

Trust and Peace in the Context of Christ

There's an old adage that says, "***A text taken out of context is a pretext to a post-text.***" Basically, when you pull a piece of text—a few words or a phrase—out of its context, you can easily make that little snippet of text say/mean something entirely different from what it ***actually*** says/means within the full context. That's the pretext. Taken out of context, the words no longer mean what they actually mean. When you begin to mislead others by promoting that pretext—that out-of-context snippet—as "truth," that's the "post-text." "***A text taken out of context is a pretext to a post-text.***"

When it comes to matters of Scripture, this is sometimes called "proof-texting." People, sometimes with good intentions and sometimes not, take the Word of God and pluck it out of context and manipulate it to suit/fit their own ideas/understandings; to "prove" their point. "***Thus sayeth the Lord!***" For example, just think how often we hear "***God is love***" (1 Jn 4:8b) used as "proof/reason" to not only condone, but actually ***bless*** homosexual unions. "***God is love, and love is love!***" No... that's not at all what is meant here. The entire context speaks very clearly to loving our neighbor as God loved us in/through Christ, and those who don't love their neighbor don't know God "***because God is love.***" ***But pluck a couple of words out of context*** and you can make undiscerning people who are ignorant of the Truth of God's Word believe whatever you want them to believe. And the devil rejoices.

Some more examples: "***Blessed is he who takes your little children and dashes them against the rocks.***" (Ps 137:9) ***What?!*** If you pluck that single verse out of context, God sounds like a bloodthirsty monster that even Planned Parenthood would cringe at. Worse yet, this comes across as a Beatitude, as if the barbaric murder of little children is blessed by God. ***Gentlemen: Who's ready to become a eunuch for Jesus?*** "***Emasculate/Castrate yourselves! For you were called to freedom!***" (Gal 5:12-13) ***C'mon... who's first? Chop-Chop!*** (no pun intended). Oh yeah... let us not forget that Jesus and St. Paul are "pro-trans" too. "***There is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.***" (Gal 3:28)

Okay... where am I going with all this? Well... it's all this talk about texts taken out of context and pretexts and post-texts and prooftexts that kept coming to mind as I listened to the words of our Lord in the Gospel lesson for this morning. And before we go any further, **we need to set the context.** Jesus is speaking here to a large group of people who wanted to become His disciples. ***That's good, right?*** Well... ***why*** were they wanting to become one of His followers? Basically, because it had become the ***popular/trendy thing to do.*** ***Everyone was doing it, and if you wanted to be part of the "in crowd," then you became a follower of Jesus.*** These people had no idea what He was really all about. They had no idea

what being a true follower of Jesus entailed. They had no idea what they were wanting to get themselves into. This is the context.

So... out of **EVERYTHING** our Lord says here—a lesson about fully trusting in the Lord in all times, places, and circumstances; a lesson that calls out “fair weather faith,” a lesson that is about trusting in the Lord over and above everything else that sinful man so often puts his trust in, even and especially when things get tough and you begin to feel the weight of the crosses that come with that faith; a lesson that is really all about faith in Christ and First Commandment issues of not having any other gods—out of all this, it’s amazing (and a bit troubling) how a few words and phrases can be **plucked entirely out of context** to justify things that have **NOTHING** to do with what our Lord is teaching here.

Examples? *“For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?”* Working for the District, I can’t tell you how often I’ve heard these words cited by congregation after congregation when discussing building plans and budget concerns! *“Thus sayeth the Lord,”* almost turning this into a command. ***The problem, though, is that Jesus isn’t commanding you (or even giving you advice) about how to properly budget for building projects.*** And yet... that’s how these words, plucked completely out of context, are treated... and promulgated (the post-text to the pretext). *“What king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.”* This verse gets cited regularly on the floors of Congress when something comes up around the world, and the politicians have to decide A) whether they’re going to send our young men and women off to war, and B) how much such a war/conflict will cost. ***The problem, though, is that Jesus isn’t giving tactical advice here about how to properly plan/budget for a war or when to seek a treaty with a superior force.***

In both these little blurbs, plucked completely out of context, the message that is so often put forward as “truth” ***isn’t at all what Jesus is actually saying/teaching!*** Remember the context! All He’s doing—in both instances—is using simple analogies that everyone would easily relate to and understand, and He’s doing so in order to teach about the truth/reality of bearing the crosses of faith and ***knowing all the costs that come with faith and being a true follower of Jesus;*** knowing exactly what being a Christian means and what it entails. The whole context of this lesson is about trusting in Him. No one can later claim, *“This wasn’t in the brochure! My recruiter lied to me!”* Nope. Your Lord told you, right up front, and He told you in many and various ways.

Now, some of you might struggle with this—that the ***entire context*** of Jesus’ lesson **is all about trust.** After all, in looking at this lesson, we really only see ***one***

thing mentioned by Jesus that speaks to trust (verse 33—“*Any of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple*”). Everything else in this text seems more about **what I need to do** in order to be a good Christian (or worse, what I need to do if I’m planning a building project or planning on going to war with someone). I must be sure to love Jesus so much that my love for others appears like hatred in comparison. I must buckle down, grit it out, and bear my cross in order to be counted as a follower of Jesus. I must be sure to count the costs; be aware of and willing to make the **great sacrifices** needed to be considered one of Jesus’ disciples. And if I don’t do these things, I will be discarded by God like salt that has lost its “saltiness” and is **good for nothing**; not even fit for use in decomposing a manure pile.

Here’s the thing: When we make these words of Jesus all about us and what we need to do, we’re missing the entire point! ***We’re missing the entire context, not just of this lesson, but of the whole of Scripture!*** All theology is Christology, right? It’s all about Jesus. It’s all about God’s love for us in/because of Jesus. When we turn the Word of God into what we need to do rather than what God has done for us poor, miserable sinners in/through Christ, ***we turn the faith into a pretext; a lie.*** Talk about plucking out of context! For it is by God’s **grace** you have been saved, which is a free gift of His, and not a result or a reward based on our works, but a result of Christ’s work alone.

Let’s come at it from the perspective of us and what we need to do, ***just to see how much making it all about us doesn’t work within the context of Holy Scripture.*** Who here has anything to contribute to their salvation? What “building blocks” or “building materials” do you bring to the table; do you have to offer/contribute that God needs in order to finish the project that is your faith/salvation? ***Without you and your help, it ain’t getting done?*** In terms of facing down and doing battle against the ***vastly superior numbers and powers of sin, death, and the devil***, who here is capable of making the good fight on their own, or at least with a little help from Jesus? Let me phrase it a different way. Did you need Jesus’ help to conquer sin, death, and the devil? ***Did Jesus need your help?*** I think of Luther’s great hymn, where he very clearly says, “*For us fights the Valiant One,*” ***not “with us,”*** as if we’re the dynamic duo. Jesus fights ***for*** us.

I want you to hear these words of Jesus within the proper context of repentant, Christ-centered, cross-centered faith. It is almighty God who is the divine builder, who first sat down and made all the plans for salvation, knowing full-well what it would take to redeem mankind; a work completely accomplished in His all-atoning death and resurrection. It is Jesus Christ, the King, who sat down and ***assessed the situation.*** He knew that all mankind was ***completely incapable of accomplishing one iota of salvation on our own.*** He knew that if He didn’t make complete satisfaction for us in our place, we would forever belong to the enemy forces of sin, death, and the devil. It is He who ***negotiated and***

accomplished the terms for peace, not with the devil, ***but with His heavenly Father***, whom we were at enmity with since the Fall in the Garden of Eden. That's important to remember. In faith, you are now an enemy of the devil, but by birth—by sinful nature—you are an enemy of God.

Christ is the one, who like St. Paul in the epistle lesson today, negotiates your peace, telling His heavenly Father, “*Charge all their sin and eternal death to my account. Not only that, then go ahead and apply the credit of my perfect life and death to their account.*” ***Christ's heavenly Father accepted His Son's sacrificial and all-atoning death as full payment for our eternal deaths.*** Because God pronounces us ***righteous and just*** solely because of Jesus and all that He has done for us, we are no longer enemies of God. More than that, because of Jesus and our baptism into His victory over sin, death, and the grave, we ***have the privilege and joy of rightly calling God our Father too.***

All that said, will life still be tough, difficult, and even downright miserable at times while we reside on this side of heaven? **Yes. Do not be deceived!** Your Lord has **never** promised a great and handsome reward ***here on earth***. I think that's what we often expect though, which is why we so often and so easily walk away from the “building project” that God is working on us as He works to build us up and strengthen us in our faith. The struggles and sorrows of the here-and-now are why we so often take up the white flag and seek peace and prosperity with the world rather than take up and bear the crosses He's given us to bear.

To those who truly struggle in forsaking all for the sake of Jesus; those who truly struggle to walk the walk of faith through this sinful battlefield and shadowy valley of death, hear these words of comfort and assurance! “*I will never leave you or forsake you. I am with you always, to the end of the age.*” “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil....*” Why? Because *Thou art with me every step of the way.* This is the Gospel promise that cross-bearing, Christ-centered faith holds fast to. This kind of faith isn't “fair-weather.” It doesn't just talk the talk. It actually walks the walk. This kind of faith looks to and holds fast to the victorious One who alone has accomplished all that is necessary for our salvation, ***purely out of a divine love for the sinner that will never be able to be comprehended or properly appreciated.*** This kind of faith looks to and holds fast to the victorious One who alone has conquered sin, death, and the devil by His all-atoning death and resurrection, the same victorious death and resurrection that, by His grace, He has baptized us into. ***It is here in the context of Christ*** that true saving faith not only knows true peace, in spite of what the powerful axis of evil—the devil, the world, and even our own sinful flesh—may throw at us, ***but abounds in and dwells in this Christ-centered peace.*** May this same Christ-centered peace, which surpasses all human understanding, be your peace. May this peace of Jesus be the context and reason for all that you say and do, now and into all eternity... **AMEN.**