

That's how the unholy trinity preys on its victims. The devil, the world, and our flesh convince us we are safe in our sin. We feel protected by worldly comforts and fleshly desires. Going back to the words of Jesus, when the One stronger comes, that is, Christ, he takes away the strong man's armor and divides his spoil (**Lk 11:22**). Again, this is hugely great news for the Christian, but this also hurts and is painful to go through. Those worldly comforts and fleshly desires no longer have their seemingly protective shield. Those fleshly desires are now exposed, conquered, and divided. We the poor, miserable sinner feel like we are left to pick up the pieces.

But here is where Christ comes in. He doesn't come to destroy; He comes to save us. We are not left to pick up the pieces for ourselves. Jesus does. His promise is that He will restore us. He does so through Baptism. Christ strips away the carnal security blanket of our flesh, and replaces it with the garments of His righteousness! The addict, the abused, nothing short of all people need not fear the unknown. Trust Christ's Word. The devil is strong. Christ is stronger. The comforts of this world are an illusion. Life in Christ is actually so much more comforting. Lord, take us out of our comfort zones, and place us where we need to be!

This brings us back to Jesus' beatitude. Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it. Now this Lenten Beatitude must be fleshed out a bit. First, the meaning of the word "keep". It is not synonymous with the verb "obey". There is a different Greek word for that. The word here is the same as in v. 21 regarding the strong man "guarding his own palace." The word "keep" is the same word used of a prison guard who guards prisoners. The Christian, then, is to hear and guard God's Word.

Second, the aspect of the verbs "hear" and "keep" indicate on-going action. This is not a one shot deal, but continuous, daily, life-long. We guard God's Word daily by being in God's Word daily, and teaching God's Word to those under our authority daily.

We are the church militant, hearing and defending the truth of God's Word until Jesus returns. Notice it is both things, though. We must continue to hear the Word for the good of both body and soul. It's that which strengthens and sustains us in the struggle to *guard* God's Word. We defend God's Word against the assaults of the devil, the world, and our flesh. We feel that struggle when temptation comes whether it manifests itself in 5 the form of despair – the devil trying to convince us Christ didn't save us from our sin. We feel that struggle when temptation comes in the form of false belief – the devil saying to you as he said to our first parents in the Garden of Eden, "Did God actually say?" Lastly, we feel that struggle when temptations comes in the form of luring us into great shameful sins. Let me be clear here: the devil works through means just like God does. So a co-worker ridiculing you for believing something in the Bible is as if the devil himself was ridiculing you. A friend enticing you to do something that you know is not God-pleasing is as if the devil himself was enticing you. **"Resist him, firm in your faith" (1 Pet 5:9).**

You see, the Christian is always under attack. If you don't feel or experience that struggle in one way or another, then it means you are living in the security of the strong man. May our Jesus who is stronger than the strong man deliver us from the domain of darkness into the marvelous light, that we may see like the Psalmist, confessing in our Introit, **"My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for He will pluck my feet out of the net" (Psalm 25:15).** Our Stronger Man, our Stronger God-man, will pluck you from the deadly embrace of the devil, the world, and your flesh. It will not be easy for you, it may hurt far worse than a band-aid being ripped off your skin, but it ends with your salvation. Good Lord, deliver us!

So keep coming to hear God's Word. Hear the forgiveness of sins with your ears, and receive it by faith. Blessed are you who hear the consoling Word and believe it. Forgiven and free from the bondage of sin, guard yourself against the unholy trinity that seeks to fill the clean-swept home of your body with more unclean spirits, leaving the otherwise unrepentant person in a state "worse than the first" (**Lk 11:26**). Blessed are you who guard the Word in your life, and your children's and grandchildren's lives. You're blessed when you hear and guard God's Word. It's God's promise. You have to trust it to be true for you. It's hard to believe we are blessed when we are suffering. Your labors are not in vain. Your struggles are not in vain. God is refining your faith just as Jesus was refining the faith of the Canaanite woman last week. He is strengthening you in both body and soul unto life everlasting. Your enemies – whatever form they take – will not exult over you, no matter how often it feels like they are. Blessed are you, because blessed is the name of the Lord who triumphed over our enemies. So repent and believe the Gospel, and live in the freedom that comes with knowing Christ has set you free from the strong man. In Jesus' name, Amen.