Revelation 14:6-7

11/1/15

**GOD BLESSES US THROUGH THE REFORMATION**

1. With messengers from heaven
2. With the eternal Gospel
3. With an urgent sense of mission

On October, 31, 1517, Dr Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. Little did he know then that the religious debate he was seeking, would turn the church, and his whole world, upside down. It is our custom each year to celebrate this event as the beginning of the Luther Reformation.

But that custom is falling out of favor. More and more Christians, even Lutheran Christians, want to downplay the significance of Luther and the Reformation. In a day and age when many Christians want to unite under the banner of *Let's agree to disagree!,* it is become politically incorrect to celebrate an event that highlights the many and varied beliefs that exist among the different churches calling themselves Christian.

Because we are sinful human beings, it is always tempting for us to join the crowd. We could reason that God wants Christians to put away their differences. Maybe it is time to stop being Luther, Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian and just be Christians. Many might think so, but such artificial unity would not bring any glory to God, because the only banner under which God wants Christians to unite is the banner of his Truth - the truth about which we cannot agree to disagree, not if we hope to be saved. Luther tried to unite sinners around the saving truth of God's Word. That was and remains the goal of the Lutheran Reformation. So rather than downplay the significance of the event, let us celebrate it by letting the Scriptures remind us how **GOD BLESSES US THROUGH THE REFORMATION** with messengers from heaven, with the eternal gospel, and with an urgent sense of mission.

When Luther died, his pastor cited the words of our text at Luther's funeral, saying: **This angel who says, Fear God and give him glory, was Dr. Martin Luther.** The reason he said that was because the word angel in Revelation is used, not just of the spirit-beings who serve as God's messengers in heaven, but it is used also of human beings who serve as God's messengers here on earth. In our text, John shares with us a vision given to him by God in which he sees a messenger from God **flying in midair.**

To appreciate this picture you must understand what John had just seen in Revelation 13. God had shown him two earth-bound creatures - powerful beasts that represent the church's enemies here on earth. The one beast depicts those outside of the church who will stop at nothing to bring her down. The second beast symbolizes the enemies within the church who threaten to ruin her with their false teaching. Both are in league with Satan; both are extremely dangerous and will remain so as long as this world exists.

From John's vision it would seem that the church does not have a chance, and we might add, does not deserve one either. The church is a band of sinners, graciously gathered together by God; and yet, throughout history, her members have often managed to despise that grace by letting down their guard and joining forces with the devil. That is a pretty fitting description of the church in which Luther grew up. The church of his day had become drunk with political power. It had replaced God's truth with man-made teachings and traditions. It seemed the church was done for.

But it could not be. Jesus had once promised of his church: **The gates of hades will not overcome it.** That is the same promise beautifully portrayed in Revelation 14. The angel or messenger from heaven is flying in midair. Why? Because there he is safely out of the reach of all the church's enemies. Not even the powers of hell can reach him there! As long as there are messengers safe in God's keeping, the church will survive, more than that, it will
Isn't that comforting truth one of the great blessings that God gives to us through the Lutheran Reformation? When through sin and carelessness the church had seemed to all but disappear, Jesus overcame sin and carelessness with a messenger, Martin Luther, sent from and guarded by heaven. Jesus did this, not because the church deserved it, but because the church's Lord cannot and will not break his promise. What hope and encouragement that brings to us careless sinners!

Having said that, you will realize that while the angel in our text depicts Luther and his work, he, at the same time, represents so many more messengers from heaven. In fact the angel flying in midair symbolizes every one of God's messengers in these New Testament days. The thing that gives the messenger both his value and protection is the message he proclaims. John reports: Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim.

Messengers from heaven come and go. They live and die. But the gospel they proclaim is eternal. Its message never changes and the blessings it brings never end. Jesus promised: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

When the messenger in our text speaks, he does not proclaim gospel here, but rather words that reveal our great need for the gospel. The angel speaks God's unchanging will: Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.

Fear God, says the angel. Every student of the Lutheran Catechism hears those words and recalls Luther's often repeated phrase: We should fear and love God. To fear God is to hold him, at all times, in reverent awe. It is to respect his Word and will above all others. It is to acknowledge that what he says, goes, and it is to live it. To fear God is to worship him by giving him glory with every thought we entertain, with every word that crosses our lips and with ounce of energy we spend every moment of our lives. To do anything else, is to sin against God. And as soon as we sin, then fear of God takes on an entirely different meaning - the meaning Jesus has in mind when he warns in Matthew 10: Be afraid of the One [God] who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Left to ourselves, we sinners cannot properly fear God. It is impossible! Because deep inside of us, where proper fear of God should be in charge, there is by nature instead, only selfishness. So rather than putting God first, we think first and foremost of ourselves. It shows in way we spend our time and our money. It shows in the short attention span we have for anything God says. It shows in our shameful lack of spiritual thoughts and in the cruel and crude words that come out of our mouths, mouths that were meant to utter nothing but God's praise. It is easy to see that we are not the people God made us to be or wants us to be. Instead we are self-centered creatures who deserve to be destroyed, body and soul, in fires of hell.

That is the kind of fear of God we sinners live with and we would do anything to be rid of it. So we pledge our lives to trying harder. We look for ways to balance every wrong with a right, hoping it might be a way to earn some extra credit in God's grade book of our lives. But there is not. Our conscience tells us there is not. Programmed by God himself, the conscience knows that God isn't looking for a balance between good and evil in our lives. God demands perfection, nothing but perfection.

Luther's conscience led him to that same painful conclusion, and when it did, there was nothing left for him to do but throw himself on the mercy of God, hoping that God would find a way to succeed where he had failed. So Luther began searching the Scriptures, looking for some trace of evidence that the mercy he was counting on God to have might actually exist.

What he found was so much more than he had hope for. Instead of just a trace of
mercy, Luther found a whole gospel full on every page of Scripture. God opened Luther's eyes to see promises where before he had read only threats. Of course, the promises had been there all along, but now by God's Spirit, Luther was given wisdom to understand that the holiness that God demands of us sinners is the same holiness he gives us so freely in Christ. From Genesis to Revelation, the message is eternally the same - sinners are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

My friends, this is how you are saved. Jesus Christ gave his life to buy you back from sin. The blood he shed on the cross cleanses you of all your sins before God. Now when God looks at you, he sees Jesus living and loving to absolute perfection and it counts as yours. Through the miracle of faith he has given you, God sees Jesus in you, devoting your life to God's glory, and worshiping him with all your words and actions - so powerful is the Savior's cleansing blood! And what that blood is doing for you today, it will do for you on the day of God's judgment. You can count on that because through the Reformation, God blesses us with a gospel that remains always the same, even into eternity.

John was privileged to witness this truth with his own eyes and ears. In one of the visions God gave him, John got to look into heaven where he saw all of us gathered around the Savior's throne and here is the song that he heard us singing to him: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God.

In these verses as well as in our text, God makes it clear that the salvation Christ has accomplished through his life, death and resurrection is meant for all the people on earth. His eternal gospel is for every nation, tribe, language and people. The Lutheran Reformation took place in Germany, but we should never think its blessings are meant only for those of German descent. On the contrary, God blesses us through the Reformation with an urgent sense of mission!

The Bible makes it clear that there are not different gods and different ways to heaven for the Jews or Hispanics or Hmong or Chinese. All people are sinners before the only God there is. All people on earth are living out these same last days before the coming of God's judgment. They are all burdened by guilt and all of them living with a fear they cannot get rid of. But God, in his grace, has given them a messenger from heaven, an angel flying in midair with an eternal gospel that will remove their guilt and do away with their fear. You are that angel sent by God to tell the people of this world that the God who made them and will soon judge them, has also redeemed them from their sin.

Through his servant, Martin Luther, God restored to his church the long hidden truth that every Christian's a royal priest of God. That means that you have all the authority and all the credentials you need to share the gospel of Christ with every soul you meet. And as you do that, as souls are brought to Jesus, they will use the gospel to touch other souls who, in turn, will reach out to even more souls. This is the unity God seeks and works among us, not through the compromise of his truth but through its bold proclamation. To this end may God continue to bless us and many others through the Reformation, always to the glory of his most saving name. Amen.

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