

+ Revelation 14:6-7 + The Clear Voice of the Gospel Still Rings Out! +
+ First Sunday of End Time: Reformation Sunday + 1 November 2009 +

It was one of the busiest days of the year in little Wittenberg. Travelers from all over Europe streamed into the city. Children chased each other through the crowds. Vendors hawked their wares and pilgrims snapped them up. Wittenberg was abuzz with people gathered to celebrate All Saints Day over at All Saints Church, known as the Castle Church because it looked like a tall castle. It wasn't the appearance of the church that drew the crowds, though. It was the relics—vials of milk from the virgin Mary, straw from Christ's manger, wood from the cross, and other relics that were supposed to take off years of punishment in purgatory with every pious viewing. All Saints Day drew thousands every fall to the city of Wittenberg.

Over the noise of the crowds, the clear voice of a hammer striking a large nail rang out. Martin Luther—a local university professor, Augustinian monk, and pastor over at St. Mary's down the street—was nailing a large roll of parchment to the door of the Castle Church, which served as the community bulletin board.

Little did he realize, but that parchment would start a fire that still burns today. He had written 95 theses arguing against the practice of selling indulgences, pieces of paper sold to willing buyers with the promise of forgiveness for a price. Those pieces of paper had quickly become licenses to sin. Out of pastoral concern for God's people, Martin Luther offered a debate on indulgences and other abuses in the church. Pastor Luther wanted the clear voice of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—to be heard. He wanted his flock to enjoy real freedom from sin and guilt in Christ.

With the ring of a hammer 492 years ago, the clear voice of the Gospel soon was heard once again. Since the earliest days, that clear voice of the Gospel has sounded in spite of attempts by Satan and our world to confuse or silence it. The Romans tried to persecute its proclamation into silence. The Papists nearly silenced it with false teaching that turned Christ into an angry judge and made man responsible for his salvation. Countless voices try to drown it out today with the denial of Holy Scripture as the Word of God, the denial of absolute truth, and the denial of the need for Christ, yet **THE CLEAR VOICE OF THE GOSPEL STILL RINGS OUT!**

It was a dark time for the Apostle John. Seventy or so years had passed since the Lord had called him to leave his fishing nets beside the Sea of Galilee and follow him. The years had flown by, yet with God's help, John had proclaimed the good news of Christ Jesus. Now he was an old man, the last living apostle, and sentenced to end his days in exile on the tiny Greek island of Patmos for his Christian faith. Darkness loomed.

Throughout those many years, though, John had seen how the light of the Gospel broke through the darkness of sin and guilt and unbelief. He had seen how pagan unbelievers who had once reveled in awful lifestyles now stood firm in the Christian faith even in the face of death. He had seen the light of the Gospel break through the darkness of unbelief in lands all across the known world. The Holy Spirit had used John's writings to strengthen God's people with the clear voice of the Gospel. Now the Lord had one more letter for him to write to prepare the Church for the challenges ahead, and to encourage God's people with the final victory already won by Christ.

God's people needed to know that **the Gospel rings out with a clear voice**. Without a clear voice, the Gospel wasn't the Gospel—the good news of all sins freely forgiven and salvation won through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Plenty of other voices threatened to overwhelm that clear voice of the Gospel. Some threatened to rob Christ of the glory he deserved by giving man a role in his salvation, that Christ's saving work was incomplete without man's cooperation. Some threatened to overthrow Christ's authority with their own. Some argued that Jesus was just a man and not God, while others twisted Holy Scripture for their own personal gain. Some tempted God's people to desert Christ in their hour of suffering or persecution or hardship, arguing that the Gospel was powerless.

Into all this darkness, the Savior shined the pure, clear light of the Gospel, shattering the darkness and putting the clear Gospel out of reach of all its clamoring enemies. In so doing, he assured his Church he will never abandon her. John wrote, ***"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."***

The Word of God would not be overcome by Satan or his hellish forces. The ***"eternal Gospel"*** would endure forever ringing out with a clear voice. Those of us sitting here can attest to that fact since that Gospel brought us here, but still today so many misleading voices clamor to drown out the Gospel's clear voice. They deny absolute truth. They transform Christ into just another moral teacher. They trade Christ and his cross in Christianity for the latest pop fad, and promote the worship of self as my sin, my lifestyle, my choice, my life, my body, my will take priority over God's holy will. These voices diminish the importance of what Christ did on the cross so it doesn't offend, and remove the teachings of sin and hell for a message that sounds pleasing to the ear, but is poisonous to the heart. These voices clamor for unity amidst diversity, even if that unity includes watering down the pure teaching of God's Word or condoning sin as a matter of choice or an alternative lifestyle. Woe to those who follow those voices!

Sadly we so often do. A congregation allows a little error to stand or looks the other way when it comes to unrepentant sin, and the clear voice of the Gospel is lost. Gospel-taught Christians like you and me become ashamed of that Gospel when faced with an awkward situation or a little heat for our Christian faith. At times, you and I put more confidence in our own abilities, our own wisdom, or our own intelligence rather than the eternal Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed from heaven. When we're so bombarded with those misleading voices, we easily let them confuse the clear voice of the Gospel.

We need to know that **the eternal Gospel rings out with a clear voice!** It rang out clearly when God in his grace forgave our first parents who disobeyed him. ***"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel."*** It rang out clearly when the cry of a baby conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin rang out in a Bethlehem stable. It rang out clearly when that baby grew into a man and began three long years of difficult ministry with one sole purpose—to proclaim the good news of sins forgiven, of guilt wiped away, of death destroyed. It rang out clearly when a hammer pounded nails through the hands of the Son of God pinning him to a cross. It rang out clearly when that same Son of God cried out with his dying breath, ***"It is finished!"*** It rang out clearly when three days later an angel told some frightened women, ***"He is not here. He is risen!"*** It rang out clearly when the risen Christ entered the heavens victorious and sent his Holy Spirit so his followers could clearly proclaim his Gospel. It rang out clearly from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. It rang out clearly when the Lord raised up Martin Luther and others to restore the truth of the Gospel to his church. It rang out clearly when that message traveled across oceans to the Americas. **That clear voice of the Gospel still rings out today!**

In all those places at all those times, the clear voice of the Gospel overcame every misleading voice with the truth of God's holy Word. The clear voice of the Gospel has always outlasted every attempt of sinful man, Satan, and the sinful world to overcome it. The clear voice of the Gospel brings forgiveness from Christ for your guilt, confidence and strength for your weak and struggling heart, truth and clarity for the confusion of our present age.

The Gospel still needs to ring out though. The angel proclaims the purpose for proclaiming that Gospel, ***"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."*** He doesn't command us to be terrified of God, but to give him glory in childlike awe and respect. Yes, God's holiness terrifies our sinful natures, but his gracious love makes us his beloved children who respond with praise as the Psalmist wrote, ***"With you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared."***

There is no time but the present for this to take place ***"because the hour of his judgment has come."*** With every passing day and hour, the Last Day looms closer when there will be no more opportunity to proclaim the Gospel.

So who will go? Who will proclaim that good news? God in his grace has provided pastors and teachers to proclaim this Good News, but the truth is, we pastors and teachers have never been able to go to every nation, tribe, language, and people. That messenger with the eternal Gospel, then, is also you. God gives you the simple message of Christ crucified for you to forgive your sins and save sinners like you. The Lord doesn't call you to blow people away with some complicated kind of shock and awe, but to simply confess what you know and believe, to sound the clear voice of the Gospel in an age of confusion and error and lies. **The Gospel needs to ring out** if people you know and love are to join you with all believers in Christ around the throne of the Lamb of God. Find strength and ability to do that, then, by spending time in the Word and at the Lord's Table. Wake up each morning remembering your Baptism with repentance and living each day as a forgiven child of God equipped with the clear voice of the Gospel.

We live in times that grow darker with each passing day. The Last Day is coming soon, when Christ will come to judge the living and the dead. Hostility grows against those who hold to Holy Scripture as God's Word and who live out their Christian faith, but Christ will never abandon you, even in your darkest hour, even when it seems the misleading noise of the present age will overwhelm the clear voice of the Gospel once and for all. Instead let that clear voice of the Gospel be heard. Let it ring out with the message of freedom from guilt and despair and death in Christ. Let it ring out with the good news of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone found in Scripture alone. May the eternal Gospel ring out clearly through you and all believers in Christ until He returns at last! Amen.