

How to Survive.

Text: Prov 3:5-6

Suggested Hymns:

341, 296, 392, 178, 301, 286, 299

- 1) The information of spiritual survival imparted to you
- 2) Spiritual equipment of spiritual survival
- 3) Besetting dangers

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Proverbs 3:5-6, ⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;* ⁶ *In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Dear Rebekah, your confirmation text today talks about your survival as a Christian. We ask such questions as, *How can you survive the attacks of Satan, the perversity of human nature, and the sinister influence of this unbelieving world?* These are certainly valid questions. Time and time again we have witnessed casualties sustained by God's young people who no longer go to church and seem to have fallen by the wayside.

These many months, which seem to have passed all too rapidly, you have been instructed in that precious wisdom which shows you how to survive spiritually. At times, no doubt, these hours of confirmation instruction seemed long, and our energy seemed to lag, for a certain amount of effort had to be put in. But, all in all, those were precious hours, for they brought you the most precious information from the wisest of the wise — our God and Lord Himself. May these truths become all the more dear to your heart as the years roll on.

A good basis for our address today on the essence of our instruction these past months is the word of our text, ⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;* ⁶ *In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Information On Spiritual Survival Imparted To You

First of all, there are the Ten Commandments. You were taught that these Commandments are not arbitrary rules of man's own making and therefore

cannot be set aside at will when they do not suit your fancy and purpose. They are the immutable, unchangeable will of God.

All the wisdom of the ages has not been able to improve upon these rules of conduct. They are basic and fundamental for the well-being of the human race. These Commandments group themselves into two sections or Tables.

The First Table tells us of our duty to God. Heading the list is the command that we give our heart's foremost and highest devotion to the Lord God; then follows the mandate that we revere and honour His name and fame; and then that we show forth our reverence and esteem by regular participation in public worship.

In the Second Table our duty to our fellow man is outlined. Heading the list is the command that we give proper respect, honour, and obedience to God's representatives on earth, in the home, the school, and the State. Then we are taught that life is God-given and therefore sacred and that for the well-being of the individual and society God has instituted His requirements for marriage, moral purity, the sanctity of personal property, the protection of our neighbour's good name and fame, and has set forth the evil of covetousness.

All this God summarises with a threat to those who disregard these Commandments, and with a promise of blessings that overflow to distant generations to all who honour and revere His holy will. These Ten Commandments are ten pillars of wisdom that serve as the foundation on which the well-being of our human society rests.

To set them forth clearly and positively by systematic instruction is greatly needed in our day and age, which is characterised by disorder, disobedience, and lawlessness. To observe them is to court the blessing of heaven; to disobey them is to bring about chaos, ruin and death.

But a knowledge of the Ten Commandments, as necessary as that is, is not enough. The Ten Commandments are like the Geiger counter in this nuclear age. The Geiger counter is a device which reveals the noxious and destructive presence of radioactive particles. These radioactive particles, if they invade the human body, bring about a slow and horrible but certain death. But the Geiger counter can do nothing to protect the individual against these pernicious forces. Other measures must be taken for protection.

Likewise the Ten Commandments reveal to us the presence of the destructive forces of sin and evil, not only around us, but also within our own selves. We know how the Scriptures declare in Psalm 51:5, ⁵ *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity.*” And in Romans 7:18 we read, ¹⁸ *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells.*

We read in Isaiah 64:6, ⁶ *But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.* The Law will reveal sin, but it will not save us from sin. Something more is needed.

God has therefore given us the Gospel. Rebekah, you have been taught the precious truth that God has provided a remedy for sin and evil. This He has done by sending His only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world, who has revealed the true God to us in His love, who suffered and died on the cross in our place and stead, and who brought a perfect and complete atonement for all people.

You have learned to know more fully and richly what our Catechism declares in the exposition of the Second Article of the Creed, I believe that Jesus Christ - true God, Son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary - is my Lord.

At great cost He has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil - not with silver or gold, but with His holy and precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.

All this He has done that I may be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.

This is the most precious truth of all. The Bible calls this Gospel the good news, the best news this sin-darkened world, has ever heard or can ever hear. This is the real secret of survival. It is the only remedy for this world's ills. It is the only hope of every individual soul. But it is not meant to be a secret. God wants that good news to be published in all the world so that all people may learn how to survive the sure and final destruction which will break upon the world on the Last Day.

Rebekah, this precious truth you have learned. You know the answer to the soul's most important question "*What must I do to be saved?*" namely, the simple but essential directive "***Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ***" as your only but all-sufficient Saviour, as recorded in Acts 16:31.

2. Spiritual Equipment For Spiritual Survival

But not only have you been given precious information on how to survive. You have also been provided with spiritual equipment for spiritual survival.

The first item of your equipment is prayer. "*Prayer is the Christian's vital breath.*"¹ A Christian who does not pray frequently and regularly is in danger of dying spiritually. You have been taught the essence of true prayer and have been equipped with the power of prayer.

You have learned that a true prayer is addressed to the only true God — the God of the Bible, the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We can come to God only through Jesus who has reconciled us to God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we must pray "*in His name,*" as He has directed us to do. We must also pray with true faith and confidence and we must submit our petitions to God's will and providence.

How wonderful it is that we can come into the presence of God as dear children approach their dear father, for Jesus has promised in John 16:23, ***Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you*** and in Matthew 21:22, ***“And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”*** "*What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!*"² Surely it is true that "more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."

I cannot understand the mysteries of this complex universe, from the atoms to the stars, but that does not keep me from enjoying a good meal three times a day and a wonderful sleep every night and a glad awakening every morning.

And I cannot understand how I, a poor miserable sinner, can speak to a holy and infinite God; but that does not keep me from folding my hands three times daily to thank Him for His bountiful gifts and to cast myself upon His watchful care each night and to implore His help and guidance each morning.

Next in your equipment are the Word and the Sacraments. The first of these, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, was made available to you when you were but a little baby. There at the font you were washed in the cleansing waters of forgiveness, you were received into the kingdom of Christ, and your name was written in heaven. Then came the months and years of instruction in the Christian faith and doctrine, and the church, with all her services of the Word, was made available to you. And now you are to be received into membership with this congregation by confirmation, upon your voluntary confession of faith.

So now remains the last item of your equipment, which is so necessary for the survival of your faith, and that is the Lord's Supper. Here at the altar, in the blessed Sacrament of Holy Communion, the Lord Jesus comes into closest possible union with you. For, as you receive the consecrated bread and wine, you receive the body and the blood of Christ, with which He has purchased your redemption. This assures to you personally and individually that He forgives you all your sins, strengthens you in this faith, and binds you, body and soul, to Him in willing and loving service.

3. Besetting Dangers

And now our text says to you, ⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart,* ⁶ *In all your ways acknowledge Him.* Perhaps I ought to tell you, too, of some of the dangers which you will encounter. Although they are often unseen, like the radioactive air, yet they are deadly in their effect.

You will note that our text stresses the word "all" and says advisedly, "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart.*" ... "*In all your ways acknowledge Him.*"

You will soon meet people who want to divide. There will be those who attempt to divide the heart. They will say, "*It is all right to be pious and godly in church, but you cannot be expected to act that way in your everyday life. Business and religion will not mix.*"

Again, there will be those people who want to divide the church. First, they want to divide it laterally and separate the chancel from the nave. They will say, "*It is all right to listen to spiritual truth from the pulpit and the altar, but those in the pews can take it or leave it as they choose.*"

Again, some people want to divide the church perpendicularly and separate the Law side from the Gospel side. They will say, "*It is all right to listen to the*

Law, to live right and do right as best you can; but never mind the Gospel, which tells you that you need Christ and are lost without full and complete faith in His atoning blood.” Or they may take the complete opposite position, “Live as you please, God loves you! He knows you can’t keep the Ten Commandments so He doesn’t expect you to keep them.”

Others want to divide the church horizontally and separate the church from real life. They will say: *“Oh, it is all right to listen to the preaching of spiritual truths in church and the lessons on Christian stewardship, but in real life it is different. The truths and principles taught in the one conflict with the atmosphere of the other. Faith and life do not mix.”*

But over against all those deadly subtleties of dividing the house of God and thus dividing our souls, our text declares, ⁵ ***Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;*** ⁶ ***In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.***

Rebekah, you have been equipped with the Word of God and the Sacraments. It is the best equipment, too, which you have received. Nothing has been spared of time or effort to give you the best spiritual equipment possible. But you must use it. The best equipment is of little value if it is not used.

Some time ago a train caught on fire. It appeared that the insulation on the cables of the motor, soaked with grease and oil over the years, had ignited; and soon there was a blaze and a rapidly spreading fire, emitting huge volumes of black smoke.

Excitement reigned for a while, as the train driver and guards gathered around the fire, wondering just what to do. Immediately they went for the fire extinguishers in the carriages. Every available extinguisher was taken down from its bracket in each carriage. But they had become so corroded that they were of little or no help — perhaps they had never been used since they had been installed. At long last an alarm was sent to the local fire station, which responded promptly, and within a few moments after their arrival the fire was quenched, and the train went merrily on its way again.

Here is a parable of our Christian life. Our prayers are like those fire extinguishers. Always the prayer books lie in their respective places, but we never use them. When some emergency occurs, we finally remember them.

But we often find that they have become so corroded from lack of attention and use that they do not function properly. The Word and the Sacrament, on the other hand, are like that fire station equipment. They are always in perfect condition ready to dispense help. But we avail ourselves far too infrequently of their services.

And at last, when the fire is too big and out of control, with the very flames of hell licking at our heels, we try to turn to these agencies, when it may be too late. Some people appeal to the services of the church only to conduct a funeral, and all one can do then, is to bury the corpse.

Dear Rebekah, let me plead with you, therefore, to use the equipment which the Church has placed at your disposal. Use it regularly. Use her prayers, her hours of worship, and her precious Sacraments. Yes, the finest and best has been provided for you by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Now it is up to you to use them. Help also to keep them in the best working condition by your regular use and by your support.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Hymn 424

² Hymn 426