

An Eternal Gospel

Reformation 2017

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Rev. 14:6-7

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Reformation: It’s *Still* All About Jesus”—that’s been our theme this year hasn’t it? I’ve included that image in all of my newsletters. And CPH has made all kinds of Reformation products available, some of which have that same slogan on them. That message leads us to pause and reconsider why it’s all about Jesus. What about Luther? Wasn’t he important? Only insofar as he was used to remind us that salvation is a free gift of God—a message God’s Word, specifically His Gospel, tells us.

Yes, so Luther is important because he gave us the Gospel, right? Did he? Did Luther bring us the Gospel? Who does the work of the Gospel?

Our catechism students should know the answer to that question. Some of them may be working on sermon notes as we speak. They are filling them out looking for who is doing what. When the subject of a statement made in the sermon—that actor or actress who is doing the action—when the subject is a human being, that statement is Law. We do not do the Gospel. We do not bring the Gospel.

Consider the following texts. Paul wrote to the Corinthians in his first letter: “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. (E)ach one of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas,’ or ‘I follow Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?...For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel.” Was not Paul simply God’s instrument? Were not Apollos and Cephas and the others only instruments as well? Was not Luther simply an instrument of Christ?

And if Luther was only an instrument, should we give him more glory than that of an instrument? Following our text from Revelation, in chapter nineteen, John wrote that he “fell down at (the angel who had been speaking to him’s) feet to worship him, but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and the brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.’”

So let the question be asked again: who does the work of the Gospel? God through His instruments. Human beings only do the Law, and even then they only break it of their own power.

Verse 1

More than that, if a human should try to take credit for working with the Gospel, they are taking God’s worship. As the angel said, “I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” All human pastors, then, are servants of Christ; and fellow servants with the angels of God. Only God deserves the worship and praise for doing the work of the Gospel. Not the angel, not John, not Paul, not Apollos, not Cephas, not Luther, not Pastor Bagwell, not Pastor Speers, not Pastor Meyer, not Pastor Ross, not Pastor Wright, not Pastor Feldmann, not Pastor Meyer, not Pastor Josh—only Christ gets that credit and worship because only He does it. “It’s *Still* All About Jesus.”

And that’s what we heard about in our text for this morning from earlier in Revelation. John records that he “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.”

Here again an angel is described as serving with all those who proclaim Jesus’ Gospel. He carried the eternal Gospel of Christ to share with all people of all time. So what is that eternal Gospel? What is the message that every faithful preacher has carried as God’s instrument since the fall into sin? That a Savior would be coming, has come, has saved us, and will be coming again.

All of humanity fell into sin way back in Genesis chapter three. God had created the first man and first woman, Adam and Eve, and had given them free reign over His garden with the one instruction not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He warned them that if they did they would die. Then the serpent came and deceived them into eating from the tree, they ate, and they died. Spiritually. Because of their fall, every human being in all of history all the way up to us, and including you and including me and including Luther and including every other pastor in this circuit, state, nation, and world, all of us were dead in our trespasses. We could not save ourselves. We were spiritually dead—unable to move, think, or do anything to save ourselves. Only one man could do that—the seed of Eve promised to the serpent and Adam and Eve who would come and save all of Eve’s offspring, including us: Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, the Promised One, who was to come, has come, and is coming again.

The promise was that the serpent would strike the heel of Eve’s seed and that Eve’s seed would crush the serpent’s head. The serpent struck Jesus’ heel by having Him nailed to the cross to die. Jesus crushed the serpent’s head for all time by dying on that very cross, paying the price for the sins of every person for all time. That is the eternal Gospel that the angel carried, that the apostles preached, that Luther reminded us was free, and that the pastors of this circuit continue to proclaim.

Verse 2

Our text continues from John: “And he (the angel carrying the eternal gospel) 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 tells us to fear and worship God, to give Him alone the glory for giving us the Gospel and all the ways He applies it to us. If you do not give Him alone the glory—*sola gratia*, to God alone be the glory—you are idolizing something or someone. Luther, like Paul, would never have wanted to be thought of in place of Christ. He had no intention of creating a new religion, and even when he had to stand firm on the Gospel of Christ apart from the Roman Catholic Church, he did not want his followers to be known as Luther-followers, but Evangelical—ones who proclaimed the pure Gospel of Christ.

Sadly, history has not permitted Luther’s desires to be fulfilled. Others took the name Evangelical so we Lutherans reverted to Luther’s name. Yet when we are confirmed, we confess the faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. You were asked, in one way or another, as a student or as an adult, “Do you confess the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, drawn from the Scriptures, as you have learned to know it from the Small Catechism, to be faithful and true?” To which you replied, “I do.” Then you promised to continue in the faith to death rather than fall away from it, all by the grace of God.

Again, when it comes to anything related to the Gospel—hearing it, believing it, proclaiming it—all of these are God’s works, not ours. We have been saved by Christ, but as saints and yet still sinners we still cannot believe of ourselves. We cannot proclaim this eternal Gospel of ourselves. That is all God’s work. It is work that He does in and through us, with us as only mere servants and instruments of His great and glorious work.

For all these reasons, the Reformation and ultimately the Gospel is, was, and always will be all about Jesus. For all these reasons, we worship God and give Him the glory. It is beyond our understanding how God who made the earth and seas and universe and all that is in them could become man and suffer and die for us sinful wretches, and yet that is exactly what He did.

Verse 3

God's judgment is coming, but in Christ, we will be found guiltless. We will fear Him—not being scared of Him, but in awe that He has given us salvation freely for the sake of His Son, Jesus. We will have fear in that we will see Him as He is with our own eyes—no longer with the fear of dying as sinful men and women with sinful tongues or bodies, but in redeemed and glorified bodies when they are restored at Christ's return.

What will it be like at that time? Will we sing for joy or remain silent at the beatific vision? As none of us knows what true hell is, none of us knows what true heaven is like either. We don't know what it will be like, nor do we know what the new heaven and new earth promised to us later in Revelation will be like. We are given glimpses throughout the Scriptures. We hear in Isaiah that animals will likely be there. We hear in the Gospels that Jesus has gone there to prepare mansions for us. We hear in Revelation that it will be a new Jerusalem, a city with streets paved of gold with God Himself as our Light. But what will that be? None of us know. The only way we have these glimpses—just as the only way we have received and believed the Gospel—is the work of God in coming to us.

God came to us in His Son Jesus Christ to pay for our sins, and to speak to us that Gospel news, which includes how He will baptize us, how He will keep us in the faith through Word and Sacrament, and how He has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for all of us who believe.

The Gospel—and all of life—is not about Luther, Paul, the apostles, or any of the pastors in our circuit, including me. It's still, and always will be, all about Jesus. In Jesus' Name. Amen.