

Meditation #1
Matthew 2:2
Prof. Herman Hanko

Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

The text is the beginning of scripture's story of the coming of the wise men to worship Christ. The wise men are a few of the characters mentioned in scripture who appear only a fleeting moment on the stage of divine history and then disappear. We shall meet them in heaven.

Many wrong ideas have been promoted over the centuries:

- Many unbelievers have tried to explain this star in the east by some conjunction of planets. In fact, it was a miracle that fulfilled Balaam's prophecy in Numbers 24:17.
- It is claimed that there were three wise men when in fact we do not know. There may have been only two or as many as ten or fifteen.
- It is claimed that the star led them all the way from the east to Bethlehem, when in fact the star disappeared after they had seen it in the east and they did not see it again until they left Jerusalem (vv. 9-10).
- The star did in fact lead them directly to the house in which Joseph and Mary with Jesus were staying. That too was a miracle (v. 9). But it was a house, not a manger (v. 11).
- It may be that Jesus was two years old by this time, for Herod ordered all babies in Bethlehem *two years old and under* killed.
- These men were not "wise men" as the Bible translation has it, nor "kings from the Orient" as a carol has it. "wise men" is a general and vague term that does not tell us of their profession. In fact, Scripture teaches that God gives his people wisdom (James 1:3-7), and Proverbs teaches us that Christ himself is the "Wisdom" of God (Prov. 8). They came from the east, which is probably somewhere near Babylon. They were also probably proselytes who, though Gentiles, had adopted the Jewish religion as found in the Old Testament scriptures. They knew Balaam's prediction that a star would announce the coming of the Jewish Messiah. With their knowledge of heavenly bodies and their movements, and great faith, they went in search of Jesus.

The significance of their visit in sacred history can, I think, be remembered by a sermon I preached on this event. My theme and points were as follows:

Christ, the Universal King

- I. Announced by a Star (Christ summoned the stars to announce his birth, for over them he rules.)
- II. Rejected by the Jews (It was the beginning of the Israelite nation's rejection of Christ.)
- III. Feared by the World Power (Herod, representing the world empire of Rome, ordered him killed.)

IV. Worshipped as King by the Gentiles.

It is a wonderful story and it predicted the salvation of the Gentiles as part of the salvation of the catholic church saved in the blood of Christ's cross.

Memory Verse: *Numbers 24:17a I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob.*

Meditation #2
Matthew 3:14
Prof. Herman Hanko

But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

The event described in this text took place at the very beginning of our Lord's ministry. John the Baptist, the forerunner of our Lord, was baptizing near the Jordan River in the wilderness of Judaea.

Imagine John's surprise when Jesus himself not only came to John, but told John to baptise him! John's answer is not a surprise. John was, of course, right when he said that he needed to be baptised by Jesus. We all need to be baptised by Jesus because the water of baptism is a sign of Jesus' blood; and to be sprinkled with water is a sign of the washing away of sins in the blood of Christ.

John was aware of this significance of baptism and knew he was a grievous sinner who needed to be baptised by Christ as a sign of the washing away of his sins in Christ's blood. John knew that Jesus did not have any sin. John knew Jesus was the promised Messiah sent by God to take away our sins. And John himself later pointed out Jesus to the crowds with the words: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Yet it was necessary for Christ to be baptised. Our Lord insisted on it. The reason was that all our sins were imputed to the Lord Jesus Christ. He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). Our Lord had to be washed from sin for he took our place as one who sinned against God. He assumed all responsibility to make his people holy and sinless. He deserved to die, for he was, before God, a terrible sinner. Our Lord needed to be cleansed from sin by his own blood.

How could he be cleansed from sin by his own blood? As the eternal Son of God in our flesh, he had to go to hell in our place and suffer the eternal torments of hell for us. He the Son of God had to bear the wrath of his Father in hell's bottomless pit and do so in perfect obedience to his Father. He was the only one who could sing Psalm 40: "I come: in the volume of the book (The Old Testament Scriptures) it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Ps. 40:6-8, Heb. 10:5-7).

And so, because he was cleansed by his own blood, spilled on the top of Calvary, we can also be cleansed in his blood and receive by faith his righteousness.

Memory Verse: *John 1:29b Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

Meditation #3
Matthew 5:13
Prof. Herman Hanko

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

The sermon on the mount is recorded for us in Matthew 5-7. It is the constitution of the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 5:2-12 Jesus identifies the citizens of the kingdom of heaven by describing their chief characteristic: they are poor in spirit, they mourn, they are meek... These citizens are quite different from the citizens of any kingdom here on earth. What could the nation of Singapore do with only weeping, meek citizens?

In verses 13-16 Jesus describes the importance of the citizens of heaven in this world of earthly nations. They are the salt of the earth; they are the light of the world.

What does Jesus mean when he calls the citizens of heaven's kingdom, the salt of the earth?

The meaning of this description of heaven's citizens depends on Jesus' use of the word "salt". Salt, in Jesus' day and is now, a necessity to the life of man and animals. I well remember bringing blocks of salt into the pastures where animals grazed so that the animals could have access to needed salt.

It seems to be best to explain the meaning of salt in terms of the text itself. The text speaks of salt losing its "savour" i.e., its taste. Even today salt gives and enhances the taste of food. Salt shakers can be found on most dining tables. If salt loses its power to enhance taste, it is useless and has no more value than dirt.

God's people are "salt" to God. They are in Christ, and therefore the only reason why the world exists and why all that happens in the world is worthwhile (Col. 1:16).

God assured Abraham that he would not destroy Sodom as long as one righteous person lived there (Gen. 18:23-33). Peter wrote that the only reason God tolerates the wicked and endures their persecution of the righteous is that there are still elect in the world who have yet to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). The whole creation and the wicked are tolerated because God will not destroy the wicked while the righteous are still on earth, lest they be destroyed also.

Jesus tells us how precious we are in the sight of God to give urgency to walk according to the precepts of the kingdom of heaven while we still live here.

Memory Verse: *Mark 9:50 Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.*

Meditation #4
Matthew 5:46
Prof. Herman Hanko

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

In this part of the sermon on the mount the Lord is explaining what is meant by that part of the law that commands us to love our neighbour as ourselves. More particularly, he is defining who our neighbour is. The Pharisees were very wrong in their definition of their neighbour, and interpreted a neighbour as one who loved them. They were the elite in the church and their neighbours were only those who treated them as elite.

Jesus defines our neighbour in a much broader way. Our neighbour is not everybody in the world – as some people teach. Our neighbour is one with whom we have contact, whom we know, or, as my pastor once put it, the one with whom I rub shoulders. My neighbour is my wife or my husband, my children or maid, my boss or my employee. My neighbour gets in my way and demands my attention, the one in front of me in line waiting for a bus

Jesus even broadens that and says that my neighbour is my enemy, the one who hates me and despitefully uses me, even the one who persecutes me. God loves us who are his enemies and hate him; therefore we must do the same.

To love someone is to seek that person's good in all our contact with that person. It is to return blessing for a curse. It is to turn the other cheek. It is to help one in need. And ultimately, love is to seek one's highest good, that is, one's salvation.

Love is to help the person next door with food if he needs it, chores if she cannot do them herself, to help to bring to a doctor if she is very sick. To love your neighbour is to bear his mockery, refrain from retaliating if he steals your possessions, and endure his persecution.

But if you do any of these things, love is also to witness to your neighbour and tell him, "The Lord has been very merciful to me though I hated him and mocked him. He has saved me even though I was his enemy. I do these things for you so that you may believe in this Lord and escape the damnation you deserve."

We are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. We are to love our neighbours because God has loved us, unworthy though we are.

Memory Verse: *Matthew 5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

Meditation #5
Matthew 6:25
Prof. Herman Hanko

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

This verse is our Lord's protest against the terrible materialism that plagues the lives of many of us. It is basically the same as Psalm 37 and Hebrews 13:5-6. It is an admonition that follows from Jesus' parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:15-21).

We are sons and daughters of our Father in heaven, and we are, in this life, pilgrims who are on their way to their home in heaven. The object of all our desire is to arrive safely at our home in heaven (Col. 3:1-3).

Because we are pilgrims in the earth, we really ought not to concern ourselves very much over what we need and want in this life. It is only extra baggage that we carry with us, which often slows us in our journey to heaven and sometimes brings us to a complete halt.

As Jesus makes clear in the last verses of Matthew 6, the Lord knows what we do need and has promised to give us these things. The things we really need are food and drink, shelter if we live in a cold area of the earth, clothing to wear and the means to provide for the needs of our covenant families. The Lord gives us more than we need because he wants us to support all the ministries of our church, to pay for covenantal education for our children and to help the poor.

Yet, we worry. We worry about all our earthly needs, whether we shall have enough. The real reason why we worry is because we do not quite believe Christ's promise to supply all our needs; and we worry because the possession of all kinds of earthly things delights us.

Therefore, we buy huge houses, fancy cars, closets full of clothes, modern appliances, electronic gadgets and vacations in exotic places.

To the extent that we worry about whether we have enough earthly possessions, to that extent we want this earth and what it offers more than the wonderful things of our heavenly home, and to the extent that we put our trust in the things of this earth, we are not doing what Jesus says and therefore, we are sinning.

Memory Verse: *Hebrews 13:5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

Meditation #6
Matthew 7:3
Prof. Herman Hanko

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

The sin of which Jesus speaks in Matthew 7:2-5 in his "Constitution" of the kingdom of heaven is a sin frequently found among the citizens of that kingdom. It is very prevalent among people who belong to the kingdom of Satan. Sadly enough, it is also found among us. Jesus underscores the prevalence of this sin among us by warning us that it is a sin against our "brother."

The sin is so common that we immediately recognize it as one found in us. We charge a fellow saint of some sin of which we ourselves are guilty. We charge someone with being irreverent in church by the clothes he or she they wear or by obviously not listening, when we ourselves are far short of worshipping God in spirit and in truth. We criticize a parent for not disciplining his or her child for not sitting still in church, when we fail to discipline our child for talking back to parents, or being rude to other adults. And those are only two examples of a multitude of other like sins.

Three things about this warning of our Lord strike me as being important.

First, this sin is an example of *judging* our brother (v. 2). We judge his conduct as evil when we know nothing of the circumstances of the lives of our brother.

Second, Jesus talks about a "mote" in our brother's eye and a "beam" in our own eye. A mote is a speck of dust. A beam is a large splinter. That is, we are critical of a very small and relatively unimportant matters in the life of our brother, while we are guilty of a large violation of the principles of righteous conduct.

Third, Jesus reminds us that if we would first get rid of the monster sin in our life, we could see better the minor sin in our brother's life. We seem to think we have perfect vision when we examine our brother's life, but we are legally blind when we consider our own eyes. Only when your vision of yourself is perfect, can you see clearly to judge your brother.

Consider your own sins and not the sins of others. You will find plenty to keep you busy, leaving little time to bother your head about your brother.

Memory Verse: *Matthew 7:1 Judge not, that ye be not judged.*

Meditation #7
Matthew 8:26
Prof. Herman Hanko

And he saith unto them, Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

Jesus spoke the words of this text when he and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee from the eastern side to the southwest part of the lake, called Gadara.

The storm that hit them as they were crossing was a most violent one, for the disciples were seasoned fishermen who lived near and knew all the moods of the sea; and they were terrified.

Two aspects of this event capture our attention. One was that the storm must have been of unusual severity and must have had power to destroy the ship in which they sailed. Yet God himself had sent it to reveal something of the work of Christ. The second is that our Lord was sound asleep, undoubtedly exhausted from his impossibly busy ministry, preaching and performing miracles in his circuit of Galilee. He was indeed like us in all things, even our weariness, except for our sin.

But the main point of the text is the “little faith” of the disciples. They were terrified by the storm when they should not have been. Why?

The Bible sometimes compares the stormy sea with the wicked nations in Isaiah 57:20, “But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt”. Christ with his disciples *were* the church in that boat. Not Christ and the disciples, but Christ *with* the disciples.

The disciples believed that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the promised Messiah. They believed that he was the Son of God who had been sent by the Father to save his church.

But they were frightened by the storm; they showed by their fright that they thought the storm could drown Christ and the church.

We ought not to be critical of the disciples. In times when the storms of persecution and apostasy blow against the church, we worry and fret about the church’s existence. This worry was true of faithful Israel in the time of Ahab; it was true during the almost 1000 years that the Roman Catholic Church ruled the known world and slaughtered God’s people. It will happen again in the days of Antichrist.

But Christ is present with his church, and thus Christ and his church will not and cannot be destroyed. This we believe, that “the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.” (2 Tim. 2:19a). Let us therefore, not be afraid of the storms of wicked men who seek our destruction. Christ controls the storms.

Memory Verse: *2 Timothy 2:19a Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.*

Meditation #8
Matthew 9:15
Prof. Herman Hanko

And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.

The text is Jesus' response to the Pharisees who considered the disciples of the Lord to be sinning when they did not fast, but ate with publicans and sinners. To them, the outward observance of the law was crucial for salvation. But fasting is really an outward sign of inner humility, sorrow for sin and a broken spirit.

Jesus uses an entirely appropriate illustration, for Scripture often uses marriage as a picture of the relation between Christ and his church. The bridegroom in this heavenly marriage is Christ himself, and the bride is the church, which he purchased with his own blood.

The relation of love that binds a bride and bridegroom together is of such a kind that they find it difficult and ultimately impossible to be separated from each other. Because separation creates sorrow, this time of separation is a time of fasting.

There was no need for fasting when Jesus was present with his disciples during his earthly ministry. It was a time of happiness and merriment. Fasting was impossible; although Jesus was, especially while on earth, a "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3).

But Jesus knew that he would soon have to leave this earth and return to his Father. Then, although the marriage would remain, the absence of the bridegroom was an abundant reason for sorrow. At the same time, Jesus is speaking of another aspect of the question.

Fasting was a sign of sorrow for sin in the Old Testament before Christ came. There was no need to fast while Christ was on earth, for he had come to earn forgiveness for his people.

But he would leave them again when he rose from the dead and ascended to his Father's right hand. Yet in heaven, he would still be with us, his people. He would be with us by his Spirit. And finally, he would come again as our bridegroom to be with us forever.

But now, though he is with us by his Spirit, he is still absent from us. Because he is still with us, the earthly sign of fasting is still possible (1 Cor. 7:5 though not necessary. But when he comes to take us to himself, we shall be happy forevermore with him.

Memory Verse: *Isaiah 53:3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

Meditation #9
Matthew 11:2-3
Prof. Herman Hanko

Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

John the Baptist had fulfilled his calling as the forerunner of Christ and as the one predicted by the closing verses of the Old Testament (Mal. 4:5-6). He had preached only six months before he was imprisoned by Herod the Great for reprimanding Herod for his adultery. From prison, John sent two of his servants to the Lord with a question. The question was whether Jesus was the promised Messiah as John had preached. Apparently, John, while in prison, began to doubt that the one he had baptised and pointed out as the Messiah was truly the promised Messiah.

We cannot be sure of the reason for John's doubt, for Scripture does not give us that information, but it is possible to mention a few possibilities.

John's short ministry probably bothered him, it was a ministry of only six months! It seems to us as if nothing of worth could be accomplished in a ministry that short. However, Jesus himself said that he was the greatest of all the Old Testament saints (Matt. 11:11) and he fulfilled his calling in only half a year. A short ministry is not necessarily a profitless ministry.

That shortness of his ministry may have led John to think that perhaps another forerunner to the Messiah had to come in verse 3, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another [*forerunner*]?"

It may also be that John did not anticipate that the Messiah should come in such a lowly state. He may have expected the whole nation to come to Jesus and immediately crown him king as David's royal son.

We do not know. We are reminded again that our ways are not God's ways, and God's thoughts are not our thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).

John was subsequently satisfied with Jesus' description of the true Messiah (Matt. 11:5-6), and was persuaded that he himself was truly the Elijah whom God had promised. Jesus was not a Messiah that came with royal pomp to set up an earthly kingdom. He came as the one burdened with all the sins and guilt of his people, and the cross cast a long shadow over his entire life. For he was truly a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. His lowliness is our lowliness, and he took our sin and our guilt upon himself to save us.

Memory Verse: *Matthew 11:6 And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

Meditation #10
Matthew 11:16-17
Prof. Herman Hanko

But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.

In the context of this passage, Jesus is still talking about the ministry of John the Baptist. The people who heard John preach rejected his ministry. This was not true of them all, but it was true of the nation and its leaders: Israel rejected John. So they would also reject Jesus himself and the gospel they both preached.

In describing the rejection of the preaching of John and Jesus (Matt. 11:16-17), Jesus makes use of a powerful figure. It is the figure of a game that the children would often play in the open streets of the market place in Palestine. The group of young people would be divided into two groups, one group playing simple musical instruments similar to a small flute, and others responding to the music either by dancing with joy or weeping. It depended on the key of the music being played. The children who were listening would dance if the music was light and lively, played in a major key; but they would weep if the music was sad and doleful and played in minor key.

Jesus describes the nation of Israel of his times as children who would dance vigorously if the music was in a minor key and mournful, but would weep if the music were lively and in a major key. They did the very opposite of what the music suggested and intended.

As it was with the generation of Jesus' ministry, so it is always with men who reject the gospel. They not only reject it, but they do the very opposite of what the gospel demands. The gospel says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery", yet adultery is rampant in our day. The Bible says that women may not be office bearers in the church, yet most churches have women office bearers. The Bible says that God is sovereign. Man says, man is sovereign. The Bible says that salvation is by grace alone, man says salvation is by faith and works.

Paul refers to this very fact in Romans 7:7-12. Total depravity not only means that we are corrupt and all we do is evil; but it also means that we so hate God's law that we refuse to obey it and do the very opposite of what the law requires. It is what we all do.

Thank God for Christ!

Memory Verse: *Romans 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.*

Meditation #11
Matthew 12:11-12
Prof. Herman Hanko

And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

The hypocritical Jews destroyed the spiritual significance of the sabbath day with their innumerable laws. They legislated how far a man might walk. They considered rubbing a stalk of wheat to eat the wheat seed a violation of the Sabbath. They determined what they might not bake or cook, and etc. They smothered the keeping of the Sabbath with their foolish restrictions. And they especially thought they found reason to kill Jesus because he healed on the Sabbath.

Jesus shows them the utter foolishness of their multitude of laws by their own inconsistency in making laws. Jesus appeals to their own covetousness as a terrible violation of their multitude of laws. They would help a sheep that fell into a pit, because it was for their material profit. But they found reason to kill Jesus when he displayed God's mercy towards sinners in healing a man, thus fulfilling the fundamental principle of the law, love thy neighbor as thyself.

In the words, "it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days", Jesus lays down the basic principle of Sabbath-keeping. It is well for us to understand this, for Sabbath-keeping is still today a matter of debate.

The first Sabbath was *kept* by God himself (Gen. 2:2-3). The meaning of the text is that God finished his work of creation and saw that the work was "very good," That is, he entered into the enjoyment of his own work because he saw that the entire creation perfectly served his purpose to glorify himself.

In the Old Testament, God commanded the keeping of the Sabbath as a requirement for enjoying God's rest. But Israel never could keep the Sabbath any more than they could keep any commandment of the law. Depraved sinners cannot keep God's law. And so, as Paul says in Romans 7:24-8:3, God's purpose in the law was not meant to be a means of saving ourselves; it was a means to drive believing Israel to Christ. The law was a crushing burden that taught believers to flee to Christ.

Part of God's purpose in creation was to make the creation the stage of the great drama of sin, death and salvation in Christ. Christ kept the law for his people and now writes the words of the law in their hearts.

Our observance of the Sabbath now means that the believer, by faith, enters into God's rest (as God himself entered into it at the end of creation) in Jesus Christ and sees that it is "very good" because it is our salvation. Anything that gives us the rest by entering into God's complete and perfect work in Christ is keeping the Sabbath, for Christ is the greatest work that God performs.

Memory Verse: *Genesis 1:31 And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.*

Meditation #12
Matthew 12:48-49
Prof. Herman Hanko

But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!

During his earthly ministry, our Lord was often surrounded by huge crowds for the common people heard him gladly, and he spoke as one with true authority from God and not as the scribes.

The text above refers to one such moment in his Galilean ministry. His earthly family lived in Galilee and wanted to see him and speak with him. This was quite natural and no one could fault them for wanting to visit with him. But on this occasion the crowd was too dense, preventing the relatives from getting to him. A man in the audience learned of the desire of the family to see their son and brother and conveyed the word to Jesus. Jesus answered this man with words to be conveyed to his relatives.

The text must not be construed to mean that our Lord repudiated his family and wanted nothing to do with them now that he was an itinerant preacher and popular with the people. Jesus' answer was intended to tell the people (and his family) that he had come into the world for a much higher purpose than to be busy with his earthly family. Indeed, his natural and earthly family was only the means he used to come into the world, to create a new and far different family of much greater importance. The human race is also a family, but because Adam, the father of the human race sinned, it is now the family of the devil (John 8:37-44). But Jesus, by the power of his sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, created a new family in which God is Father, Jesus himself is the Elder Brother, and all his people who are born again are sons and daughters of God. He has gone to heaven to prepare a place for this family in his father's house of many mansions (John 14:1-3).

This truth is why Jesus says to Mary at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" (John 2:4) And this is why, while hanging on the cross, Jesus entrusted his earthly mother to John and called her "Woman", "Woman, behold thy son!...[Son] Behold thy mother!" (John 19:26-27)

Our earthly relationships also serve a higher and better relation in Christ. Our wives and our children here on earth are part of what Paul calls in 2 Corinthians 5:1 our earthly house of this tabernacle. But those relationships are gone forever in glory; and after all, is it not true that the blessedness of a marital relationship is that husband and wife are also brother and sister in Christ?

Memory Verse: *John 14:2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

Meditation #13
Matthew 14:31
Prof. Herman Hanko

And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

The incident recorded in this text took place after Jesus had fed 5000 men with five loaves and two fishes (Matt. 14:15-21). It was evening and Jesus went alone into a mountain to pray after sending his disciples across the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum.

While the disciples were in their boat, God sent a vicious storm so that their lives were threatened. Jesus, however, left off praying and came to his beleaguered disciples, walking on the surface of the stormy sea. Thinking Jesus was a ghost, they were terrified until Jesus assured them that he was their Lord. At that point, Peter, ever the bold and impetuous disciple, wanted to walk on the water as well and asked the Lord if he might do this. The Lord consented and all went well until Peter looked around him and saw the waves that threatened him. He doubted whether he could do what he was doing, and immediately started to sink. Jesus rescued Peter from sinking by taking his hand. They entered the ship and immediately the storm ceased.

This was an astounding miracle, and as such, it was a sign pointing to a spiritual reality.

The stormy troubled Sea of Galilee was a picture of the wicked nations apart from God (Isa. 57:20). Christ walked on the water, and this indicated that Christ was sovereign over the wicked nations and had defeated them, for a victorious captain put his foot on the neck of his conquered enemy when he conquered him (Josh. 10:24). By sending the disciples alone in a boat, Jesus was telling them that he would leave them soon to go to heaven. They would be without him. Because they would establish the New Testament church, they would have to do this among the nations that sought their destruction. But Christ would be with them even though his human nature would be in heaven (Matt. 28:18-20).

Peter's attempt and failure to walk on the water indicated to the disciples that when they believed in Christ their Lord, they too could be conquerors of the nations (Rom. 8:37), but if they did not trust in him, they would be overcome by the wicked. Christ was their strength and help and would gather the church from the nations and thus be victorious over all the nations.

Memory Verse: *Romans 8:37* *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

Meditation #14
Matthew 16:15
Prof. Herman Hanko

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

The context tells us that Jesus and his disciples were in Caesarea Philippi in the vicinity where Jesus was about to be transfigured. It was probably with a view to this transfiguration that Jesus asked his disciples whom the multitudes who heard him considered him to be.

The answer the disciples gave to Jesus' question indicates that, among the people in general, Jesus was considered to be a prophet (Matt. 16:14). The question Jesus put to his disciples was, therefore much sharper. It implied that Jesus was asking his disciples whether they agreed with the multitudes and considered Jesus to be another of these prophets like Jeremiah or John the Baptist: "But whom say ye that I am?" Everyone who heard him knew he was different, for he performed miracles no one else could do, and he spoke with an authority that no scribe or Pharisee had. The multitude should have known that he was the promised Messiah. John says that many believed in him, but only because they saw his miracles, but that was not saving faith (John 2:23-25).

The disciples must have talked about this question among themselves, for Peter answered for all of them in verse 16 when he said: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." The disciples believed that he was the promised Messiah, although they did not understand what that meant. They thought that Christ had come to establish an earthly kingdom — as so many who call themselves "Kingdom Builders" try to do in our day. They work hard to establish an earthly kingdom by making this present world a better place to live.

But Peter's confession means that the disciples believed that Jesus was the Christ, the anointed promised Messiah. They believed that Jesus was the eternal Son of God, even though he was like us in all things, except our sin. They did not understand that being the Messiah, he had also to die a shameful death for our sins. Nor did they understand that the kingdom Christ came to establish was a heavenly kingdom. But they would understand when the exalted Christ poured out his Spirit on the church (Acts 2).

Peter's confession is not the proud boast of the pope of Rome who claims that Peter was the first pope; the disciples believed their confession with all their heart and it was the rock on which the church is built. It is the ultimate dividing mark between the true church and the false church (1 John 4:1-3)

Memory Verse: 1 John 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Meditation #15
Matthew 18:1
Prof. Herman Hanko

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

The subject of the kingdom often came up in Jesus' ministry. Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom and instructed his audiences in the principles and nature of the kingdom. In fact, the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) is sometimes referred to as "The Constitution of the Kingdom." But neither the multitudes nor the disciples understood the nature of the kingdom, as they constantly thought in terms of an earthly kingdom.

It is quite possible that this idea arose among the Jews during the 400 years between the prophet Malachi and the birth of our Lord in Bethlehem. Most of that 400 years the Jews were under the rule of Greece and Rome. The exception was the time when, under the Maccabees, the Jews were independent.

No matter the origin, this idea of an earthly kingdom persisted in the minds of the disciples. They repeatedly argued among themselves about who among them was going to occupy the higher positions in that kingdom (Mark 9:34, Luke 22:24). Nor did their conception change after Jesus died, rose again, and was about to ascend into heaven (Acts 1:6). Jesus had not taught them that kingdom was earthly, but had, on the contrary, taught them that the kingdom was heavenly (Luke 17:20-21). But the disciples did not understand. It was this mistaken idea that led the disciples to ask the Lord the question: "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

It might seem strange that even thinking in terms of an earthly kingdom, the disciples call it "the kingdom of heaven;" but apparently, they were thinking in terms of a kingdom here on earth that would represent heaven. How surprised they must have been when Jesus took a little child and told the disciples that the greatest in the kingdom was one who became humble like a little child. Humility was the one great characteristic of the citizens of the kingdom.

How foolish it is when today many churches are engaged in "kingdom building" to establish a universal kingdom here on earth – whether it be a thousand-year reign of Christ in Palestine with the Jews, or whether it be a kingdom truly heavenly when all sin is taken away from its citizens, the curse is destroyed in heaven and on earth and a new heaven and a new earth are established. The kingdom's chief characteristic is the righteousness of Christ, earned by him on the cross. It is imputed to those who by faith in Christ believe in him and his perfect work.

An earthly kingdom is man's work and shall soon disappear. A heavenly kingdom is God's work through Christ and endures forever.

Memory Verse: *Acts 1:7b And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power*

Meditation #16
Matthew 18:21
Prof. Herman Hanko

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

In the context of this passage, Jesus is instructing his disciples (and the church of all ages) how sin must be dealt with in the church of Christ. More specifically, how we must deal with a brother who has sinned against us.

Jesus' answer is: you must always forgive him when he sins against you. I may not count the times he sinned against me and stop at fifty or sixty. Jesus is aware of the fact that this amount rarely happens, but he means to stress that our forgiveness of our brother is not something which has a limit.

Peter thought that forgiving his brother did have a limit. In fact, if it did have a limit, Peter thought he was being very generous when he suggested seven times. He thought one time was enough.

Underlying the answer of Jesus (v. 22) is a wonderful reality, which Jesus explains in the parable that follows (vv. 23-35). The man mentioned in the parable owed his lord ten thousand talents. In today's reckoning that would be ten thousand times twenty or thirty thousand dollars, a total of 200,000,000 – an impossible sum to repay, but a sum that the lord of the servant simply forgave.

Yet the servant went to one who owed him about one dollar, and choked him, demanding payment immediately and putting him in prison – even when the debtor promised payment.

The point Jesus is making is clear. We owe God such an enormous debt that there is no way we could ever pay it. We are guilty of Adam's sin, responsible before God for our sinful nature, and we increase our debt with everything we think, do or say. All this enormous, sky-high debt is simply forgiven us because God gave his only begotten Son to pay it for us.

What our brother owes us is so small that it is insignificant. Especially in comparison with what we owe God, the debt our brother owes is a tiny, almost invisible dot in a ledger.

If we refuse to forgive him, there is only one reason: We do not appreciate that God has forgiven us. The enormity of our debt to God is so great that we cannot be thankful enough, but can only bow in humility before our God and forgive our brother no matter how many times he sins.

This is what we pray: Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors (Matt. 6:12). That is our calling.

Memory Verse: *Matthew 18:21-22 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.*

Meditation #17
Matthew 19:16
Prof. Herman Hanko

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

I like this man who came to Jesus and I expect to meet him in heaven. Although we cannot be sure about this, some claim that he was Joseph of Arimathaea, who, with Nicodemus buried the body of our Lord. He was a man who was utterly honest with himself and with the Lord. He was also a true believer, though he did not know it, and was troubled in his soul about his salvation. Jesus loved him, and that is conclusive proof that he was among the elect (Mark 10:21).

When the man claimed that he had kept the commandments of God from his youth, he was not bragging, nor was he claiming to have earned eternal life. He had kept the law perfectly. But he was deeply troubled because he knew that was not enough. He held to the Pharisee's doctrine, which was salvation through the works of the law. But he kept the law only outwardly, which it is possible for a man to do. But God had begun a work of salvation in his heart that left him troubled, for the outward keeping of the law is never enough to save.

Jesus underscored the impossibility of this by quoting various commands of the law because the man himself had asked: "what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" He knew an outward keeping of the law was not enough and thought he could do something more.

Jesus' response seems strange. Is not selling all one has and giving to the poor also an outward deed? Yes, it is, but there is a difference. As the Heidelberg Catechism tells us in its discussion of the law (Lord's Day 44, Q&A 113-115), covetousness is a matter of the heart. If one covets, one breaks all the commandments of the law, for one breaks the law *inwardly*. One must keep the law inwardly. The quickest way someone shows that he keeps the law inwardly is to refrain from covetousness.

The man was wealthy; to sell all his possessions would indicate that he wanted to keep the law inwardly as well as outwardly, for it would show he did not covet.

Jesus adds, "and come and follow me." To follow Jesus is to learn from him and obey the command to believe on him, having true faith in him in whom alone is all our salvation.

The rich man went away sorrowfully. Some claim that this is proof the rich man was not saved. But let me ask you, which one of us would not feel sad to give away everything he owns to follow Christ? Not one of us! But the Lord will demand that of us if we suffer persecution; and God, being merciful, will give us the grace to do it.

Memory Verse: *Matthew 19:17b there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*

Meditation #18
Matthew 21:23
Prof. Herman Hanko

And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

Jesus' acts of cleansing the temple from its buyers and sellers in Matthew 21:12-13 is sometimes said to be another description of the event recorded for us in John 2:13-23. Nevertheless, the circumstances and the description of the event are too dissimilar to identify them. It is entirely appropriate in our Lord's public ministry that Jesus should begin his ministry with cleansing the temple and end it with the same act.

That the narrative of the cursing of the barren fig tree comes between the narrative of the cleansing of the temple and the question put to Jesus by the Pharisees concerning his authority to cleanse the temple is to be explained by the fact that after cleansing the temple, Jesus left Jerusalem and on his return to Jerusalem the next day, he cursed the barren fig tree. (Matt. 21:17-22).

In both instances, the Jews asked Jesus concerning his authority to cleanse the temple (although in John 2, the Jews hid their interest in authority under the request for a sign).

The Pharisees had assumed to themselves the right or authority to determine what events might take place in the temple. They had no plans to allow Jesus to chase out the buyers and sellers of lambs for the Passover and/or sacrificial animals. This claim of the Pharisees was an arrogant claim, but it also provided them with huge sums of money.

Jesus' authority was simply that the temple belonged to him. It belonged to him for it was an Old Testament type of Christ. It was the symbol of God dwelling with his people in covenant fellowship; for God dwelt in the Holy of Holies in the Shekinah; the reality is God dwelling in covenant fellowship with his people in Christ.

In Christ dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 1:19, 2:9) and the church is the body of Christ (I Cor. 12). Thus Christ is the Holy One of God in whom is fulfilled the typical significance of the temple.

That is why Jesus gives this sign to the Pharisees (John 2:13-23): destroy this [earthly] temple [in Christ's crucifixion, when the veil of the temple was rent at the moment of Christ's death], and Christ would raise up the true temple of his body when he rose from the dead.

How wondrous are the ways of God, unfathomed and unknown!

Memory Verse: Colossians 2:9-10 For in him [Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:

Meditation #19
Matthew 21:42
Prof. Herman Hanko

Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

This quotation from Psalm 118:22-23 is quoted also in I Peter 2:6-7. That Jesus should ask the Pharisees is ironic, *"Did you never read this text in the scriptures?"*. Obviously, they read it frequently because Psalm 118 was part of "The Hallel," group of Psalms sung at every Passover Feast.

The figure is clear. Jesus, in speaking of a cornerstone, used a figure from older days in building projects, especially in America in the erection of barns. It was a huge stone and its angle determined the squareness of the entire structure, and on it rested the building. This was true especially when the building was built on a slope. The cornerstone was placed on the bottom of the slope and the structure built on it.

Jesus was responding to the query of the chief priests and elders of the people, on who gave him the authority to teach. These leaders had effectively rejected Jesus' teachings and authority, and would go on to crucify him.

In crucifying him, they performed the great irony of history worked by God as determined in his eternal counsel. The very act of crucifying the Lord became the means by which the corner stone was laid and became the chief stone in the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20-22). The poet had it right: "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord."

Peter's quotation of Psalm 118 is quoted by him as proof of reprobation. Peter added to the statement in Psalm 118 that the wicked Jews rejected the one corner stone on which the church could be built: "whereunto they also were appointed" (I Peter 2:8).

That this is in the Lord's determinate counsel, as Peter puts it, is clearly stated in Acts 2:23 and Acts 4:27-28.

The abiding truth is that the church of God cannot be built by human hands and our keeping of the law; it can only be built by the perfect sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross of Calvary who washes away our sins in his blood.

Memory Verse: *Psalm 118:22 The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.*

Meditation #20
Matthew 24:2
Prof. Herman Hanko

And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

It was near the end of Jesus' ministry, in fact, it was his last appearance in the temple. The last words Jesus said in the temple were words of doom in Matthew 23:38-39: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord".

The disciples were struck by these words that predicted the destruction of Jerusalem. On the way out of the temple, the disciples pointed to all the buildings of the temple, as if to ask: "*Do you mean these buildings around us?*" Jesus' response is, "*I mean exactly that. The whole city of Jerusalem with its glorious temple will be destroyed.*"

It was a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem that took place less than forty years later, when the Roman legions under the generalship of Titus burned the city with the temple to the ground.

The disciples, apparently still thinking in terms of an earthly kingdom, equated the destruction of the temple with the coming of Christ in verse 3: "...what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" From a certain viewpoint the disciples were correct in identifying the destruction of the temple with the end of the world, for the destruction of the city of Jerusalem with the temple was a type of the destruction of the entire earthly creation, which shall take place when our Lord returns. The destruction of Jerusalem marked the end of the old dispensation; the destruction of this creation marks the end of the new dispensation and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth (2 Pet. 3:12-13).

Jesus, therefore, gives to his disciples (and to us) the signs of his coming as they took place in 70AD and as they will take place in our world and are taking place now all around us – if we have eyes to see.

It is crucial that we see these signs and live in eager expectation of the return of Christ, the establishment of the new creation, and the final glorification of the Church. It is our salvation.

Memory Verse: *2 Peter 3:13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*

Meditation #21
Matthew 24:45
Prof. Herman Hanko

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?

In this important chapter in Scripture, our Lord gives us the signs that precede his coming at the end of the world. He closes his sermon with a practical section that instructs us in how we have to live in this world in the light of the fact that he is coming again to bring an end to history and to this creation. Jesus sums up our calling with the words: "Watch and pray." (Matt. 26:41a)

Jesus uses four figures or illustrations to drive home his point, while in the next chapter Jesus uses two parables to accomplish the same purpose. In chapter 24 Jesus uses the four illustrations of a fig tree (vv. 32-33), of Noah and the flood (vv. 37-39), of two in the field and two women grinding together (vv. 40-41), and of a steward. Verse 45 has to do with the illustration of a steward (vv. 45-51).

A steward was a slave in a rich man's house who was faithful, trustworthy and wise, and who, therefore, was often promoted to be the head steward (Joseph in Potiphar's house and Abimelech in Abraham's house are other examples). Jesus tells us that a faithful steward had, as one of his duties, to see to it that his master (and family) had proper and enough food to eat.

We are, Jesus means to say, stewards in God's house. That means:

- 1) This earthly creation is God's house, not ours.
- 2) We are given responsibility to take care of God's house for the 70 or 80 years of our sojourn here. That is, we are so to work in God's house that his creation serves his purpose, and the enrichment of the owner and his glory. We may not use even one penny for ourselves, for all belongs to God.
- 3) We are pilgrims and strangers in this world and find in God's house all that is sufficient for our needs – without owning anything.
- 4) What will the Lord find us doing when he returns? Using his creation for his benefit and glory? Or using it for ourselves in accumulating its riches and enjoying life in the world at our Master's expense? The former obeys the Lord, watches and prays. They are true stewards. The latter are unfaithful, steal from God and perish. Are you a faithful steward? Are you faithful in watching and praying for the Lord's return? If not, you are an unfaithful steward.

Memory Verse: *Matthew 24:42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*

Meditation #22
Matthew 26:10
Prof. Herman Hanko

When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.

Jesus' public ministry was over and the shadow of the cross darkened as our Lord neared the climax to his suffering: his atoning death on the cross. He was at a home in Bethany. Bethany was a small village, where Simon the Leper, as well as Lazarus, Martha and Mary lived. Jesus decided to stay with Simon. It was at Simon's house where this event took place.

The woman mentioned in Matthew 26 was then Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus who were all present in the house as guests. Mary anointed Jesus with a very costly ointment as they were eating, to the consternation of Judas Iscariot and the other disciples (v. 8). They thought it was a waste of money that could have been used to alleviate the lot of the poor (v. 9).

Jesus reprimanded the disciples for this. Jesus knew that Mary had done this in anticipation of his burial (v. 12). Jesus reckons this is so important that he tells those present that what she had done would be included in the gospel that would be preached until the world ended. The act of Mary is therefore, part of the events surrounding Jesus' death for our sins.

The deed, which so angered the disciples, was, in fact, an act of faith. Jesus himself said that the woman did this to prepare Jesus for his burial. While the Jews often used spices and sweet-smelling perfumes in burying their loved ones, they did so in the hopes of the resurrection.

Mary, therefore, understood that Jesus was going to die; but she also understood that he would rise again. She was perhaps the only one who understood this. She must have understood this, because Jesus, having died, would have to rise again if he were to redeem his people. She knew this was why Jesus had come into the world.

The disciples all believed that Jesus, the Son of God, had come for the redemption of Israel, but Jesus' death had no place in their thinking – as their actions showed after Jesus' crucifixion and death. John only understood after he had seen the grave clothes after Jesus' resurrection (John 20:8).

What an amazing faith Mary had. May our faith be as great.

Memory Verse: *Matthew 26: 11 For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.*

Meditation #23
Matthew 26:15
Prof. Herman Hanko

And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.

Judas had made his agreement with the leaders of the Jews only a short time before Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples. Dorothy Sayers in her book, *Born to Be King*, depicts Judas Iscariot as a man who continued with Jesus only because he was thinking of an exalted position in the earthly kingdom Jesus had come to establish. He could be in charge of the finances, as he already was in the circle of Jesus and his disciples.

The other eleven disciples also thought of Jesus ruling an earthly kingdom in which Jesus would drive out of Canaan the hated Romans and establish the old kingdom of David and Solomon. But they were men of faith, and when, through the Spirit of Pentecost, they understood the need for the crucifixion of Jesus, their faith embraced the true meaning of Christ's kingdom.

But Judas Iscariot was not a man of faith, and when it became certain to him that Jesus would be killed and that his death would be the end of his dreams, he decided to get out of what he thought was a fiasco while he could.

Judas decided to bargain with the chief priests of the Jews to help them capture Jesus and kill him. The bargain was sealed for Judas' treachery at thirty pieces of silver. Some reckoned that thirty pieces of silver equaled to \$17.00.

Judas accomplished his task in the Garden of Gethsemane. But he had regrets, for deep down in his heart he knew that Jesus was the Son of God. After failing to return the money to the Jewish leaders he threw it down on the temple floor and hanged himself. His regrets were not sorrow for sin, but simply regret for what he had done and the horror of a guilty conscience.

The treachery of Judas was the fulfilment of prophecy (Zech. 11:12). The Old Testament Scriptures were God's eternal program for the redemption of his people. That is the reason why the New Testament quotes the Old Testament dozens of times. The New Testament shows beyond contradiction that every detail of Jesus' life was prophesied in the Old Testament. Jesus himself was conscious of this divine program. Our Lord's theme song was Psalm 40: "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book (*the Old Testament Scriptures*) it is written of me"

The wicked are willing to betray Christ for a few dollars. We find in him everything we need for time and for eternity.

Memory Verse: *Psalm 40:17 But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God.*

Meditation #24
Matthew 26:40
Prof. Herman Hanko

And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?

After celebrating the Passover feast with his disciples, Jesus went with them to the garden of Gethsemane just outside Jerusalem. It was in this garden that the events described in the text took place.

The Word of God teaches us three things in this text that are necessary for us to know to understand our Lord's suffering and death for us.

The first great truth implied in this text and its context is that Jesus was like us in all things, except our sin (Rom. 8:3; Heb. 4:15). In this particular aspect of our Lord's suffering, he showed he was fully like us by craving the companionship and understanding of his disciples, who had been so close to him in the years of his public ministry. But he did not receive it. They could not give him what he needed.

The second truth evident in this text is the emphasis the text puts on the failure of the disciples to give him the fellowship Jesus desired. In each case, as Jesus prayed, the disciples fell asleep. When the Lord wanted them to watch and pray with him (Matt. 26:41), they could not.

From what Jesus said to them when he found them sleeping, we may deduce that the sleep of the disciples at this critical juncture was due to their spiritual weakness, if not sin, "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (v. 41b).

On the one hand, their spirits were willing because they loved the Lord and earnestly desired to keep him company. But on the other hand, their flesh was too weak. They were emotionally and physically exhausted; they did not understand why their Lord was about to leave them. They found it physically impossible to stay awake.

The third teaching of this passage is that our Lord had to suffer and die alone. No one, not even his closest friend could endure what he had to endure. He alone, as the eternal Son of God in our flesh, could bear the burden of the sin and guilt of the people given him of the Father from eternity. He alone could endure the hell these people deserved by entering hell himself and suffering in their place. He alone could atone for the enormous number of sins of which all the elect were guilty. As the poet expressed it, "It was alone the Saviour prayed, in dark Gethsemane..."

Let us ponder the anguish of our Lord in the garden before he died to save us.

Memory Verse: *Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

Meditation #25
Matthew 26:62
Prof. Herman Hanko

And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?

All the gospel narratives make a point of it that Jesus, during his trial before Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod, was silent (Mark 14:60, Luke 23:9, John 19:9). The gospels do not mean that Jesus never said anything at all in the presence of Caiaphas and Pilate; when a matter of the truth was at stake, Jesus spoke openly and forcibly. But in other matters, he was silent and refused to defend himself.

This silence of our Lord was also the fulfillment of an important prophecy: In Isaiah 53:7: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

I once worked for a rancher who raised sheep. I was struck again and again with the utter silence of the sheep as they were being sheared, for in shearing them the shearers treated them very roughly. Isaiah, who saw more of the cross of Christ than any other prophet, was struck by the same fact: Our Lord refused to defend himself; he was silent.

This silence of Christ is also an important aspect of our Saviour's suffering. When God's truth was at stake, the Lord spoke; when it came to defending himself, he was silent. He refused to speak because he was on his way to the cross in full obedience to the will of his Father. "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within in my heart" (Ps. 40:6-8). Hebrews 10:5-10 confirms that Psalm 40 is speaking of Christ.

In an astonishing passage, Hebrews makes clear that Christ's obedience was our salvation. "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:7-9).

I have never dared to preach on this text; it is too profound. Let us look in faith at our suffering Lord, for in him is our perfect and eternal salvation.

Memory Verse: *Isaiah 53:7: He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*

Meditation #26
Matthew 27:21
Prof. Herman Hanko

The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.

Our Lord was at his last stop before he endured the suffering of his cross. He had been to the Sanhedrin, to Herod and now to Pilate, the Roman governor in Palestine. Pilate represented Rome, the world power that ruled in Palestine. It was there that Jesus was finally judged and condemned by Pilate and by the Jewish nation. No one wanted him.

Pontius Pilate was frightened. He was frightened by his certainty that Jesus was innocent of any crime lodged against him; he was frightened by his wife's dream that underscored our Lord's innocence; but above all, he was frightened by the Jewish leaders and crowds present for the Passover. He feared them mostly because the Jews were always on the edge of rebellion.

As a last desperate effort to escape having to agree to condemn Christ to the excruciatingly painful death of crucifixion, he offered the people a choice between releasing Jesus or an imprisoned thief and murderer by the name of Barabbas. All the gospel narratives tell us that Barabbas the criminal was offered to the mob as an option to Christ. Surprisingly to Pilate, the mob chose Barabbas.

The implications are many.

Christ, we must remember, was in control of all events, and his condemnation was not a surprise to him. In the divine program of redemption, this event too had to take place. It had to be shown that the eternal Son of God, and therefore, God himself, was hated by the whole world.

Rome, the world power, represented by Pilate, was more fearful of the Jews than of God and would condemn God rather than incur the fury of the Jewish mob.

His disciples had fled in fear and Peter had denied him, afraid he might also be arrested.

The church of that day, no, the session (the Sanhedrin) and members of the church preferred a thief and murderer to God. With their hideous cry, "His blood be on us, and on our children" (v. 25), they committed ecclesiastical suicide. They preferred a criminal to God in the person of his only begotten Son.

Would we have done the same if we had been there? Yes, we would have screamed for his blood and preferred a criminal to God himself who had come to save us. This is the kind of people we are; yet we are saved by grace, sovereign grace, unmerited favour.

Memory Verse: *Hebrews 13:6 So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

Meditation #27
Matthew 27:46
Prof. Herman Hanko

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Martin Luther, the 16th century reformer, when he finally came to see that justification was by faith alone without the works of the law, cried out in astonishment and awe when he gazed at the cross, “God forsaking God. Who can understand it?” The text, ever so brief, lifts a corner of the veil that hides from us the dreadful suffering of our Saviour in his death for us.

If we are not sufficiently impressed with the fact that Christ was forsaken by God, the little word “why” makes us shudder. The eternal Son of God suffered in three hours the wrath of God in hell for all the elect.

The people of God are more than the stars in the heavens and the sand of the seashore; their sins are so many and their guilt is so great we cannot even comprehend it; we are guilty for our own sins, plus our shared guilt for Adam’s rebellion; each individual sin deserves an eternity in hell. But Christ bore all of it – in three hours!

The “why” that came from Christ’s lips indicates that momentarily he did not even understand why this terrible darkness, this awful loneliness, this agony that tore him to pieces was necessary!

Yet he also cried out in his agony, “My God, My God.” Even in that indescribable agony he still loved his God. He kept the law to love God and his neighbour. He said, as it were, “No matter if I cannot even understand this hell into which God pushes me, I will and do still love him.”

He was the eternal Son of God, true God of true God (as the ancient Creed of Nicea puts it). He was forsaken by his Father. God turned his back on him. God drove him away into hell. God poured out on him wrath in untold measure. He bore it and loved him who did this to him! God forsaken of God! How can it be?

If by faith we kneel at the foot of the cross and cry out in our own agony over our sin, “He is my Christ. He died for me,” we find the salvation he earned for us. Luther called his doctrine the theology of the cross. So indeed it is.

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Memory Verse: *Galatians 6:14 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*