

## THANK GOD FOR THE GOSPEL!

Revelation 14:6-7 | The Festival of the Reformation | October 25/28, 2018

*Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.*

### Jesus

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

When Martin Luther died his dear friend and pastor, Johannes Bugenhagen, preached the funeral sermon. He used as his sermon text the portion of God's Word before us today. Here's a sample of what he said: **"He was without a doubt the angel concerning whom it is written in Revelation, who flew through the midst of heaven and had the eternal Gospel ... This angel who says, 'Fear God and give him the honor,' was Dr. Martin Luther. And what is written here 'Fear God and give him the honor,' are the two parts of Dr. Martin Luther's doctrine: the Law and the Gospel, through which all Scripture is unlocked, and Christ our righteousness and eternal life is recognized."**

Pastor Bugenhagen believed that the angel of our text is none other than Martin Luther. What do you think? Was he right, or did he go too far? Well, let's think about it. The basic meaning of the word *angel* is "messenger." Martin Luther certainly was a messenger. He was a great preacher and teacher of God's Word. The angel of our text proclaims the eternal gospel. Luther certainly did that. He proclaimed the glorious truth that we sinners are saved not by our works but by God's grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone. So I would say Pastor

Bugenhagen got it right. The angel of our text is Luther.

But not just Luther. Finally the angel John saw in that vision stands for every faithful gospel witness from the time of John's writing until the end of the world: great reformers, theologians, pastors, teachers, missionaries, Christians. We all have the eternal gospel to proclaim. My friends, that is no small thing.

As we celebrate the Reformation today what we are really celebrating is the return of the pure soul-saving gospel to God's Church. Today we say: THANK GOD FOR THE GOSPEL! On the basis of our text we'll see three reasons to do so. Because the gospel is good news. Because the gospel is for all people. Because the gospel gives eternal blessings.

### I. It is Good News

Good news was hard to come by in the church of Luther's day. False teachings and practices, even superstitions, had taken the place of the gospel of salvation through Christ. Priests portrayed Jesus only as an angry judge and not as the merciful Savior he is. People who were troubled about their sins were not told to look to look to Christ and his cross. Instead church leaders told them to make amends for their sins and gain God's favor

by doing good works, by praying to the saints and by making pilgrimages to view supposed holy relics, like the bones of saints and pieces of the true cross. If you had the cash, you could buy a piece of paper (called an indulgence) that said your sins were forgiven.

Where did all this false teaching come from? The church viewed church traditions and papal decree as superior to Scripture. In 1223 the church decreed that no lay person could own a Bible. If they were caught with one it would be confiscated and burned. No wonder good news was in such short supply!

The phone rings and the recorded voice says, "Congratulations! You have been specially chosen to receive a free Caribbean cruise!" Sounds like good news. Until you realize that it's a scam and that to claim your "free" cruise you have to pay a number of hidden fees and service charges, which amount to about the price of a cruise.

The gospel contains no hidden fees. There are no service charges. There is no cost to us at all. The gospel is free. And free is just what we sinners need.

Listen to what Paul wrote to the Romans: **All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God** (3:23). When it comes to what God demands every human being – each and every one of us – is "a day late and a dollar short." Actually, we're a lot more than a dollar short. We've fallen far short of God's glory. We were conceived in sin. We were born sinners. We have spent our lives giving in to our sinful natures. In

what we have done and left undone we have failed to love God or our neighbor as a holy God demands. We have fallen short.

But I've only shared half of the passage. **All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus** (3:23-24). In God's cosmic courtroom we and all are fellow sinners are declared not guilty. This must be some great miscarriage of justice! After all, we *are* guilty. But no! There is no injustice! God declares us not guilty by his grace, his underserved love and kindness. God declares us not guilty because of the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God declares us not guilty because Jesus didn't fall short. He measured up to God's holy standards. He lived in perfect obedience under God's law. God declares us not guilty because Jesus paid for our falling short. He redeemed us "with his holy precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death." **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God** (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Forgiveness for every sin. Peace with God. An eternity of life in heaven. How do we get these things? What works do we have to do? What saint do we have to pray to? Is there a piece of paper we can buy? My friends, salvation is a gift. It cost God everything. It costs us nothing. It's free. Believe it. Can you see why the gospel is called "good news"?

## II. It is for All People

Here's some more good news. The angel flying in mid-air **had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.** The gospel isn't for a select group. It's for all people. Again, this is no small thing.

This truth is taught throughout Scripture. Paul wrote to Timothy: **God our Savior ... wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth** (1 Timothy 2:2). Jesus said, **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”** (John 3:16). The gospel is for all people.

We're used to restrictions, right? You have to be at least 52 inches tall to ride the roller coaster. You have to be 21 to order a beer. If I walked into the Ferrari dealership down in Chicago, they would know immediately that I had no business there. My clothes, my credit, the car I arrived in – all would say, “No Ferrari for you.” Purchasing a Ferrari is restricted to those who can actually afford it.

With the gospel there are no restrictions. The gospel is for everyone. No one is left out. The gospel is to be proclaimed to every nation: Germans, Koreans and Ethiopians. The gospel is to be proclaimed to every tribe, every race: blacks and whites, Asians and Hispanics. The gospel is to be proclaimed in every language and to every people: Arabic and Hebrew, Mandarin and Swedish.

Do you realize what this means? Every single person you encounter is a potential audience for the gospel. Every. Single. One. Your brother-in-law. Your mailman. Your dental hygienist. The lady who trains your dog. Your spouse. Your kids. Your friends. Your classmates. Jesus died for all people. That good news is for all people.

And you're an angel. You are a messenger of good news. Maybe you're thinking to yourself: I don't know what to say. I don't know enough. I beg to differ. Do you know John 3:16, “God so loved the world”? Then you know what to say. Do you know the Apostles' Creed? That creed is 100% gospel. You know what to say. Do you know the beloved children's song “Jesus Loves Me”? Then you know what to say.

You know the good news, which means you can share the good news. You can share the reason for the hope that you have. You can share Christ. And that message my friends works wonders. After all **the gospel ... is the power of God that brings salvation** (Romans 1:16). Yes, the gospel brings salvation. It gives eternal blessings.

## III. It's Gives Eternal Blessings

The gospel is not a new message. It's the same message God spoke all the way back in Eden, when he promised the newly fallen Adam and Eve that he would send the Serpent-Crusher to save them and all people. It's the same message that flowed from Isaiah's pen: **The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed** (53:5). It's the same good news David wrote about in the

Psalms, the same good news preached by Paul, proclaimed by Luther and taught by millions of Christian parents.

The gospel isn't going anywhere either. Sociologists say we live in the post-Christian world. Some even envision a time when the world will have grown up and left the Christian gospel behind, with all the rest of mankind's silly superstitions. Not according to Jesus. He said, **"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away"** (Matthew 24:35). The gospel will be around forever. You know, there really has never been a time when the gospel didn't exist. God planned our salvation, he dreamed up the gospel, already in eternity, before he created the world. The gospel is eternal.

As so are the blessings it brings. Right now, through the gospel, we have forgiveness, life and salvation. We have peace with God and power for living. We have the sure hope of heaven. These blessings never end. We will always be God's dearly loved and forgiven children. We will be at peace with him forever and ever. We will live with him in perfect joy, in an eternal inheritance that can never, perish, spoil or fade. For all of eternity, with utter contentment, we will do what the angel of our text calls us to do in response to the gospel. We will worship our Creator, the One **who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water**. And eternity will not be too long a time to praise him for his saving love in Christ!

Pastor Bugenhagen was on to something. The angel flying in midair calling people to

praise and worship the one who saved them, proclaiming the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ. That's Luther. But that's also you and me. My friends, thank God for the gospel! It is the good news of our salvation. It is good news for all people. It is good news that brings eternal blessings. Yes, thanks and praise be to our Savior God forever and ever! Amen.

**S.D.G.**