well-being and ... calamity.* The Lord is not the source of evil or the cause of sin. Nothing happens without the Lord's knowledge and permission. He is the cause of well-being. He may inflict retribution, but He may also permit calamity to come through human sinfulness, through Satan, or through the sin-corrupted order of the natural world. (TLSB)

Since God is the author of all things, He governs and sets limits to all. The good and bad actions of men and angels are under His control that He accomplishes through them His own wise counsels, while they are left altogether free and responsible to Him for their conduct. (CB)

We may be puzzled by His dealings in our world and in our own lives, but whether He brings prosperity or creates disaster, He always has the best interests of His people in mind. So He promised, “In all things God works for the good of those who love Him” (Romans 8:28). (PBC)

I am the Lord, who does all these things. God foresees everything that happens and governs everything according to his good pleasure, which is to save all people by his grace alone in Jesus Christ (e.g., Ps. 139:16; Dan. 4:35; Acts 2:23; Rom. 11:33-36; 1 Peter 1:20-21; Rev. 17:17). The Bible also teaches that since the fall (Gen. 3), humans are slaves to sin and by nature reject God’s gift of salvation. Both of these truths need to stand in tension. People are saved only when God works through his mean of grace to bring about repentance and faith in Christ. Thus salvation is the free gift of God without any human merit or cooperation; it is God’s work alone. (CC)

EPISTLE – 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Greeting

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

1:1 *Silas*. He accompanied Paul on most of his second missionary journey. (CSB)

Aka Silas; leading member of the Church in Jerusalem; proclaimer of God’s Word. After the Jerusalem Council, he accompanied Paul to Antioch to deliver the Council’s decision (Ac 15, esp v 22). During their travels together, they met Timothy in Lystra. (TLSB)

Timothy. Recipient. Both he and Silas helped Paul found the Thessalonian church (see Ac 17:1–14). (CSB)

Son of a Greek man and a Jewish woman (cf Ac 16:1). His mother had become a Christian a few years earlier when Paul and Barnabas preached in the city. (TLSB)

Both were trusted junior co-workers who accompanied St Paul in the proclamation of the Gospel. Though separated for a while, they were now reunited with Paul in Corinth. They had visited with him in Thessalonica in AD 49 (cf Ac 17:1–14). Both were selected by Paul for his second missionary journey (Ac 15:36–40; 16:1–5). (TLSB)

Thessalonians. In the first century, Thessalonica was the capital city of the province of Macedonia and the largest city on the Greek Peninsula. Today it is called Thessaloniki (or Salonika) and is still located on the Thermaic Gulf in Greece. (TLSB)

in. Indicates the vital union and living relationship that Christians have with the Father and the Son (see Jn 14:23; 17:21). The close connection between the Father and the Son points to the Trinitarian relationship (see 3:11; 2Th 1:2, 8, 12; 2:16; 3:5). (CSB)

Father and the Lord Jesus Christ – This expresses the close relation and vital union of believers with the triune God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

The close association of Jesus with the Father shows the highest place given to Him.

Lord. Gk *kyrios*, translation of the divine name Yahweh. It was the name given to Jesus Christ to show His divinity. The omission of the Holy Spirit here does not mean that the Church existed without the Holy Spirit. Wherever God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ exist, the Holy Spirit is also there. (TLSB)

Grace and peace. Paul addressed his letter to the church, or congregation, of the Thessalonians, not merely to the officers, the presbyters and deacons, but to all the members. There were no hierarchical distinctions in those days, neither did men think of restricting the study of the Word of God to the preachers or priests. The entire congregation, all the true believers in Christ in the city, were in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This profound and stately expression does not denote merely a fellowship with God and the Savior Jesus Christ, but it emphasizes that the entire life of the believers is in God, that their entire sphere, their whole state of existence, is in the Lord, Rom. 16, 11; John 15, 4; 1 John 2, 5; 5, 20. The fact that the Christians are in Christ and in God, the two persons of the Godhead being one in essence, makes them new creatures, separates them from the world and consecrates them to the Lord. The apostolic salutation to this congregation of consecrated believers is brief, but comprehensive: Grace to you and peace. He wishes that the kindness, the favor, the mercy of God may be theirs for the sake of Christ, and that thus they might enter into the right relation with God once more, a relation which had been torn asunder by the Fall. He that is the possessor of the grace of God through Jesus Christ will also be sure of the peace with God in Jesus Christ. (Kretzmann)

1:1 As a good shepherd, Paul wants to keep in touch with the flock of God. Labor in God's kingdom is not a one-man job. We must not forget to visit and follow up with those who are in Christ Jesus. We must work in God's kingdom by joining hands with other brothers and sisters. God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ sustain the Church and carry it in the palm of Their hand. • Lord, thank You that the Church is rooted in You and not in feeble human beings. As feeble as we are, help us to join hands, as did Paul, Silas, and Timothy, and labor in Your kingdom. Amen. (TLSB)

The Thessalonians' Faith and Example

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, 3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. 9 For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

1:2 *thank.* For the fruit of faith God produced in the lives of the Thessalonians. (TLSB)

The present tense denotes a continual remembrance of his fellow believers in prayers. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

constantly mentioning. Either as often as they prayed or contemplated God. (TLSB)

1:3 The triad of faith, hope and love is found often in the NT (5:8; Ro 5:2–5; 1Co 13:13; Gal 5:5–6; Col 1:4–5; Heb 6:10–12; 10:22–24; 1Pe 1:3–8, 21–22). (CSB)

Gifts of the Holy Spirit that remain with God's people when all others vanish. The greatest of all is love (1Co 13). Though listed separately, the three are connected. (TLSB)

work of faith. Faith produces action (see Ro 1:5; 16:26; Gal 5:6; 2Th 1:11; Jas 2:14–26). (CSB)

Literally, “of the work of faith.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

labor of love – This type of love is not, of course, exclusive, conditional, or self-serving. It is, on the contrary, inclusive, absolute, and sacrificial. God's love is active. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

steadfastness – Endurance is not passive acquiescence of life's twists and turns, but firm resolve and quiet strength to meet adversity. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

hope. Not unfounded wishful thinking, but firm confidence in our Lord Jesus Christ and his return (v. 10). See Heb 6:18–20 and note on Col 1:5. (CSB)

Christian hope makes possible our joyful endurance of trials and tribulations. Hope is not mere wishful thinking, but the confident expectation that God will do as he promises. Hope is a synonym of faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

1:4 know. The reasons for Paul's conviction regarding their election are stated in vv. 5–10. (CSB)

brothers. United to each other through union with Christ. This term is used 28 times in the two letters to the Thessalonians. (CSB)

Refers to God's family, the Church. (TLSB)

loved ... chosen. Both words speak of God's electing love (see Col 3:12; 2Th 2:13). (CSB)

Their faith and love show that God chose the Thessalonians. Paul does not speak of election in the abstract but notes its concrete effects in Christians' daily lives due to the Gospel's impact. (TLSB)

The doctrine of election is a difficult truth for many Christians to accept, and indeed it is impossible to fully understand. Edward Koehler defines it, “The doctrine of predestination (election) is this: Whatever God has done, is doing, and will still do..to bring us to faith in Christ and preserve us in this faith (Summary of Christian Doctrine, p. 182). It is intended as a doctrine of comfort for Christians, but at the same time it must not be used to exclude others from God's plan of salvation, which is for all people. Paul's purpose in mentioning it here, it would seem, is to provide further motivation for the Thessalonian Christians to persist in the “work..labor..and..endurance” produced by their Christian “faith..love..and..hope.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

1:5 our gospel. The gospel preached by Paul, Silas and Timothy and that they themselves had received by faith. It is first of all God the Father's (2:8) because he originated it, and Christ's (3:2) because it springs from his atoning death. (CSB)

A shared Gospel. Paul received it from the Lord, but it is the same message preached by the other apostles (1Co 15:3; Gal 2:9). (TLSB)

Paul did not travel to Thessalonica because of favorable “scouting reports” or because an ancient market analyst suggested it as a great place to start a congregation. Rather Paul received a revelation from the Lord that God’s people in Macedonia needed to hear the Good News. Paul’s ministry, then, was prompted and sustained by grace. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

power. The power that delivered them from spiritual bondage. That power is of the Holy Spirit (see Ro 15:13, 18–19; 1Co 2:4–5), but it also resides in the gospel itself (see Ro 1:16). (CSB)

The good news of our Lord Jesus Christ always has power to change lives (Heb 4:12). The Word’s power may be demonstrated in visible, supernatural miracles in areas that have not been reached with the Gospel. (TLSB)

Holy Spirit. Jesus said the Spirit would testify about Him. The Spirit is always present when the Gospel is preached (cf Jn 15:26). (TLSB)

full conviction. Such conviction, on the part of both the preachers and the Thessalonians, was also of the Holy Spirit. (CSB)

Not delivered with doubt or uncertainty. Full clarity, understanding, and certainty come from the Holy Spirit, who persuades and convicts on the basis of Christ’s accomplished work.

plorophoria is a rare word in the NT, occurring elsewhere only in Col 2:2; Heb 6:11; 10:22. The noun refers to “full confidence, certainty, assurance” that God’s promises are true, reliable, and will be fulfilled. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

proved to be among – Paul and his companions, by God’s grace, were empowered to set a godly example of faith and endurance in Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

1:6 imitators. The order in Christian imitation: (1) Believers in Macedonia and Achaia imitated the Thessalonians (v. 7), just as the Thessalonians imitated the churches in Judea (2:14); (2) the Thessalonians imitated Paul, just as the Corinthians did (1Co 4:6; 11:1) and just as all believers were to imitate their leaders (2Th 3:7, 9; 1Ti 4:12; Tit 2:7; 1Pe 5:3); (3) Paul imitated Christ (1Co 11:1) as did the Thessalonians (v. 6); (4) all were to imitate God (Eph 5:1). (CSB)

The Thessalonians followed Christ’s and the apostles’ examples by suffering persecution gladly for the sake of their faith in the Gospel (1Co 11:1). (TLSB)

mimatas is responsible for the English words mimic and mime. The basic meaning is “to behave in the same manner as someone else. As Paul uses this term, he is calling the Christian church to an active obedience, not simply a shallow or careless resemblance. To imitate means to recognize the authority of Jesus’ person and Word, and to permit God to shape and mold our faith and life according to his pattern. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

much affliction. Such as recorded in Ac 17:5–14 (see also 1Th 2:14). (CSB)

Trouble or hardship that Christians may have due to their faith and witness. Some of Paul’s hosts in Thessalonica were definitely persecuted by their fellow countrymen (Ac 17:1–9). (TLSB)

The Thessalonians accepted their trials – not with regret, but with inner peace, a display of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and lives. To remain faithful to our Lord in such instances is to be an imitator of him who was faithful to the end. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

This attitude of the heart is always accompanied with the joy of the Holy Ghost, in the very midst of much affliction, No matter how much hostility and persecution the believers must contend with, no matter how seriously the wretchedness and misery of this present life seek to create doubt and unhappiness in their hearts, they have the assurance of the Holy Ghost in the Word, and therefore they are, in their heart of hearts, satisfied, joyful, happy. (Kretzmann)

1:7 Rome had divided the Greek Peninsula into two provinces, Macedonia (north) and Achaia (south). (TLSB)

an example – In classical Greek, tupos, “type, model” can mean either a mold, die or stamp; or the imprint left by it in clay, metal, etc. For example, in John 20:25, Thomas speaks of seeing the tupos, “mark” or “imprint,” left by the nails in Christ’s hands and feet. Acts 23:25 uses the word for the “seal” or “signature” of the Roman official Claudius, which he affixed to a legal document he wrote on behalf of Paul; the imprint signified that the document was genuine and authoritative. The idea is similar to Eph 1:13, which speaks of Christians being “sealed” with the Holy Spirit, that is, signed with God’s name and signature in Baptism. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

Macedonia and Achaia. The two Roman provinces into which Greece was then divided (see Ac 19:21; Ro 15:26). (CSB)

1:8 *the word of the Lord sounded forth* – The word edzacheo, literally “to echo out,” is usually translated “rang out” or “resounded.” The English derivative “echo,” which would imply that it is the Lord’s Word that resonates in us and off of us. We Christians do not make up our own gospel; rather, we affirm and faithfully sound forth the words the Lord has spoken, as in the worship liturgy. The idea is the same as that of Christians as reflectors of God’s light. A colorful translation might be “thundered forth,” since the verb is in the perfect tense to give the idea of a continuing echo. A loud thunderclap reverberates for some time. In the mountains or in a canyon, the echo of thunder is awesome, as the Israelites experienced at the foot of Mt Sinai. (Ex 19:16-19) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

This is not flattery (cf 2:5–6). As in the popular saying “Actions speak louder than words,” news of the Thessalonians’ faith, love, and hope rooted in the Gospel spread far wider than their immediate environment. The Thessalonians functioned as a missionary church by proclaiming the Gospel they received by word and life. (TLSB)

everywhere. In every place they visited or knew about (see Ro 1:8; 1Co 1:2; 2Co 2:14; 1Ti 2:8). The news spread because Thessalonica was on the important Egnatian Way; it was also a busy seaport and the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. (CSB)

Throughout Macedonia and Achaia, the ancient Grecian country, the larger part of what is now the Balkan Peninsula, the Gospel had been disseminated, people had gone forth, even in this brief space of time since Paul first preached there, endeavoring to spread the seed of the Gospel doctrine throughout the country. Surely a splendid example of interest and zeal for all Christians to imitate. By thus taking advantage of their opportunities, the Thessalonians had caused their faith to be known, to be spoken of everywhere. Cp. Rom. 1, 8; Col. 1, 6. 23. The rapid, powerfully spreading conversion was exciting attention everywhere, so that there was nothing for Paul to add; the facts spoke more loudly than his words. (Kretzmann)

1:9–10† Three marks of true conversion: (1) turning from idols, (2) serving God and (3) waiting for Christ to return. In his two short letters to the Thessalonians, Paul speaks much of the second coming of Christ (v. 10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13–5:4; 5:23–24; 2Th 1:7–10; 2:1–12). (CSB)

1:9 *they themselves* – So great was the sensation which the faith of the Thessalonians had caused in all the cities along the trade routes of the Eastern Mediterranean that, as the apostle writes: For of their own accord people make mention concerning us what manner of entrance we had toward you, and how you turned to God from the idols to serve the living and true God. This was surely a novel experience for the apostle. Before he so much as had an opportunity to refer to the willing acceptance which the Thessalonians gave to the Gospel, in order to incite others to emulation and to open a way for the preaching of the Gospel, people told him of their own accord what they knew of the situation in Thessalonica, of the willingness with which the Thessalonians had received the Gospel-message. (Kretzmann)

idols to serve – It was known everywhere how they had turned away from the worship of idols with the express intention of serving only the living, the true God. The God of the Gospel-preaching is the living God, as opposed to all dead idol-images; He is the true, the real God, as opposed to the imaginary, lying idols. To serve this true God in faith and love, that is the life of the believers, therein they find true and lasting happiness. The service of all false gods and imaginary deities is a slavery which the conscience of the idolaters denounces, which they themselves abhor; the service of the true God is the outflow of the relation of love which obtains between the heavenly Father and His children. (Kretzmann)

Before the Gospel came to them, the Gentile Thessalonians worshiped idols. Forsaking idol worship and coming to the true and living God was important evidence of true conversion in the first century. (TLSB)

to serve – First, they turned to God from Idols. Second, they came to “serve the living and true God.” The verb *douleuo*, “serve,” is from the same root as *doulos*, “slave” – a term the apostle Paul proudly uses for himself in the introductions to some of his epistles. It underlines the nature of Christian service as rendered to a Master who has ownership of all aspects of our life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

1:10 *and to wait* – Third, they were waiting for the return of the Lord. Their anticipation of the parousia led to dedicated service. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

The second coming of our Lord was actively expected by the Early Church and thought of as near. (TLSB)

Jesus. And the best is yet to be: And to wait for the coming of His Son from the heavens, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, the Deliverer from the wrath to come. While the believers lead their lives of faith and love, serving God and their but fellow-men in the simplicity of their hearts, their minds are looking forward to, they are eagerly expecting, they are anxiously awaiting, the coming of the Son of God, who will return from heaven in the fullness of His divine glory, Matt. 25, 31. It was this Son whom God raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of His power. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the great fact by which He has definitely and incontrovertibly been proved to be the Son of God with power, Rom. 1, 4. (Kretzmann)

wrath.† A reference to the final judgment (see note on Ro 1:18; cf. Lk 3:7 and note); millennialists think it refers to a future period of tribulation. (CSB)

Divine judgment to come upon the unbelieving on the Last Day. (TLSB)

1:2–10 The Thessalonians become model Christians in words and deeds due to the impact of the Gospel in their lives and the fruit of the Spirit demonstrated in their faith, love, and hope. Compared to the Thessalonians, we are much poorer in our faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope. Even without hardship or persecution, we are slow to confess our faith and live it out in love. The Lord knows each one of us and our specific situation. His Spirit has created faith in us and gives us power and full conviction. Despite our weaknesses and failings, His unfailing love and forgiveness will sustain us to be His witnesses. • Thank You, Lord, for the victorious life You gave to the Thessalonians. Make us also an exemplary witness for the Gospel, so that Your name may be glorified far beyond our community. Amen. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 22:15-22

Paying Taxes to Caesar

15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. 16 And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances.] 17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” 18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? 19 Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. 20 And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” 21 They said, “Caesar's.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” 22 When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

22:15–17 The Pharisees were ardent nationalists, opposed to Roman rule, while the hated Herodians, as their name indicates, supported the Roman rule of the Herods. Now, however, the Pharisees enlisted the help of the Herodians to trap Jesus in his words. After trying to put him off guard with flattery, they sprang their question: “Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” (v. 17). If he said “No,” the Herodians would report him to the Roman governor and he would be executed for treason. If he said “Yes,” the Pharisees would denounce him to the people as disloyal to his nation. (PBC)

Jesus arrives in Jerusalem to fulfill his mission, right on God's time, as the spotless Lamb of God. Matthew relays a succession of three interrogations of Jesus by the Pharisees and Sadducees (15–22, 23–33, 34–40) trying to find some fault in him. None was found. Through these three examinations, Matthew shows that Jesus is the spotless Lamb, now examined and ready (Ex 12:3–6) for the sacrifice on behalf of all. Jesus ends the examination by asking his questioners in vv 41–46 to interpret the question of Psalm 110 regarding the Messiah as David's son (true man) and David's Lord (true God). They could not or would not answer. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 4)

There is an old saying that politics makes strange bedfellows. Here the Pharisees and the Herodians display a common hatred for Jesus that overshadows their sharp disagreements with each other. (PBC)

22:15 *went* – *proeuthentes* implies that the Pharisees had heard everything Jesus said from 21:24 to 22:14, but it had left them cold and heartless.

Plotted how to entangle him – *pagideuw* occurs only here in the NT. It is metaphorical for trapping game. That has to be done stealthily, without the animal's or bird's awareness.

Once again, Jesus' adversaries set a trap for Him, by means of a trick question. (TLSB)

sumbouvlion e[labon o{pw" aujto;n pagideuvswn. The NIV's "laid plans to trap him" does not fully convey the insidiousness of the more literal "took council how they might catch him." The motivation for the question that will be put to Jesus is pure evil. The Pharisees want nothing more or less than to trap him. The only question is how it might be done. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 4)

22:16 *their disciples*. Just as Jesus had disciples, so also did other famous religious figures, such as John the Baptist (9:14; 11:2) and, in this case, the Pharisees. (TLSB)

It would have been humiliating to a degree for them to appear with the Herodians, whom they despised and antagonized. They sent their disciples instead. (PBC)

with the Herodians –The Herodians are mentioned just two other times in the New Testament: in Mark's parallel account of this event (Mk 12:13) and in Mk 3:6, where, in reaction to Jesus' healing of a man with the shriveled hand, "the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus." The Pharisees, with their devotion to the traditions and laws of the Jews, were no friends of the Herodian party, which represented Roman authority, but the trap required a threat from that quarter too. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 4)

we know that you are true – The Pharisees would not come themselves, but would send a group of their keenest students together with the Herodians, who this time might be expected to come before him without arousing in him a suspicion of sinister motives on their part. The impression which they evidentially designed to make was that a dispute had occurred between them and they now desired to settle it by referring the matter to an authority such as Jesus was. We must always remember that the devil is a liar and the father of lies.

Our text, the first interrogation, begins with disciples of the Pharisees and their political and theological opponents, the Herodians, "buttering-up" Jesus with smooth words about being a man of integrity and truth. The description is true. But they speak this truth without conviction, showing themselves as hypocrites, mere actors with hidden motives. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 4)

not swayed by appearances. Excessive and insincere flattery that frames this question is intended to disarm Jesus and set Him up for a fall. (TLSB)

22:17 *tell us then* –The trap is clearly explained by Luther: "Does he say no, then the servants of Herod are present and will put him to death as a revolutionist and as one who sets himself against the Roman government. Does he say yes, then he will speak against the independence of the Jewish people, and we will excite the people against him. For the Jews wish to be a free people, and to have their own king" (Martin Luther, *The Church Postils* [Grand Rapids: Baker], 5:295). Though their trap is unsuccessful, they will, in fact, accuse him before Pilate: "He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar" (Lk 23:2). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 4)

Pay taxes to Caesar or not. This tax was levied directly by Roman authority in Judea and had perhaps been a contributing cause to social unrest and violence a generation before. (CC)

22:18 *aware of their malice* – It plainly shows that Jesus divinity enabled his humanity to be omniscient.

22:19-20 Coin minted by Rome for paying this tax bore the image of Tiberius Caesar and identified him as "son of the divine Augustus." Ironically, the question was put to Jesus, the true Son of God. The fact that they possessed this coin tacitly acknowledged Caesar's rule. (TLSB)

22:19 THEY BROUGHT HIM – This means that they had none on their person but had to go the money-changers in the Court of the Gentiles to get this coin.

denarius. The common Roman coin of that day. On one side was the portrait of Emperor Tiberius and on the other the inscription in Latin: “Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus.” The coin was issued by Caesar and was used for paying tax to him. (CSB)

22:20 *whose likeness* – The coin does not merely resemble Caesar’s face and name but represents his face and name. Where the coin goes, there goes Caesar, in this case.

eijkwvn is here rendered “portrait” (NIV) or “likeness” (NASB, ESV, RSV), but “image” (KJV, NKJV) suggests richer implications. The image on the coin is that of Caesar, but before Jesus’ questioners stands, in the flesh, “the image [*eijkwvn*] of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 4)

Caesar’s “inscription,” *ejpigraphv*, is also on the coin. Above the “image of the invisible God” on the cross will be the “inscription,” *ejpigraphv*, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 4)

22:21 *things that are Caesar’s* – Jesus here distinguishes the two realms—the civil and the heavenly—under which all believers live. Though our first allegiance is always to God (Ac 5:29), we are also bound to obey the legitimate civil authorities God has established (Rm 13:1–7). Luther: “It is the duty and obligation of those who participate in this earthly regime to administer law and punishment, to maintain the distinctions that exist among ranks and persons, to manage and distribute property.... But the Gospel does not trouble itself with these matters. It teaches about the right relation of the heart to God” (AE 21:108). (TLSB)

to God what is God’s. In distinguishing clearly between Caesar and God, Jesus also protested against the false and idolatrous claims made on the coins (see previous note). (CSB)

22:22 *left him* – They left him alone and in a sense they had set a trap for Jesus, but had fallen into it themselves.

On Tuesday He tells the Pharisees to pay taxes to Caesar, and on Friday they haul Him before Pilate and say, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king” (Luke 23:2). (PBC)

22:15–22 Jesus’ followers owe loyalty and obedience not only to Him, but also to the human rulers that God Himself has established. Though Christians may be tempted to avoid taxes and shirk civic responsibilities, they must “render to Caesar.” Civil authority and good governmental leaders are beneficial means whereby God blesses us. • “Thou who art ever nigh, Guarding with watchful eye, To Thee aloud we cry: God save the State!” Amen. (LSB 965:2) (TLSB)