

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings
for 10.25.15 Reformation*

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. ⁷ 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 angel (or messenger) flying overhead has a message of "eternal gospel," and yet his announcement begins, "Fear God and give him glory..." Is this gospel? Is this good news?

It all depends on where you are standing. When you have just spread your blanket on a sandy beach and laid out a picnic lunch for your whole family, then the rising wind and darkening storm clouds are a terrible sight.

But when you are standing on hot desert sands, thirsty and lost, then the sight of a rising rainstorm might mean your salvation! Or when you have been battling a forest fire

for days, then the darkening clouds might mean rescue!

John shared God's good news with believers who were under bitter persecution. When they heard that "the hour of his judgment has come," they knew that the injustices from which they suffered would not go on forever. Evil men would not triumph forever.

498 years ago, Martin Luther searched God's word, looking for comfort. He searched for deliverance from his sin. The church had taught him that he must strive to be sinless in order to be saved, but he knew that he could not meet the demands of God's law. But then he discovered, and proclaimed like this angel, the good news that God would be our Judge. And he pronounced judgment on his Son instead of us.

God judged our sin on the cross, and our enemy is now powerless to condemn us. This is good news for all who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people."

Prayer: Father, lead a Reformation in me, and let me proclaim your good news again. Amen.

Day Two: Romans 3:19-28

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

Paul's letter to the Romans is considered very complex. His sentences are long and have many parts. His argument is very detailed. But in the end he says a very simple and important thing...

No one can work hard enough to please God. No one can be good enough to earn eternal life.

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law...” In the past, people looked at God's demand for holiness, and that's what showed how holy and perfect God was. But now God shows us how perfect he is in a very different way... in his Son.

When I was little I thought that my father was always right. I thought he knew everything. I thought that he was super strong. And I saw all of those things mostly through his stern discipline when I was disobedient. I tended to be a little afraid of my father.

But when I went to work for my father as a machinist in his shop, I came to see him in a new way. I saw his greatness in the merciful way that he taught me – that he helped me out of trouble in my work – that he fixed my mistakes. I never feared that he would fire me, but even when he was frustrated with my errors, he showed his love for me by his patience.

Many people, even many Christians, feel burdened by the demands of being good, of trying to do the right thing, of being the perfect student or parent or husband or wife. But God has excluded the law, and given us good news!

Prayer: *Father in heaven, do not let me live any longer under the law, discouraged and defeated. You let your Son carry that burden for me. Lift me up and let me live joyfully in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Day Three: John 8:31-36

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."³³ They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

There are some entertaining videos on the internet of hamsters running on treadmills, hamsters running through plastic tunnels, hamsters chasing each other around their food dishes. They sure look like they're having fun!

And they probably are. After all, they have the run of the entire cage. They don't have to worry about predators. They don't have to search for their food.

If they lived in a burrow in the wild, their running skills would not be used for fun. They would have to run from cover to cover, fleeing from

the hawk that seeks to kill them, and searching everywhere for a bit of something to eat.

So are the hamsters free? No. They may feel free, but they are not. In the same way, we might feel free because we have money and nice houses and good cars. We think that we are protected from bad things, but we live on a treadmill, trying to keep ahead, trying to earn our food.

Jesus says that we can be truly free only when we trust in him. Free from the slavery of the law. Free from the fear of death. Free to love one another without guilt. Free because he has taken on himself the price of our captivity.

If you have been set free, would you live like you were still captive? Would you guard your little pittance, or would you joyfully share your wealth of good news?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I worry and fret. I am tormented by guilt and failure. I often feel trapped by the expectations of others, and myself, and you. But you have set me free. You have forgiven me from the past. Help me to live joyfully as I walk toward the future with you. Amen.

Day Four: Free At Last

Free at last, free at last

I thank God I'm free at last

Free at last, free at last

I thank God I'm free at last

Way down yonder in the graveyard walk

I thank God I'm free at last

Me and my Jesus going to meet and talk

I thank God I'm free at last

At Reformation we remember the powerful gospel preached by Dr. Martin Luther. But another pastor who was named after him also preached the good news about Jesus.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. quoted this famous spiritual in one of his best known speeches. “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, I’m free at last!”

What many people do not realize is that the slaves who loved to sing that song were singing it even while their bodies were still enslaved. But they knew, and they were joyful, that their spirits could not be enslaved. They knew that regardless of their legal circumstances, or their financial circumstances, or their medical circumstances – regardless of what anyone did to their bodies – they were already set free by Jesus!

And from what had they been freed? Not just slavery – but they had been set free from death.

“Way down yonder in the graveyard walk, I thank God I’m free at last.” Even when they would go to their grave, they knew that death had no power over them because Jesus had overcome death.

“Me and my Jesus going to meet and talk, I thank God I’m free at last.” Earthly enemies can tear us apart from those we love, but as Paul says, “nothing can separate us” from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Not our sin – not shame – not failure – not our circumstances – not poverty – not sickness. We and Jesus will walk together even in the presence of death, and we will talk, and he will set us free!

*Prayer: Dear Savior, set me free!
Set me free from my sin, free from
this world, free from death. Set me
free to serve you. Amen.*

These devotions help us to think ahead about the Bible verses we will read in worship next week. They are written weekly by Pastor Don Neuendorf. You can learn more about our worship or our church at stpaulannarbor.org