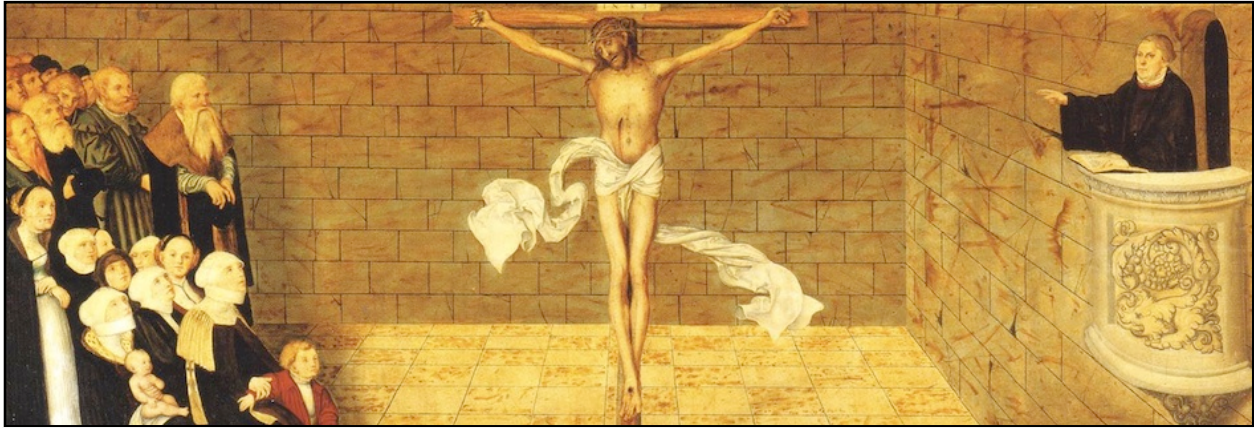


Session #1 – Evangelical Lutherans

Read: Preface and Intro, pp. 9-27



Lucas Cranach the Elder, part of the Reformation Altar in Wittenberg, oil on panel, 1547.

Introduction

Christians of every description claim to believe the Gospel and to be evangelical. Many churches or denominations even include the terms “Gospel” or “evangelical” in their name. Even in secular circles, something certain can be described as “gospel truth”. What is the Gospel? What does it mean to be truly “evangelical”? These questions, addressed throughout the study, will be raised in this first session.

Opening Prayer – Collect 109 (LSB 305)

Almighty and everlasting God, You would have all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. By Your almighty power and unsearchable wisdom break and hinder all the counsels of those who hate Your Word and who, by corrupt teaching, would destroy it. Enlighten them with the knowledge of Your glory that they may know the riches of Your heavenly grace and, in peace and righteousness, serve You, the only true God; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

Opening Hymn – LSB 644: The Church’s One Foundation

Scripture – 1 Corinthians 2:1-10

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. ⁶ We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the

wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷ No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"--¹⁰ but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

Quotes and Questions from Veith:

“Lutheranism involves major elements of both Catholicism (sacraments, liturgy, creeds) and Protestantism (the Gospel, the Bible, the priesthood of all believers) – making it a uniquely ecumenical form of Christianity – while also having its own distinctives (vocation, the two kingdoms, the theology of the cross). All of this results in a particularly life-affirming, physical-existence-affirming, liberating vision of Christianity.” (9)

- How does Lutheranism compare to other experiences you have had with religion/faith?
- How do you think Lutheranism is initially perceived by those unfamiliar with it?

“We are in the era of the “Nones” - those who say they have no religious affiliation whatsoever... and yet very few of these “Nones” are atheists or materialist. Nearly three-quarters of the “Nones” believe in a god of some kind, and nearly four-fifths believe in some kind of spiritual realm... Those who are ‘spiritual but not religious’ might well become interested in the rich heritage of Christian spirituality, but they would be hard-pressed to find it in most American churches.” (11-12)

- Why do you think the ‘Nones’ are the fastest-growing religious view?
- In what ways can Christianity generally and Lutheranism in specific appeal to the Nones?

“What I needed was a spiritual framework big enough to embrace the whole range of human existence, a realistic spirituality. I needed a spirituality that is not a negation of the physical world or ordinary life, but one that transfigures it.” (18)

“Lutherans were the first to be called evangelical. They emphasized the Gospel to such an extent that it became central to every facet of their doctrine and practice.” (22)

- What does it mean to have the Gospel be “central to every facet of doctrine and practice”?
- What would be exciting about that? What could be unnerving?

“Spirituality needs theology, and theology needs spirituality. In Christianity, these go together... Lutheranism in particular with its doctrines on sacraments and vocation brings the spiritual and the material together.” (24)

Connections with Small Catechism:

Ten Commandments: *The First Commandment:* You shall have no other gods.

What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

- What are some of the ways that this world and even our Christian experience can pull us away from fearing, loving, and trusting in God?

Lord’s Prayer: *Sixth Petition:* And lead us not into temptation.

What does this mean? God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature might not deceive or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.

- What is the source of all false belief? Of all despair?
- What is the source of deliverance from false belief or despair?
- In what way does this reflect a Lutheran, gospel-centered spirituality?

Conclusion

Being centered on the Gospel and thus truly “evangelical” runs contrary to our human nature. We tend to either reject the Law’s demands, or to look to our own obedience for salvation. Either one denies Christ as our true savior. Only that faith which continues to acknowledge the depth of human sin and failure and cling to Jesus’ righteousness as our salvation can be centered on the “good news” and truly considered “evangelical”.

Closing Prayer

Notes
