

Introductory

In Luke 10: 21-22, there is a parallel to part of this text (vv. 25-27), but that text is not appointed to ever be read in either TLH, LW, or LSB lectionaries. This reading from Matthew does not appear on any Sunday in the TLH one-year lectionary. It is the reading appointed to be read on Pentecost 7 in the A series of LW.

The tenth and eleventh chapters of Matthew's gospel are about the Twelve and their task. Jesus sends them out, and their mission works. He talks to them about suffering and reward that will accompany their work, and then He moved on. In chapter eleven we see that John B has been imprisoned, which effectively stymies his ability to preach.

Clearly the twelve have been selected and put into place to continue the work that John is no longer able to do. The Word of Jesus *must* be proclaimed, and they are the ones who begin to do it. John's imprisonment seems to bring about an identity crisis in him. The question of his own identity is tied up in the identity of Jesus, whom He proclaims.

John's disciples come to Jesus to clarify His identity. They engage in a conversation, and then the conversation becomes a monologue. Jesus continues preaching as the disciples of John B leave (7), and the sermon ends with Jesus pronouncing words of judgment on places where He has done miracles, but the places have not repented and turned to Him.

It appears that the disciples of John B continued to walk away as Jesus continued to preach. There is nothing in the text to make us think otherwise. Or is there. You almost wonder if they were offended that Jesus questioned their faith (6). To be sure, that sermon – including today – is spoken in the presence of the Twelve and of "crowds" (7).

As we read through these five verses, we would do well to pay attention to exactly who is on the receiving end of the words sent by Jesus. First (25), the Son is speaking to the Father. Then (28), He directs His words away from the Father, and towards His own disciples and the crowds, inviting any of them who are working hard to come for rest.

When Jesus speaks to the Father, we call that prayer. When He speaks to humans, we call that preaching. Put those two things together, and you have Divine Service. Review for your people the sacramental aspects (God speaking to us) of Sunday morning and the sacrificial (us speaking to God) to help make Sunday morning more understandable.

As this text plays out, the words that Jesus speaks to the humans include several facets of a metaphor involving lifting burdens. The metaphor has us switching out our yokes,

which are woefully inadequate to carry the heavy burdens of life, to His yoke, which is all-sufficient for carrying any and all burdens, both temporal and eternal.

Textual Notes

25. During that sermon, where Jesus is talking to people, He switches to talking to the Father, “Ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν Ἐξομολογοῦμαι σοι, Πάτερ – at that time, Jesus answering said, I confess to you, Father.” The verb that has Jesus answering (ἀποκριθεὶς) is an aorist passive participle of “ἀποκρίνομαι.”

That word is very common in the NT and one that is used by Matthew all the time. In the ninety-four occurrences of that verb in that form in the NT, the word is always used when one person is *responding* in some way to another person, and almost always when one *answers* another, for example to answer a question or respond to a statement.

Most of the translations rightly translate “Jesus answered,” but some of them have him declaring or exclaiming. The lazy translators punt and have “Jesus said,” and that was easy. That word in that form is frequently used in conjunction with the verb εἶπεν, the aorist active indicative of ἐπώ, a more general verb, “to speak or to say.”

That verb in that form appears six hundred thirteen times in the NT, including many occurrences in Matthew. Grammatically speaking, normally when you have an aorist participle and then a main verb, like here, the aorist participle would connote past action, as in “having (verb) he then (main verb).” Voelz talks about that on pp. 144-146.

That is not the case here. It’s not that Jesus, “having answered, He then said,” separating the two actions. His speaking is in and of itself a response to something, like when you respond to a question or statement by using words. The translations that have it, Jesus “answered and said” are good, and those that have Jesus “answering said,” are the best.

Voelz talks about that on p. 280, noting that “the aorist participle may occasionally convey action that occurs *at the same time as* the main verb. In these instances, the action is generally *identical* to the action of the main verb. The most frequent use of this construction is in the rather Semitic idiom, ‘He answered and said’ (EG 6).”

This is *not* to be translated: ‘*After* he Had answered, he said.’ The answering and the saying constitute the same act.” He then references Burton, Moods and Tenses, para. 132-51 (FGG).” If you have a copy of Voelz, then tote you can note that EG 6 is the exact same construction (ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν) that we have in front of us in this text.

While I am admittedly showing off my ability to quote Jim Voelz, I’m not *just* showing my ability to quote James Voelz. I’m actually going somewhere with this. It’s important to know *to what* or *to whom* is Jesus *answering* or making response here in v 25, because He’s responding to or answering *something*, and just what would that be anyway? .

We backtrack to v. 3, where the disciples of John the Baptizer ask Jesus, “Are you He who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Jesus “ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν – answering says”, the exact same construction found here, where Jesus is still responding to the original question of the disciples of John, “Are you He who is to come,” or not?

There is no other question to which to respond between that question and His answering here, nor has context shifted in any other way. Yes, they had been leaving (7), but I have a hard time seeing them, walking away, when they hear Jesus say, “What did you go into the wilderness to see?” doing anything *but* stopping in their tracks, turning on a dime.

And staying for the rest of the sermon. You think they heard that and kept on walking away? No, it doesn’t say that they stopped leaving and stayed, but given that the verb presupposes a question or statement to which is being responded, that’s really the only conclusion that can be come to. But does it make any difference one way or another?

The entirety of the sermon (4-24) is the answer to that question about His identity, and here He answers that question by offering in their presence this prayer to His “Father.” If the question is one of the identity of Jesus (3), and it is, then the answer given here is that He is the Son of God. We see that because He calls God His Father.

Directing His words towards the Father the Son says, “Ἐξομολογοῦμαί σοι, Πάτερ Κύριε τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅτι ἔκρυψας ταῦτα ἀπὸ σοφῶν καὶ συνετῶν, καὶ ἀπεκάλυψας αὐτὰ νηπίοις – I confess to you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to little children.”

The verb translated as Jesus “thanked” or “praised” the Father is the present middle indicative of ἐξομολογέω. It is not a common word (ten occurrences) in the NT, and it has the force of acknowledging one in authority, speaking further to the question of the identity of Jesus, who sees Himself as being in some way below the Father.

The Son goes on to acknowledge that the Father is Lord of both heaven and earth, but mostly the Son gives the Father props because of the way that the Father has handled His business; hiding Himself from those who are highly thought of and considered learned, who often think highly of self, revealing Himself to those who are considered ignorant.

Σοφῶν is a common word, one that Paul uses repeatedly in 1 Corinthians 1, and here refers to such as the Gentile philosophers and the Jewish Rabbis of the day. Συνετῶν is not common, refers to what we would call “smart people,” and has negative connotations in all of the few occurrences in the NT, and likewise sometimes smart isn’t very smart.

Numerous examples can be given of these phenomena of wise and intelligent people today. There are a lot to choose from in the field of religion, and even more from the various fields of the various sciences. The scientist that comes to mind is Stephen Hawking, who while living revealed his ignorance of it by talking about religion.

I don't talk about evolution all the time, but when I do, I mock it. It's just bad science, and it's a bad thing for God's Highest Creation to think of themselves as some higher life form. It's something that needs to be addressed because your belief about origins impacts the whole of life, and because we are hammered with nonsense constantly.

It starts with the public schools, where things like Creationism and Intelligent Design are not allowed and scoffed at. It continues through those twelve years, and then if a young person goes off to state school, that's when the screws are mercilessly applied. If you're going to refute evolution, you need to know evolution, and be able to explain its fallacies.

The Modern Scientific Movement was begun by Christian, but has largely been hijacked by unbelievers and Atheists, but you already knew that. Christians ought to love science – the study of God's creation – because of what it is. We certainly ought not to fear it, and I don't think we do, but jump at the chance to learn more about our physical world.

While the Father has hidden those things from those people, He has instead revealed or made them known to others, the *νηπίους*, those whose intellect is more childlike than prodigious. BAG sees this adjective in “contrast” to the two words to which Jesus here contrasts it; *σοφών* and *συνετών*, and here it's not referring primarily to physical age.

It's the word that Paul uses in 1 Cor 3 when he says that, “I couldn't speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshly, as to *babies* in Christ.” The same word, different form, also occurs four times later on in 1 Cor 13, particularly (11) “when I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child...when I became a man, I gave up childish ways.”

26. The revelation to the babes, and not to the others, is the way that it ought to be, Jesus declares “*ναί, ὁ Πατήρ, ὅτι οὕτως εὐδοκία ἐγένετο ἔμπροσθέν σου* – Yes, Father, because it was well-pleasing in front of you.” The noun “*εὐδοκία*” its cognate verb “*εὐδοκέω*” means that The Father is rightly satisfied and pleased that He has made it so.

27. That verse was short and sweet. This one is not. Continuing His declaration of the way things are, He states “*Πάντα μοι παρεδόθη ὑπὸ τοῦ Πατρὸς μου* – all things have been handed over to me from My Father.” The verb is common, and can be used to refer to betrayal, or here to refer to the handing over of things from a father to a son.

As for the Son, “*καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐπιγινώσκει τὸν Υἱὸν εἰ μὴ ὁ Πατήρ* – and nobody knows the Son except the Father.” This verb for “to know” is the one that indicates a very complete and detailed sort of knowledge, and as a matter of fact, the father has been around the son since from the beginning of his life, and has had a front-row seat to his growing up.

Under normal circumstances, one could easily make the case that nobody knows a man better than his father knows a man, down even to his nuance. You could make the case that the reason for that is because a son is not only unable to hide things from his father. He is not as likely to do that as he is to do it to other people, especially his wife.

It goes both ways, “οὐδὲ τὸν Πατέρα τις ἐπιγινώσκει εἰ μὴ ὁ Υἱὸς – nobody knows the Father, except the Son,” and as a matter of fact, the son has been around the father since from the beginning of his life. Often, they are around each other almost constantly, especially if they work together. I, for example, know my father well, and he me.

The “εἰ μὴ” exception clause means that it’s not that other people don’t know those fathers and sons, but that other people can’t possibly have the thorough knowledge that fathers have of sons and vice versa. And yet, the tacked on phrase, “καὶ ὃ ἐὰν βούληται ὁ Υἱὸς ἀποκαλύψαι – and anyone to whom the Son should choose to reveal (Him).”

The Christian possesses that thorough knowledge by virtue of being a Christian; a baptized child of God to whom has been revealed all things about God. That knowledge comes from the Holy Spirit given at Baptism, and from the Holy Scriptures, given by that same Holy Spirit, understood only by those who possess it, only by Christians.

The access of the followers to the Father is through the Son. In expressing that thought in a sermon, one can use figures of speech involving comparison in which a person these days gets access to a powerful father through that man’s son to get a job or a loan or just a meeting with the father. Sometimes, it is about who you know. Like here, for example.

The other side of that coin is that the Father is not revealed to anyone except and unless He is revealed to him by the Son. People who adhere to other religions who have a father god, or who believe that God is a father, will have no access to the One True Father. He will not acknowledge them as His children because they did not acknowledge His Son.

The whole tone here is that people, for their own good, need to become connected to the Father, and that connection to the Father comes by means of the Son. The Church has what people need. People need God and His Church. God and His Church do not need them. Then why then do we communicate to people how much The Church needs them?

We do communicate that to them, and it begins with thanking visitors for worshipping with us this morning. If you’ve heard this before from here, it’s because this is a fundamental problem for us and one that is not going to be changed overnight. It begins by our playing hard-to-get and acting like we have something they need, because we do.

A few years ago – ten – I was talking to church lady about signage. Their church is on a busy city street, and a lot of cars go by, and the expensive marquee can say a lot of things. She wanted to put up messages that tell people how much we want them to come to church, how much we would love to have them, how much we need them.

Which the passing motorists would read to say, “we really need you and your money to keep from dying.” I want to put up messages that say something about us, who we are, what makes us different, like “The Word of God proclaimed here” or “God is Here,” or even “we have what you need.” The one I like best is “we believe stuff here.”

I gave her my spiel, and she seemed to get it, but as she left, she said, “and we’ll put ‘you are welcome here’ at the end, ok?” I said, “No, you don’t have to put that. If there’s one thing that people know about churches, they know that they are welcome.” Then the vacancy ended, and every time I drive by their sign, I think of what might have been.

28. Even though we need Jesus a lot more than Jesus needs us, it is He invites us “Δεῦτε πρὸς με πάντες οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι, καὶ ἐγὼ ἀναπαύσω ὑμᾶς – Come to me all the growing weary and being burdened, and I will give rest to you.” The words here speak the language of the working man, who does manual labor and gets tired at work.

Κοπιῶντες is the present active participle of κοπιᾶω, a verb that has connotations of hard work to the point of exhaustion. Πεφορτισμένοι is the perfect passive participle of φορτίζω, “causing to be weighted down,” or overloaded. The disciples of John have and the Twelve been both been run hard and put away wet, and they need to chill.

You may have to review that concept for some of your hearers, some of whom perhaps have seldom sweated, and I mean that. You go to work in the morning, work hard all day, and at the end of the day you’re beat, and you have to go and get at it again the next day. That’s life for most of the world now and historically, and for many Americans.

We might expect to find the Greek word for “Sabbath” when we see the translation “rest,” in “I will give you rest,” but we don’t. We see instead the future active indicative form of the verb ἀναπαύω, a word used to refer to that person who has worked hard and now will rest, which makes sense, given that Jesus has been talking about hard work.

The invite is to “come” to Him and to receive the rest that He has to offer. In our time and place those words welcome. A lot of Americans are maxed out and could use a little break. Jesus gives that us that break. The original invitation of Jesus to “come” was given to His own people, to John’s, and to anybody else within earshot.

Now it comes to us in our time and place. I don’t know if pastors generally understand how worn out are the sheep, especially young families. They both work, they shuffle their children hither and yon, fight with the culture that works 24/7 to screw them up, and by Sunday morning I’m happy and somewhat amazed that they made it – again.

In other words, their lives are a lot like your life, and then you’re going to spend your twenty-two minutes hammering them with the Law? Preach the Law, and preach the Gospel, which needs to predominate, and talk to them about the rest we have in Christ, who Hebrews calls “our sabbath rest.” Avoid talking overmuch about the OT sabbath.

I’m not one to allow a lot of whining from American Christians about how hard it is to be a Christian, because we have it good, and don’t even use the word “persecuted.” As a recovering whining Pastor, myself, I also tolerate a lot less whining from pastors about how the sheep are acting like...well, they’re acting like sheep...again.

At the end of the day, many Christians around the world are suffering for the Faith. Nobody is trying to kill us or even throw us into prison, and we will go home to our homes and wives and peaceful sleep. What's my big problem today, the hardship that's annoying me most? DirecTV sent my new TIVO to the wrong address, that's what.

Having said that, it's not easy to be a Christian around here, and it gets just a little bit harder every day. The moral framework that governs our society continues to erode, and Christians find themselves increasingly out of step with the new norms of the culture, and the problems of society always effect The Church. It's hard to be a Christian these days.

LCMS pastors are given a great deal more respect by parishioners than in other church bodies. But the default respect level, the beginning point, has declined over the years. It's harder to be a pastor than it used to be, and harder still to be a faithful pastor. I never would have thought such a thing just a few years ago, but I may one day face persecution.

The sheep more than the shepherds are hurt by society's increasing disdain, and in some cases contempt for Christian or anything having to do with church. Add to that the sheer weight of expectations from work, school, family, health, death, and the like, and by the time people make it to church on Sunday, they are ready for some words of comfort.

But sometimes they come to church and there are yet more expectations, more things to do in order to be a good, or at least better Christian. Barclay talks about how,

for the orthodox Jew religion was a thing of burdens. Jesus said of the Scribes and Pharisees: 'They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders' (Mt 23:4). To a Jew religion was a thing of endless rules. A man lived his life in a forest of regulations which dictated every action of his life. He must listen for ever to a voice which said, 'Thou shalt not.' (Vol 2, p. 16)

He then goes on to tell a parable attributed to Korah. See it here:

<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=362&letter=K>

We had some of that during the Golden Age of LCMS Phariseeism, when "thou shalt not" rung in the ears of the faithful. We even added to God's Ten, which I have seen most clearly documented in Arndt's, *The Borderland Between Right and Wrong*. If you want to know how we got to be who we are, you should read that book.

The legalism is creeping back. I call it the "Barefoot and Pregnant" movement. It was best expressed by a former Regent at CUC and youngsters on FB and the like. Women should not be educated, but she should get a job and wait for a Lutheran husband and then have children. And don't even think about serving in the military or the like.

You can tell that their theology is defective by looking at the Bible verses they quote and especially at the ones they ignore. Proverbs 31. Let us be careful not to return to that Golden Age, remembering to proclaim the “thou shalt nots” given to us by God, but never to forget, or let our people forget, that the end of it is what God has done for us.

29. He then continues with two aorist imperatives, both involving Him, telling these people to “ἄρατε τὸν ζυγὸν μου ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς καὶ μάθετε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ – take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” If you don’t know what a “yoke” is, then you need to look that up. The yoke is worn by animals, attached to a farm implement, to move that implement.

If you google “beast of burden,” you get the song by the Stones. What we want is working animals of pack animals; beasts domesticated to assist man. It’s a lot easier for the working animal if you use a yoke, and it’s important that the yoke fit the animals. A poor fit means discomfort for the animal, but more importantly it can injure the animal.

The second command is the straightforward “μάθετε – learn of me,” the verb cognate of the common verb for “disciple.” The word is in the aorist active plural form, and the invite is to those who have varying degrees of interest in Jesus, but all of whom are on some level part of the group that is interested in Him, some more than others.

Is Jesus here very explicitly inviting the disciples of John B, who is in prison, to come be His disciples? It could be. John A has Andrew leaving Team Baptist and joining up with Team Jesus in 1: 35-42, and some see a final merge of the two tribes in the account of Apollos in Acts 18:24-19:6, but I certainly not something inconclusive.

They should become His disciples “ὅτι πραῦς εἰμι καὶ ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ, καὶ εὐρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν – because I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” The first adjective is the opposite of forceful and the second is the same word used in the Sermon on the Mount, the “meek” (KJV) will inherit the earth.

The first adjective that Jesus applies to Himself in v. 29b, the one translated “gentle,” is πραῦς, a rare word in the NT. Here and in 21:5 the word is attached to Jesus. I take it to describe the person who has His act together, who seems always to know what is appropriate to do and to say, whose emotions are correctly balanced. Sounds like Jesus?

The second adjective that Jesus uses “ταπεινός,” though more common than πραῦς, this word appears only eight times in the NT. The occurrences are mostly in the Epistles and in the context of Christians being told to practice this trait. The word means “humble” or “lowly” and has connotations of depending on God, not self, and staying in your lane.

A lot of people do know about hard work, and sometimes we play hard, or at least we see other people who do. Create pathos in the hearer by inviting him to recall a time when he worked hard, and then to recall how good the rest felt afterward. This life is hard work. Heaven is rest, and we get a foretaste of that rest in Divine Service, our break from labor.

30. He comes back to the metaphor, calling it *His* yoke, and assuring the hearer that it does indeed fit him, “ὁ γὰρ ζυγός μου χρηστός καὶ τὸ φορτίον μου ἑλαφρόν ἐστιν – for my yoke is well-fitting, and my burden is light.” Perhaps the worst translation ever is the one that has the yoke being “easy,” the word used by almost every English translator.

The commentaries talk about yokes and about how they were custom-made for each particular animal and how a well-fitting yoke is better than a poorly-fitting one. It’s like using the right tool for a job, whether in the kitchen or in the garage, not the wrong tool. The right tool would make it a lot easier, as does the well-fitting yoke.

In the literature of the day, χρηστός is one of those very versatile words that may have a plethora of uses, depending on context for meaning. It’s is often used in connection with a yoke. It is also used in the context of clothing fitting properly, and in the moral sense of positive things as suitable, worthy, good, reputable, kindly, benevolent (BAG).

You can wear clothing that fits, or you can wear clothing that doesn’t. Which is better? You can wear shoes that are the right size, or shoes that are too tight or too loose for your hike, and how does that work out for you? What is it that makes the yoke of Jesus an easy yoke? The knowledge that no matter what happens here, it’s all good.

The well-fitting yoke is that no matter how hard the work, no matter how much the suffering in this life, eternity will be spent in eternal rest. That knowledge changes our fundamental understanding about life on this earth, causing a shift in the way we look at not just the afterlife, but the way that we look at everyone and everything in this life.

Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption by Laura Hillenbrand, is the story of a bomber crew shot down in the Pacific and the ordeal that follows, particularly for Louis Zamperini. *Endurance: Shackleton’s Incredible Journey* Alfred Lansing is about the 1914 Antarctic expedition, which also became an ordeal.

What kept those men going during their ordeal? The present was not good, but they looked to the future, and the likelihood that things would get better. The Christian likewise looks to that. We run into ordeals all the time, and in a sense all life in this fallen world is an unending ordeal, but we look to a better place to come in the future.

That outlook changes the way we look at everything.

Law/Gospel

Work/Rest – create pathos by talking about work and rest and this life and heaven. Remind the hearer that it is because of sin that “the sweat of your brow” exists. But if you think that’s bad, then Hell is worse. There will be no sweat of brow in heaven, but only rest for eternity. Use the argument from the lesser to the greater to invite the person

who knows about earthly rest after hard work to imagine the heavenly rest that will be infinitely more satisfying and enjoyable.

Hidden/Revealed – The World seeks after the divine and it is hidden from them. God seeks after man and reveals Himself to them. The Christian ought not to spend very much time asking why me, but a lot of time thanking God for that revelation.

Hidden/Revealed – God reveals Himself most clearly in the Person of Jesus, who is revealed to us these days in Word and Sacrament. The movement away from belief in that sort of revelation and towards revelation in self continues in our Western Christian Civilization. This has led to quite a bit of man-made religion. In the midst of these religions, God remains hidden. God reveals Himself most clearly in the Person of Jesus, who is revealed to us these days in Word and Sacrament.

Sermon Titles

God Hidden, God Revealed

The Right Yoke

What's an Easy Yoke? What's a Yoke?

Rest Stop for the Soul

Hymns

O, Day of Rest and Gladness – LSB 906

Jesus, Refuge of the Weary – LSB 423

Jerusalem the Golden – LSB 672

For All the Saints – LSB 677

Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer – LSB 918

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Resources

ACC – Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Matthew)*.
Intervarsity Press, 2002

BAG – Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by
William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1979

BCLY – William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*. The Westminster Press, 1975

FGG – James W. Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*. Concordia Publishing House,
1993

GBS – Jeffrey Gibbs, *Concordia Commentary, Matthew*, CPH, 2006

GND – Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*,
Eerdmans, 1982

MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, *A Concordance to the Greek
Testament*. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

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University Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

SCR – David Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church*, CPH, 2004

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Baker, 1930

VINE – W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of
Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

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Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html