

THUS SAYS THE LORD, THE KING OF ISRAEL...WHO IS LIKE ME? ... IS THERE A GOD BESIDES ME?

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last...Who is like Me?... Is there a God besides Me?"

When the LORD asks, "Who is like Me? Is there a God besides Me?," He is asking a rhetorical question. Bear with me here, I'm not trying to make this a grammar lesson, but a rhetorical question is a question that is not looking for an answer. When the LORD asks those questions, He is not looking for your opinion.

But, in our day and age, everyone has an answer; everybody has an opinion on it and everybody has to weigh in on it. Luther writes in his Large Catechism, "There has never been a people so wicked that it did not establish and maintain some sort of worship. Everyone has set up a god of his own, to which he looked for blessings, help, and comfort" (Tappert, 367). In other words, everybody has a god. Their god is that person, place or thing that they look to for all good; that they look to for refuge in time of need. Your god is that person, place, or thing that you trust in with all your heart, soul, and mind.

"Who is like Me? Is there Is there a God besides Me?" The answers to that question are numerous.

The Israelites answered that question at Mt. Sinai. Their answer was the golden calf. Aaron, the high priest of the Triune God, fashioned a calf out of the people's gold and said to the people, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" and "tomorrow shall be

a feast to the LORD” (Ex 32:4-5). And what happened? The people got up very, very early the next morning and brought offerings to the golden calf and “the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play” (v. 6). And, understand that “play” is a nice way of saying they engaged in sexual immorality. By their actions, they answered the question, “Is there a God like you? Is there a God besides you?” Their answer was, “The golden calf is much better than you, God. He got us out of Egypt.”

The Athenians answered that question, as well. The city of Athens was filled with idols, made of gold and silver and stone, all right out on the street for everyone to see and worship. And the people looked to those idols; they trusted in them as their gods with their whole heart, soul, and mind. These gods were their refuge in time of need. And there were a lot of them. There was Athena, Ares, Apollo, Hermes, Hades, Poseidon, Zeus, and a whole host of others. Like I said, the whole city was filled with these gods and it was all very public, everybody knew what gods they were worshipping.

Most people are not that bold about trusting and worshipping the Triune God. Like the man who went up to Jesus and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life” (Lk 18:18). Jesus answered him, Keep the Commandments. Specifically, Jesus pointed him to the 2nd table of the law, the Commandments about loving your neighbor as yourself. And that rich young man, on hearing that answer, was happy. He even boasted to Jesus, “All these I have kept from my youth” (v. 21). When Jesus heard that, he said, “One thing you lack. Sell all that you have distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (v. 22). When that rich young man heard that, he went away sad, because he had great possessions. His great and many possessions

were what he looked to for all good; that in which he trusted with all his heart, soul, and mind; and for refuge in time of need.

Thus says the Lord, “Who is like Me? Is there a God besides Me?” How about it? How do you answer God? What do you have to proclaim and declare in answer to the Lord’s question? Is it a golden calf? Is it an idol of gold, or silver, or stone? Your great and precious possessions? What is it that you look to for all good? What do you trust in in time of need? Where do you go for refuge and strength? Is it money? Your leisure time?

Proclaim and declare before heaven and earth – who is like the LORD? Is there a God besides Him? In what do you fear, love, and trust above all things?

The answers to that question are very numerous. We set-up a lot of gods for ourselves and, in spite of what you believe about them, they are not like the Lord. They are not like the Triune God in any way, shape, or form.

The Lord of hosts is the First and the Last, the eternal God from everlasting to everlasting. He rules and reigns over all creation. He has no beginning; He has no end. A golden calf, images of gold, silver, and stone, your precious possessions, your money, your leisure activities, are all created things. They had a beginning and they will have an end. They will return to the dust. They cannot be for you what the Triune God is for you.

The LORD is the one who declares what is to come and what will happen. Images and idols can’t speak. Oh sure, your family and friends can speak and offer you advice, but they can’t tell you what is to come or what will happen. Your precious possessions can’t talk to you. Neither can your leisure activities or your money. They cannot tell you what is to come

and what will happen. But, the Lord of hosts, the Triune God, most certainly can speak and He speaks to you about who you are. He tells you, plain and simple, that you are a sinner. And the very fact that you have set up idols for yourself that you fear, love, and trust in, proves that you are a sinner. You will be disappointed in them, for they cannot save your soul from sin, death, and hell, and they cannot raise your mortal body from the dust of the earth. Trusting in them, you will die and you will die for all eternity. That's what God tells you.

But the LORD of hosts also says this, "The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel" God with us, for the Triune God comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ (Is 7:14). He comes in flesh and blood; He comes as a man to save you from sin, death, and the power of the devil; to save you from your idolatry. He comes to you to say, "I – and I alone – am the way, the truth, and the life. I – and I alone – am the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, including your sin." No calf, no image of gold, silver, or stone, no precious possessions can do that for you.

For this Lord Jesus Christ is the King who left His throne of heaven and came down to this earth to do battle for you in the kingdom of this world. He came down to fight for you, to save you from eternal damnation. No golden calf, no image of gold, silver, or stone can do that for you; no income, no leisure activity can do that for you; nor can anything else that you put your trust in, except the Triune God.

He is Immanuel, and He is also your Redeemer. He is the one who bought you back from sin, death, and the devil; who bought you back from your life of idolatry. And He does that, "not with gold or silver, but with His

holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death," so that you may be His own (2nd Article).

For this Lord Jesus Christ went to Calvary's cross for you. There, He gave His body and blood into death for you; paying the price for all of your sins; redeeming you from a life of idolatry; redeeming you from sin, from death, from the power of the devil. Of this you can be sure, because this same Jesus who died for you rose the 3rd day. His resurrection proves that God the Father accepted His sacrifice for the sins of the world, which means you are redeemed in full.

And all of that He gives you, Dear Child of God, through the preaching of the Word, the washing of the water and the Word in Holy Baptism, the supper of His very body and blood under the bread and wine, putting ALL His forgiveness, His life, His salvation into you, as no one else can. Not a golden calf, an image of gold, silver, or stone, no precious possessions. Only Jesus can do that for you.

Thus says the Lord. "Who is like Me? Is there a God besides Me?" The answer to that question? Well, we can answer with Isaiah, "I know not any!"

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.