

Reformation Sunday, October 30, 2022

Readings: Revelation 14: 6-7, Romans 3: 19-28, John 8: 31-36

The Son of God Has Set Us Free from Sin and Death by His Grace

“Wisdom is justified by her deeds” (Matt. 11:19), and the true Wisdom of God, Christ Jesus the incarnate Son, justifies us by His deeds. He prepares His way by the preaching of repentance, but He has suffered the violence of the Law and voluntarily handed Himself over to violent men, that we might eat and drink with Him in His Kingdom and *“remain in the house forever”* (John 8:35). For He is *“a friend of tax collectors and sinners”* (Matt. 11:19), and He has rescued us by His grace from the slavery of sin and death. By the proclamation of His eternal Gospel *“to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people”* (Rev. 14:6), *“the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law”* (Rom. 3:21), *“that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus”* (Rom. 3:26). And by hearing the Gospel of Christ Jesus, *“whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith”* (Rom. 3:25), *“you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”* (John 8:31–32).

Sermon Transcript:

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

Before we get started, I would highly encourage each and every one of you to take this hymn, "Salvation unto us has come," hymn 555 and study it this week. We only sang the first five verses. There are 10 full verses. I was tempted to let us sing all 10 of them because each one of them is great and marvelous. But I encourage you, study this hymn. This perhaps is even a better hymn for the theme of the Reformation than even "A mighty fortress is our God." I know that might sound like heresy to Lutherans. However, "A mighty fortress is our God" really is a rallying cry. It's meant to, I mean, it really does get you enthusiastic and excited. There's no way you can sing "A mighty fortress is our God." without just feeling your blood pump. It's just an amazing hymn. But "Salvation unto us has come" is a theological treatise walking step-by-step from us and our sin and our hopelessness before God to the redemption of Jesus Christ and the hope that is found in Him and the confidence that we find in His salvation. It is a wonderful hymn that you cannot go wrong in memorizing, and I would highly encourage it. All right. That being said, let us begin by looking at our text.

Now, Romans 3. Romans is the book by which Luther really came to understand the Gospel. It wasn't that the Gospel wasn't preached, but it was preached so little and it was attached with so much extra baggage that it was hard for people to hear what the Gospel was really about. There were people in the day who were very afraid. Most of the people in fact, were very afraid for their eternal salvation. They had no certainty whatsoever. They assumed, most of them, that even if they were going to get to heaven, they'd have to go through an extended time in purgatory first before they got there.

Now, things have changed in say, 500 years or so, but the fear or the lack of confidence of the salvation that is yours is still alive and well in the world today. There are many people who if you ask, "Do you know or how do you know that you are saved?" They will answer, "I hope," and then they'll list something. Hopefully, they'll list something about Jesus Christ and His salvation. But oftentimes they'll say, "I hope that I get to heaven because I have done X, Y, and Z." Now that sounds strange to my ears and hopefully it sounds strange to yours, but it is a common occurrence, not just in the non-Christians, but also unfortunately, in many of the Christian community. The reason for that is that the Gospel must continually be fought for and focused upon. Every celebration of the reformation since 1517, every hundredth year when there's a centennial of the celebration of the beginning of the Reformation, there's also been a difficulty within the church that has made the Gospel clouded, that people have wanted to add additional things to the Gospel. Even at 50 years after 1517, Martin Luther had already died in 1546 and by 1567 there were several people out there saying, "Well, if Martin

Luther were alive today, he would've said this." He would've said that we need to focus on this. He would've not said, "The Lord's supper is the body and blood of Jesus Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine." He would've understood logically and reasonably it's just bread and wine, doesn't really mean anything. Or he would've said, "You're saved by grace, yes, but you must do good works otherwise you don't know if you're saved." I mean those sound strange, but that was being said, even 50 years after the nailing of the 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg Church. But I'm not here to give you a history of the Reformation necessarily. I'm not even here to praise Martin Luther. While we appreciate the teaching that Martin Luther gave us, especially as we find in the Small Catechism and the Large Catechism, which is the core and foundation of us growing up and understanding what it means to be Lutheran, we love that about Martin Luther.

But the fact of the matter is Martin Luther was a man, and a sinful man at that. Sometimes he had very brilliant things to say. Other times, he was a fool, just like everybody else, just like the pastor that's in front of you right now today, and just like every pastor that has ever been before you ever since. There are times when we say something brilliant. We thank God for that because it is a gift of God, and there are plenty of times where we say something foolish as well and we ask that you would forgive us for that and focus solely upon the Word of God.

This is the Reformation. This is why we are dressed in red. This is why we connect Reformation Sunday with Pentecost Sunday, is because on Pentecost, the Gospel was revealed fully to the apostles. The apostles had been with Jesus, had seen the life and times of Jesus Christ, had seen the crucifixion, had experienced the resurrection, had been there for the ascension, and yet still they needed the presence of the Holy Spirit to reveal to them an understanding of what it all meant. And so at Pentecost, they preached with a full understanding with the power of the Holy Spirit and the Gospel was proclaimed and 3000 or more came to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior that day.

In the course of 1500 years, unfortunately, that message had been clouded by traditions and superstitions and misunderstandings and false practices and all sorts of other things. Much of it was because the church, rather than standing firm on the Word of God, decided that they needed to conform to the culture, that they needed to be relevant to the way the culture worked, to look more like the culture and act more like the culture so that they could be connected to the people out there so they could make sense of what was going on in here. Be it in the day where the power of the kings was becoming paramount and the idea of the king being chosen by God to be the ruler, and so the Pope and the church started to think that we needed rulers and leaders like the Pope to guide us and direct us and control not just the church, but also property and land. Or whether we get pulled by the culture to think that we need to feel it, that everything is about how I feel that determines what is truth or not truth. Or the idea that you have your truth and I have my truth, and we can agree to disagree that my truth is just as equal with your truth. Relativism, that there is no way to tell what is true or right. I mean that seems to be the idea of the day today.

But we are here and we are in a Lutheran church because the Lutheran church has strived very carefully to remain focused solely and utterly on the Word of God and what it proclaims. This Romans passage in particular has some beautiful things for us to understand, this is verse 21 of Romans chapter three, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it. The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe, for there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith." I know that's quite a long section, but it bears repeating over and over and over again. "A righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law." Right there, it throws all of our good works, all of our efforts out the window as far as salvation goes. This is the key distinction. This is what the teaching of Martin Luther is all about, that there is nothing that we as human beings can do. We cannot follow the law. The righteousness of God is apart from the law. It is a gift given to us freely. Initially, it is given to us, most of us, in the words of baptism, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." In those simple words,

I mean let's face it, those are not very complex words. "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Pretty much anybody can say those words without tripping over them. And yet, those words are some of the most powerful words ever to be spoken because through those words, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you are dragged out of the kingdom of sin and death that you reside in, that we all reside in because we are sinners. You, through those words, are dragged out of that and the control of your sinful nature and the temptations and the suppression of Satan and everything else, you are dragged out of that kingdom and dragged out of that control, and you are placed securely in the kingdom of God.

In fact, not only are you placed securely in the kingdom, God considers you the kingdom. The kingdom is you. You don't just get moved to a place. You become the essence of what He promises, that you are a child of God, that you are a member of the kingdom of God, because the kingdom of God is not of this world. The kingdom of God is not a territory or a place like heaven or anything like that, although that's where God is. The kingdom of God is actually you and me. All of us who have been called by the Gospel, who have received the gift of faith through Jesus Christ. We are the kingdom of God. And wherever we go, the kingdom goes there also, and so we can stand secure in the face of trials and tribulations and heartache and pain and suffering and illness and even death because nothing can shake us, nothing can take us from the hand of God. He is a mighty fortress that protects us and guards us, sets His walls around us.

We are covered in the blood of Christ. We are new creations. We are secure in the kingdom of God and therefore, we can stand firm no matter what comes our way. Especially, can we stand firm in this: How or why or do I know that I am saved? I do because the Word of God has declared it to be so. The Reformation changed the world. I mean, it literally did. The language changed, the structure of government changed, the structure of the church changed, the structure of the family and how it worked changed, ability to read and understand. I mean, practically every aspect of human life changed as a result of the Reformation. But what mainly it changed was that we no longer need to fear the devil, the world, our own sinful nature or even death itself. We have been freed by the gift, even though all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We are all justified by grace as a gift. It's a gift. You have it because He gave it to you. It is not yours in part like, okay, you got the beginnings of salvation, but now you better work on it and you better live right or else. If you don't get it right, then you never know. No, you have the fullness of salvation. You are not waiting for eternal life when He comes again. You have eternal life right now and when He comes again, you'll see what that means and you'll get a full understanding of what it is. But it is yours today.

Therefore, we know that we are justified by faith apart from works, but we are called in joy and celebration to do good works. But the good works that we do have a completely different focus and purpose as we understand the Scriptures. No longer do we need to figure out what do I need to do in order for God to love me or to make sure He continues to love me, so I need to be a really good Christian and follow the law, come to church every Sunday, do all of this, give my money, everything like this. And if I don't, I don't know. We're freed from all of that. We're freed from the uncertainty. Does God love me? Yes, you are His child. Even when you are His wayward child, you are still His child and He still always loves you and you are freed from the fear, from the anxiety, from the doubt. You are freed to live in the joy of your salvation. To serve each other, to seek good to do to everybody and anybody, not because you must or not because that's the right thing to do because now you're doing good works and now fulfilling what God didn't complete in you, no. You do good works because the other people need it. See, good works aren't for you. That's another beauty of our understanding of justification is why we do anything good or good works. It's not for us. Good works are kind of unimportant to you and me. My good works are not about me or for me. See, my relationship with God is secure. My faith, the grace of God is a hundred percent. Whether I fully understand it or not, or whether sometimes I doubt it or wonder about it doesn't matter. It's secured. It's a hundred percent solid because God has declared it to be so. Now that I'm safe and secure, wrapped in the love of Christ, now I can go out and I can share the joy of my salvation, be that by good works or giving money or service or helping each other or

talking to one another or sharing the Gospel, whatever it might be. It's for them who do not yet know the security and the hope that we have in Jesus Christ.

When Jesus spoke to the Jews who had believed in Him, he said, "If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." That's what this is all about. We abide in the Word of Christ, which says, we are given salvation free as a gift, not by works. Therefore, we know the truth and that truth has set us free. Free from fear, free from worry, free from anxiety. We are free in Christ to rejoice each and every day, even on our last day. We can really rejoice on that day because that is the day we will close our eyes and when we open them the next time, we will be in the new heavens and the new Earth and we will see Christ in all of His glory and we will be restored without any fear or trials or hardship or anything, and every tear is wiped from our eyes and we will live with Christ for all eternity. What a glorious day that is. The Reformation has enabled us to cry out as they did in the Book of Revelation at the very end, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus." Either come again in Your second coming or allow me when I die to die in faith and confidence because You have done it all for me. I am Your child and that is enough.

May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always, now forevermore to your very last day unto life everlasting. Amen.