

St. Paul: On The Same page

for 10.26.14 Reformation Day

Day One: Revelation 14:6-7

“Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.” And he said with a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

The Revelation of St. John is filled with symbolism and might seem intimidating. But at least this much is easy to see, a lot of bad things will happen in this world before the end. And all of it will be the result of sin and rebellion, and of our enemy, Satan.

Then, in chapter 14, there is a change of scene. We see an image of the saints in heaven, all those who have been saved through faith in Jesus. And there is an angel – that is, a messenger – who proclaims the good news that God will bring justice against the enemy who has brought so much misery into our world.

Maybe that seems sort of theoretical to you. Maybe that picture doesn’t make you feel reassured.

Think of it this way, in a world in which armies capture children and sell them into slavery, in which Christians are beheaded for their faith, in which a plague is raging that kills more than half of all those who catch it, in which millions of unborn children are killed every year, in which nature itself is being poisoned and destroyed, in which many who were raised with Jesus are now turning away from faith – to such a world imagine the arrival of a messenger who proclaims that at last God will make things right.

God’s messengers, his angels, announce the good news. Forgiveness is free!

Martin Luther and others proclaimed that great news to a world filled with corruption 500 years ago. Now we can be God’s angels, his messengers, to shout out the same good news today!

Prayer: *Father, send me. Lead me to announce the gospel wherever I am, so that my world too may be reformed! Amen.*

Day Two: Romans 3:19-28
For there is no distinction: ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith...

²⁷Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

You open your mailbox to find a letter from the IRS. Good news! You are being audited. Would you welcome the chance to have experts go over all your tax filings for the last 3 years? Hmmm... maybe not.

Living by the law means living always in tension, never sure if you met the standard. And that applies to more than just the tax law.

If your future depends on the grade you get in this next class, you will live in fear of failure. If your value as a person depends on your appearance, then you will worry about every bite you put in your mouth, and every choice you make in clothing.

If your words are watched to make sure that you never offend anyone, then you will be afraid to speak.

We often live by the law, always trying to please, and yet knowing that at some point we are bound to fail. We will offend a customer, our boss, our parents or our spouse. Certainly we will offend God. We will even offend ourselves, and consider ourselves to be a failure.

But Paul says that our sins have now been covered up by Jesus' blood. We no longer live under the looming threat of the law. Instead, we live by faith in Jesus who loved us even while we were his enemies.

It's not just one or two of us who have failed. Everyone who tries to live by the law will fail. But the good news, the gospel news, is that Jesus has fulfilled the law for us. And we are now judged to be his, to be washed, to be clean, to be loved.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I don't want to live by the law. I know that I cannot. But help me to live in your forgiveness and freedom, filled with joy and boasting of your love. Amen.*

Day Three: John 8:31-36

³¹So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,

³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ³³They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"

³⁴Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

"The truth will set you free."

A lot of people, when they read these words, debate about what the word "truth" means. Pontius Pilate objected to it. And many others have argued about whether there is only one truth, or whether Jesus' truth might include all the things that we'd like to believe are true.

Instead of getting caught up in that debate, I'm wondering if you have ever thought about the word "free". If Jesus' truth sets you free, what does it mean to be free?

The freedom to move about feels great. Economic

freedom, to enjoy the fruit of your labor, is good. We like the freedom to choose how we want to dress (casual Fridays), and of course the freedom to speak our mind.

But Jesus is talking about an even greater freedom - freedom from sin, from guilt, from the burdens of the past. Jesus says we will be free from the fear of death, free from condemnation, free to live forever!

That's a very different kind of freedom. It's like the difference between being free to buy a candy bar because you can afford the calories, and the freedom to buy a comfortable home.

You are not just free to live as you like. You are so eternally wealthy that you are free to love others, free to serve others, free to forgive others because you have been given an abundance of forgiveness!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you have purchased my freedom at an enormous cost. Now help me to live in that freedom, not to enslave myself again to the values of this world, but to rejoice in the life I have forever in you! Amen.*

Day Four: Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Jon Acuff, a Christian comedian and speaker, wrote recently about the tendency for Halloween costumes to be highly sexualized. Acuff compared our situation to the problem that the Boze company faced. They wanted young adults to buy their high quality audio gear, but companies like Sony had already started marketing to those same customers when they were in kindergarten!

The world is selling ideas to our children from the time they are toddlers, and we often help make the sale. We expect that when they are adults it will then be time for us to talk to them about following Jesus. But by then they are already lifelong customers of the culture.

God used Martin Luther to begin a Reformation, a radical change in culture – in understanding of the meaning of life. But even then God used parents to work that change in generation after generation of children.

The culture around us elevates self – sees the key to happiness in pleasure and things – measures success by money – and values other people only so long as they meet our needs. Paul says that we need a revolution. We need to be transformed by the news of Jesus' redemption for us, so that we value Jesus first. And then we see the eternal value in all those others whom Jesus loved.

As you make choices in life, you show your children (even your adult children) and others what is true and what has value. What will that be?

Will you be conformed to the world around you – or will you be transformed by Jesus, and share that transformation with others?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, continue to change me, and use me to change my world. Help me to show the joy of sharing you, the Water of Life. Amen.*