**“At What Cost?”**

Psalm 26

Ezekiel 33:7-9

Romans 13:1-10

Matthew 18:1-20

Pentecost 15

“If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Bridge**

“At What **Cost**, Heaven?”

God says to Christians: “So **you**, son or daughter of man, I have made a **watchman for the house of Israel**”, and that “house of Israel” is **your body / your flesh / your soul**. “At **What Cost, Heaven**” **for** your body / your flesh / your soul / your family’s body and flesh and souls, your kids, your mom and dad’s, your best friend, your own. You “watchmen” had better **decide on that**, and **act upon that decision**: guard, protect, **DO**, warn (speak up), gird, lead by example, lead by words and duty of habits lived up to … or lead by words of repentance for leaderships not lived up to.

And that's what I always consider “**Rally Day Weekend**” to be about. Trying to **leave behind** the laziness of summer and schedules, distractions, vacations, and general structural looseness, I, personally, hold this weekend as a marker to get our committed-Christian **ACTS** together and remember duties **faithful** and **eternally helpful** … and **DO THEM** for the sake of all that is, really, **most important:** a **destiny in Heaven**.

We’re **here**, and that’s the best **START** for the 2023 and 2024 version of this, at least, school year. Sunday School teachers are in place and students (the very young to adults of all ages) are expected in church and in seats for learning and study (for consideration of God’s Words). This weekend’s **Sunday School lessen** is Jesus as the Good Samaritan / the foreigner who cared for you and I who had been (without that) lying all but dead, literally on the side of road, Him stopping and stooping down and bandaging us, washing our wounds, putting us on His own animal, and bearing us up to deposit us in the rest and continuing healing care of an inn-keeper (pastor and teachers) of a clean and reputable inn (a Church). **To that place** He’d return to view the progress and personally pay for all the expenses of positive movement (give of Himself for that). Moms / dads / God Himself, in Christ Jesus, has deposited all of you **here in this “inn”**, and **the** **Word’s here**, and **apt and faithful staff are here**. If any amenities are missing, know that you can request them and, if they’re useful, they’ll be made part of the process … and you’ll be **made useful / part of the process also**. God says that “you, son of man, I have **made** **a** **watchman for the house of Israel**”. **Your responsibility** in the “inn” of God’s care for people through families and His Church is a **usefulness to an eternal structure**. And, as a “**watchman**”, **you’re** a care **giver** immediately after being a care **receiver**. First **receive** the care (the Word and Sacrament / in other words hear what God says from the pulpit and a classroom and consume of the divine food of Christ’s living body and blood in bread and wine when it’s offered), then care (**give**) in some (or many) Good ways of eternal use.

**Text**

This weekend, we’re given a laundry list of **how that should look in application** in various scenarios. I don’t think one specific situation would be missed without recommendations from today’s readings from Ezekiel, Romans, and then Matthew. Down to handling individual relationships, the texts are **roadmaps of instruction** for every situation from apathy to conflict and argument.

**FIRST OF ALL**, **listen and learn**. The **apathy** thing is huge. It’s the biggest and most devilish issue (I think) that’s working **against** a human’s heaven-ward journey. I’ll go so far as to say that I think people are mostly tempted by Satan to **“yawn” through this life** **(to be distracted and just momentarily entertained, or numbed and lulled to sleep)**.And that’s not to say that we don’t “busy ourselves with things”, because that’s the distraction / the numbing agent. Yet most of those things (the way they are prioritized and packaged) end up being eternally insignificant most all the time, and Satan loves it that way / choreographs it to be that way / overall, real uselessness, yet tiring and draining-of-energy for stuff really significant … and useful into forever.

The very name “**Rally** Day” denotes concern for the sin of apathy. That people have to be **“rallied”** denotes the **problem recognized most to be solved**. For instance, it won’t be long before we hit New Years Eve and, **then again**, make resolutions (or commitments) to change all we’d apathetically ignored for the **whole year of 2023**, just to, probably then, again forget those commitments and ignore the idea **again in 2024**. Apathy says that our “**rally CALL**” is not remembered or considered beyond the words coming much out of our mouths … and that’s the sin of apathy and complacency.

Which I always pray is not the case with the essential thing like being Heaven-bound, yet I know that it **likely is**. I’m an optimist, by realist. Being a pastor I have to be a **bit optimistic**, but also as a pastor and parent and resident of the same quest, I’m honestly not expecting the greatest outcome of this “rallying” time. I will expect but try not to frustrate myself to the point of despair if a chunk of us fall off the cart by next weekend. But I will be depressed and disappointed if such happens. I do **EXPECT** favorable response.

**THEN** **study** **…** and **follow the path**. This week’s text could make for a whole years Bible class and home discussion. I’ll **bet you that you can’t** think of an issue that’s **not answered-by-God in these three passages**. And **there’s the challenge**. “**Stump the pastor**” (or each other) with some struggle or challenge that God isn’t speaking to from **just these three places**. If you try to stump m**e on that, I’ll know that at least you’re pouring through the texts**, and **that by itself** will be a huge **GODLY SUCCESS** (hugely beneficial) to you and for your families and marriages and fellowship with believers all on the same heaven-ward path … **share the “pouring through of Scripture on issues” with them**.

**Application**

The **fact is** **on all of this non-apathy and study and path-following: God’s already done the “hard moving”**. **Without being apathetic in His part, He** **EXECUTED**. **He** **PLANNED** **and ACTED-OUT a GOSPEL TO SAVE EVERY ISSUE (Christ died for you that you might BE HIS and BE HEAVEN-BOUND)**. **All we really NEED DO is CLIMB ABOARD AND ENJOY THE RIDE**. And that “**climbing on board**” and “**enjoying**” **looks like something … obviously**. And it’s **to that** **LOOK** that we “rally” ourselves, but the **SAVING** and providing the “inn” of a Church and Holy Supper and the Witness of the apostles in written and proclaimed Words, that’s **COMPLETED WORK TO ENJOY AND GROW FROM**. We need only to **be in proximity of all of that GREAT STUFF and GAIN FROM IT** … then the **happening WILL HAPPEN FROM IT** since the Holy Spirit takes care of all of that through **those MEANS OF HIS WORK that** **feed the system**. **GOOD STUFF WILL OCCUR “WITHIN” US EVEN … BECAUSE HE’LL MAKE IT HAPPEN**.

**MAINTAINING PROXIMITY to “Means of Grace” that God promises to use to bestow and build-upon His saving work** is your only **addition** to an already wonderful story and journey Heavenward. **WITH YOU**, **you’ve** been brought (and I think that applies to all of you here) to and through a font of Baptism in the name of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And **you’ve** (so many of you) have been taught through confirmation years with those lessons still ongoing. And **you** know what, and Who, **you get** when you come to the communion rail. And **you** “want that (most of you **know that you do** and are **explicit in admitting it” … you’re here for it**). And **you** carry those gifts home **with you**, and they affect how you parent or obey your parents, or neighbor yourselves at work or in schools. **You** **REFLECT** what **you** **RECEIVE**.

A couple of weeks ago, God used me to baptize four in my family not yet to that point, but now there. He used me to (also that weekend) consecrate the start of a marriage. That START I charged to be CONTINUED UPON … the “Rally Call” I announced to family members.

May today be, for us, the, either, **START** or **CONTINUATION** a newly-committed **“watchmen” role** for you and in your families. May the **“cost” of Heaven (obvious Christianity)** be “**what you’re willing always to spend**”. And may you **be and** **remain** of great service to yourself and others in a Kingdom your baptism birthed you into. May **THIS** **be the case** **among all of us**, in +Jesus’ name. Amen.