

October 29, 2006
Reformation Sunday

"The Everlasting Gospel Will Always Be Proclaimed"

REVELATION 14:6,7

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. ⁷He 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."

In his old age the Apostle John was privileged to write down visions from the Lord in which he saw things that were going to be happening in the future of the church. Some of the things he saw were very beautiful such as the saints gathered around the throne of the Lamb or the new heaven and new earth so beautiful that it took your breath away. "It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, a beautiful place where God will wipe away all tears from our eyes."

John also saw things that were frightening, worse than any horror movie you might see this time of the year around Halloween. In chapter 13 he sees a beast come up out the earth. It had ten horns and seven heads with terrible names that blasphemed God. This terrible beast resembled a leopard with the feet of a bear and a mouth of a lion. This beast made war against the saints and loved to slander the name of the Lord. As long as the church exists in this world it is going to have to do battle against the forces of evil that threaten to destroy the Christians and speak evil of them.

Even worse than the beast that came out of the earth was the beast that came out of the sea. He had two horns that looked like a lamb but he spoke like a dragon. This beast could perform mighty miracles to impress people. His ultimate ambition is to put a mark on people, the mark of the beast, the frightening number 666. Jesus warned against this beast when he told us about the false teachers who look like a sheep on the outside but on the inside they are ravening wolves. As long as the church stands she will suffer persecution from the beast that comes up out of the earth, and even worse there will be false teaching from the beast that rises from the sea. What is worse? Being put to death for your faith, or having someone teach God's Word incorrectly? One destroys the body, the other the soul.

The words just read to you are so comforting because they assure us that no matter how bad things get in the world or the church or our personal lives the message of the gospel will be preserved. This is the vital life-giving message that Jesus lived a perfect life for you, died a perfect death for you and rose from the dead so you could be with him forever. John sees an angel come down from heaven with the everlasting gospel. That is what we want to see this morning, this glorious angel with the everlasting gospel. We want the Holy Spirit to open our ears to hear what that angel has to tell us.

Look at what John saw

John sees something that every Christian needs to see to keep from getting discouraged. "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." Notice what kind of gospel it is. It is the eternal gospel. It will last forever because God wants people from every nation, tribe, language and people to hear the message and be saved. Before he ascended into heaven Jesus said, "Go and preach the gospel to every creature." This command to continue proclaiming the gospel has been entrusted to every Christian who ever lives on the face of this earth. The treasures of the kingdom of heaven must never be hidden or buried away. They need to be brought out and placed in full view for everyone to see. Jesus said in Matthew 24, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come."

I read this past week that one of the more popular gifts for Christmas will be something called a chocolate phone. This is a name for wireless phone that also serves as a digital camera and a digital music player that can hold over 1000 songs. What is "cool" and "in" this year, may not even be worth mentioning next year. That is true of so much in life. It just doesn't last. We get tired of material possessions. We lose friends. Even families grow apart and distant from each other. We look at pictures and see evidence of things that were once so important to us but now are almost forgotten. Electronic gadgets that once impressed us are now taking up room in the garage. The beauty of the everlasting gospel is that we have something that is just as good today as it was yesterday, and will even be just as good tomorrow. The love of our heavenly Father that Jesus has earned for us is the same yesterday, today and forever. "Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God that exists in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The Lord our God has provided a way to preserve the message of the gospel until the end of time. He keeps this message safe here on the pages of the Bible and opens up this message to people of every generation, every language, tribe, culture and people. One of the first Bible verses children learn are the familiar words of John 3:16, "God so loved the world..." When Jesus was born the angels told the shepherds, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." It was on the pages of the Bible that Martin Luther discovered this good news of great joy. His eyes were opened to see that he was saved and accepted by God not on the basis of a righteousness he was able to produce in his life, but purely on the basis of the righteousness Jesus had gained and provided for him as a free gift.

It is in the Bible that we discover these amazing words from Romans 3: "The just (or righteous) shall live by faith." And: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the Lord." The problem with every single human being ever born into this world without exception is that we are thoroughly imbued and endowed from our parents with the notion that we can do the right things to make ourselves righteous before God. We don't want the righteousness God provides for us in Christ.

That was the problem Martin Luther faced as he tried to purge his life of sin. He became a monk in a monastery, spent extra time in prayer, painfully abused his body to drive out the evil and volunteered for the dirty jobs no one wanted to do. The harder he tried to expunge the sin from his life by his own efforts the more he seemed to exhume from his past the evil he had done in his life. He confessed this agony with the words we just sang from a hymn he wrote: "Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay; Death brooded darkly o'er me.

Sin was my torment night and day; In sin my mother bore me. Yet deep and deeper still I fell; Life had become a living hell, So firmly sin possessed me."

It was by God's grace that Luther was rescued from this living hell. He was led to the light when he was asked to lecture at the university on different books of the Bible. He started reading God's Word seriously for the first time in his life. He trembled at the words "the righteousness of God" until he realized from Romans that a righteous and holy God who demands that people be holy and righteous for eternal life also provides that righteousness as a free gift through Jesus his Son. At first it was only a still small voice crying out to him from Romans, "The just shall live by faith." Then it became louder, "The just shall live by faith!" Eventually the message rang out loudly, "The just shall live by faith!!"

The phrase that he once feared, "The righteousness of God" took on new meaning when the eternal gospel came into his life. He saw that Christ had provided and credited this righteousness to him as free gift. He wrote: "All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light. I ran through the Scriptures from memory and found that other terms had analogous meanings, e.g., the work of God, that is, what God works in us; the power of God, by which he makes us powerful; the wisdom of God, by which he makes us wise; the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God." That's the eternal gospel that still reaches people today. That's the eternal gospel that has come into your life and mine. Someday we will join the saints and angels around the throne of the Lamb singing, "Salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb." It did not originate with me!

Listen to what John heard

John saw the angel with the everlasting gospel and then he heard a loud voice shouting out, "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 springs of water." The time is coming and it is here right now for people to "fear God" or give him the respect that is due him as an awesome, mighty, powerful and glorious God. It is time for people to stop wanting God on their own terms and molding him into their way of thinking and their own personal feelings. As one woman named Sheila once said of her own little god inside of her own little heart. "I believe in God. I cannot remember the last time I went to church. But my faith has carried me a long way. It is 'Sheila-ism.' Just my own little voice." The loud voice said to John and speaks to all people in our current generation, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of judgment has come."

Look back at the awesome power of God in creation then look at an even greater glory and majesty that will come again to us on judgment day. John hears the loud voice crying out, "Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." This is much more than just a force in the universe, or an intelligent designer, or Mother Nature. This is the mighty God, the creator of the heavens and earth who has dazzled us with his glory by putting the sun in the sky, 93 million miles away, a sun that warms you on your patio as you drink your morning cup of coffee. This is the mighty God who in the tiny cells of your body has implanted a carefully coding of genes that gives you the body you possess, the color of your eyes, the shape of your ears. Every thing around us in our world throbs and pulsates and underscores the glorious truth: "The Lord is God, the Lord is God." Psalm 104 says, "He makes plants grow for the cattle and plants for man to

cultivate- bringing forth food from the earth." Isaiah says, "Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens; Who created all these things? He who brings out the starry hosts one by one, and calls them each by name." It will all come to a crashing halt, in a moment, a twinkling of an eye. The universe will be destroyed by fire. All people will stand before God in the judgment. In flash the Lord will provide us with a new heaven and new earth.

Study any part of God's creation and then stand in awe at the detail that he has provided in everything he made. Then look with even greater awe at the detail that went into carefully providing everything that you need to stand pure and holy before God. That is the eternal gospel that will be proclaimed to all nations before the end comes. Amen.