

Revelation 14:6-13¹
Three angels announce the Gospel
& doom of those who reject.
4th Last Sunday of Reformation
& Endtime
Reformation Sunday
Supplementary Lectionary
Series "B," Epistles

Pastor A. J. Kunde
Grace WELS Durand MI
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Elders' Meeting

⁶ Then I saw another angel who is flying in midair, who has the eternal Gospel to proclaim upon the inhabitants of the earth – even upon every nation and tribe and language and people. ⁷ He said in a loud voice, "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."

⁸ A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink of the wine of the desire of her adultery!"

⁹ A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, ¹⁰ he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." ¹² So this is the patient endurance of the saints – those who are keeping the commandments of God and (those who are keeping) the faith of Christ.

¹³ Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the LORD from now on."

"Yes," says the Spirit, "they will have rest from their labor, indeed, their deeds follow them."

THREE ANGELS ANNOUNCE GOOD NEWS
I. JESUS' ENEMIES FALL
II. THE ETERNAL GOSPEL SAVES

In the Name of Christ Jesus, in whom we remain through the Everlasting Gospel, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

While many, if not most, people celebrate last Thursday as Halloween, believers in Jesus recognize October 31st as a day to celebrate the Reformation. It was on October 31st, 1517, that Dr. Martin Luther nailed to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, ninety-five theses or statements. (These statements are posted on the doors

¹ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

by which you enter our worship area.) These theses were for the purpose of debate. However, Luther's theses were copied, run-off on Gutenberg's new invention of the printing press, and circulated throughout Europe and England. The catalyst for Luther's writing of his ninety-five theses, was the sale of Papal Indulgences by the papal legate, John Tetzel.

An indulgence is a piece of paper that promises escape from punishment for sins. The greater amount of money a person paid, the greater was the escape from punishment. To combat these worthless pieces of paper sold to increase the financial income for the Pope, Luther focused on the Gospel.

It was the Gospel of Jesus Christ not the Pope's worthless indulgences that brought the forgiveness of sins, salvation, and escape from the punishment of hell. It was, therefore, that Luther focused on the Gospel and its proclamation of the full and free forgiveness of sins by faith alone in Jesus. That is the focus of our text this morning from Revelation Chapter Fourteen. In these verses, we see that THREE ANGELS ANNOUNCE GOOD NEWS. THREE ANGELS ANNOUNCE GOOD NEWS ... I. JESUS' ENEMIES FALL; and, II. THE ETERNAL GOSPEL SAVES.

THREE ANGELS ANNOUNCE GOOD NEWS I. JESUS' ENEMIES FALL

The first angel, the one flying in midair proclaims the eternal Gospel that saves. The second and third angels proclaim the destruction and fall of Jesus' enemies.

The second angel says, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink of the wine of the desire of her adultery!" (14:8b). Babylon the Great has fallen.

In the Old Testament, Babylon was that great and ruthless nation that extended its empire from the borders of India westward toward Asia Minor (today's Turkey) and to the south through Palestine and to the borders of Egypt. The Babylonians were cruel. They not only killed by the sword, but they tortured their enemies and dashed their enemies' babies against the rocks. Then there was a New Testament Babylon.

In the times of the New Testament – the time of Christ Jesus – the Roman Empire was the Babylon. This empire too extended its control to India and then westward through France into England. They too conquered and dominated Palestine. The Romans were guilty of the same kinds of cruelty as were the Old Testament Babylonians. For example, we are reminded in Matthew Chapter Two of how King Herod ordered the Roman forces to slaughter all of the babies in Bethlehem who were two years old and under (cf. Matthew 2:16). Another type of torture used by the Romans was crucifixion – it was the Romans, under command of the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate, who executed Jesus by nailing him hands and feet to the cross. But that did not end the appearances of Babylon.

During the time of Luther, there was the Babylon of the Roman Catholic Papacy. The Roman Catholic Papacy introduced all sorts of false doctrines to the church, including that of Purgatory. Just about everyone could end up in Purgatory and, after a time of suffering, eventually make their way to heaven. In addition, if you had someone still living – a son or daughter or relative – if that person paid some money, your stay in Purgatory could be shortened. The most heinous doctrine of the Roman Catholic Papacy – still their most heinous doctrine today – is that salvation and eternal life are gained, not by faith alone in Jesus, but by good works.

A statement by the Roman Catholic Papacy as recent as the year 2000, said that if people live a good life they can get to heaven even if they do not believe in Jesus Christ. Things have not changed. It is the same today. Moreover, during the time of Luther, the Babylon of the Roman Catholic Papacy included torture, torment and executions – it was the time of the Inquisitions. As then, so now, the Roman Catholic Papacy claims authority over the three-kingdoms – notice the three-tiered hat that the Roman Pope wears – authority over the church, authority over governments, authority over the heavens. Thus, Babylon serves as the personification of all the evil forces in the world throughout time.

There has been no change to today's Babylon. Today, evil ecclesiastical forces spew their false doctrines and deceive many. Those false doctrines basically deny the Gospel truth that by faith alone in Jesus a person has forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Today as in the past, governments attempt to usurp the power of Almighty God – killing babies still in the womb, providing the empty promise that the government can do everything to give people peace and happiness. Here is the maddening wine of Babylon's adulteries. Not only adultery, fornication, sexual immoralities and shacking up literally, but also the adultery of refusing to repent of sin and believe only in Jesus. This kingdom of Babylon is fallen, says the second angel. And the third angel gives further description.

The third angel refers to those who worship “the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand” (14:9b). In the Book of Revelation there are two beasts featured.

The first beast in the Book of Revelation is the beast from the sea (13:1bff). This beast is representative of civil governments and authorities, which are opposed to Christ Jesus and the Gospel. Such nations today like China that outrightly kills babies and like the Muslim countries that persecute and kill Christians are part of this beast from the sea – secular government lined up against God's people – believers in Jesus. When our own nation, the United States, uses federal funds to pay for abortion or sets up policies that are calculated to kill the elderly and infirm – or, attempt to silence those who preach the full and free Gospel of Jesus - they too are part of this first beast.

The second beast is the beast from the earth (13:11ff). This beast is representative of false and vicious ecclesiastical government, especially, the Roman Catholic Papacy but not exclusive to the Papacy. Any so-called Christian religion that departs from the Bible in its truth and purity is part of this second beast. When the founder of Methodism, John

Wesley, stated that a person could attain perfection in this life and that someone might commit “involuntary transgressions,” but such failures should not be called “sin”; then Wesley was part of this second beast from the earth. Wesley and others of his persuasion also argued that salvation was the result of faith in Christ and good works and not faith alone, Wesley thus aligned himself and Methodism with Roman Catholicism. Then there is only one that these two beasts – the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth – serve.

In Chapter Twelve of the Book of Revelation a dragon is described. This dragon is the devil, Satan, the Tempter – that serpent who led Adam and Eve astray in the Garden of Eden. The devil slanders God’s people; Satan accuses God’s people; the Tempter, as was the case with Jesus (cf. Matthew 4, Luke 4, Mark 1), tempts people to fall away from faith in Jesus. The two beasts – the one from the sea and the one from the land – serve the dragon – serve Satan. For anyone or any organization that sets itself up against Christ and salvation by faith alone – serves the devil.

Those who serve the beasts have a mark on forehead or hand, which identify them as serving the beasts. But, what is awaiting them?

John records,

⁹ ... “If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, ¹⁰ he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name” (14:9b-11).

The wine of God’s fury – full strength, not diluted – is coming for those who serve these two beasts – dependence and reliance on earthly governments and allegiance to false ecclesiastical governments – false churches. That fury of God’s wrath is coming. The Last Day, Judgment Day, will usher in that everlasting punishment awaiting all those who deny Christ and faith alone in him, and who continue in wickedness and sin. Here is a warning for us too.

Allegiance to Christ has to be more than lip-service. Allegiance and faith in Christ means genuine repentance for sin and faith in Christ alone – a faith that relies on Jesus alone for full and free forgiveness. Unless you have that faith, you are doomed to destruction.

The destruction for those who are unbelievers, is described as an everlasting torment in burning sulfur with no rest night or day. Indeed, the Lamb of God, Christ Jesus, and his holy angels observe this torment, for those being tormented forever in hell, rejected Jesus as their only Savior. So it will be with you and me, if we reject Jesus alone. Only the wine of

God's fury, undiluted, will be the end of you and me if we do not repent and cling to Jesus alone.

If you or I hold on to our pride and arrogance, if we think that we are better than others, if we think that in us there is even a little bit that deserves God's grace, then we are doomed to destruction. If we think that we can go on deliberately sinning against God's Word and will but still be saved, then we are doomed to the fires of hell. If we think we can continue in sinful thoughts and words, the sulfurous fire is awaiting us. In true repentance, we are to put away sinful habits. Where there are no fruits of faith, there is no faith. Yet the Gospel of Christ Jesus continues to be proclaimed.

THREE ANGELS ANNOUNCE GOOD NEWS, not only that

- I. JESUS' ENEMIES FALL, but also that
- II. THE ETERNAL GOSPEL SAVES

John records,

⁶ Then I saw another angel who is flying in midair, who has the eternal Gospel to proclaim upon the inhabitants of the earth – even upon every nation and tribe and language and people. ⁷ He said in a loud voice, “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” (14:6&7).

An angel is a messenger. This particular angel is flying in midair, between earth and the heavens. The messenger is in the world but not of the world. His message is eternal.

The message of the “angel who is flying in midair” is “the eternal Gospel.” The Gospel is eternal because it continues throughout the ages of this universe, and its praises are sung in eternity by believers and all the hosts of heaven. The Gospel is eternal because its effects are eternal. The effects of the Gospel for believers are the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven through the faith that the Holy Spirit works through the proclamation of the Gospel. Moreover, that Gospel is proclaimed throughout the world.

The Gospel is proclaimed to “every nation and tribe and language and people.” No one is excluded from hearing this Gospel. And, the Gospel is the Good News of Jesus' perfect holiness and righteousness being credited to all; and, the Good News that Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, is the substitutionary punishment that everyone deserves. This Gospel brings about the fearing of God and the giving of God glory, as the angel announces.

For believers in Jesus to fear God does not mean that they are in terror of God. Through faith in Jesus, believers have been made children of God. Their “fear” of God is reverence and

respect for God, who sent his Son into the world to be their Savior. Thus, believers also give glory to God for his grace toward them.

The grace of God toward believers, is that they praise and honor God for their creation, preservation and protection from day to day; that they praise and honor God for their salvation in Jesus; and that they praise and honor God for sending the Holy Spirit into their hearts through the Gospel, so that they believe in Jesus as their Savior. This is also our reverence, respect, praise and honoring of God, for he created us, preserves and protects us; redeemed us by the blood & righteousness of his Son; and, called us to faith by the Gospel in Word and Sacraments, by which the Holy Spirit has created and strengthened faith in Jesus in our hearts. Now believers also give thanks and praise to God “for the hour of his Judgment has come” (14:7b).

The hour of Judgment for unbelievers means terror and destruction. But for you and for me as believers in Jesus alone, the hour of Judgment means deliverance – deliverance into the Kingdom of Heaven which Jesus prepared for us.

At the same time, all of the wickedness that comes from the first beast of the sea – secular governments which attempt to usurp the place of God – and from the second beast of the earth – ecclesiastical groups, such as the Roman Catholic Papacy and all other “religious” groups which depart from God’s Word in truth and purity – all of this pervasive wickedness causes true believers in Jesus to undergo tribulations during their time on earth. But listen to what one of the angels records for us. He says, “this is the patient endurance of the saints – those who are keeping the commandments of God and (those who are keeping) the faith of Christ” (14:12). Patiently endure what is going on around us for deliverance is coming.

You and I as believers in Jesus are delivered from hell and destruction and brought into the Kingdom of Heaven. The description that John gives is a description of you and me too as believers in Jesus. John writes,

13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the LORD from now on.”

“Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will have rest from their labor, indeed, their deeds follow them” (14:13).

You and I and all believers who have gone before us are blessed even when we die. We are blessed by faith in Jesus. The comfort that Jesus gave to Martha when her brother Lazarus died, is also the comfort Jesus gives to you and to me. Jesus said, “I Am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25b&26a). The “dead who died in the LORD” are believers in Jesus. By God’s grace alone, that includes you and me. Moreover, John records that the good deeds of believers follow them – follow them into heaven.

The good deeds of believers do not precede those who believe in Jesus. In other words, it is not by the good works that believers do that they have access to heaven. It is only the blood and merit of Christ Jesus that opens the way of heaven for believers. But believers will bring forth fruits of faith in good works and godly living out of thanksgiving to God and to their LORD Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life that has been given to them.

By faith in Jesus alone as your Savior, you are “in” Christ Jesus. Death no longer holds any terror for you. Trusting alone in Jesus through the everlasting Gospel that has been proclaimed to you, you have eternal life and salvation awaiting you in heaven.

CONCLUSION

Dr. Martin Luther was one among many faithful preachers of God’s Word throughout the ages. Others included Moses, Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament; the Apostles and Evangelists of the New Testament; and all faithful preachers since those times. You too are a part of their ranks as you proclaim to others the everlasting Gospel of Jesus.

That everlasting Gospel of Jesus has been and is being proclaimed even now to all nations – to every nation and tribe and language and people. Now also is the time for believers – you and me included – to undergo many tribulations before we enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But deliverance will come.

The time for Judgment Day is near. All unbelievers – servants of the two beasts and of the devil, the dragon himself – will be damned to suffering in eternal fire. But you, through the work of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel, will be saved. Continue in that Gospel of Jesus. Amen.