

The Bible, The Creation and The Reformation

A Sermon for Creation Sabbath written by
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Hymns:

Opening: 506 – A Mighty Fortress

Closing: 21 – Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise

Text: Hebrews 2:9-11 NKJV

9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

Bringing Many Sons to Glory

10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

Note that in this sermon, underlined passages go with slides in the accompanying Powerpoint slideshow. It can be downloaded from: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/c6ay93kxepcyttw/Creation%20Sabbath%202017%2.Sermon.pptx?dl=0>

Sermon

On Tuesday, October 31, 2017 Protestant Christendom celebrated the 500th anniversary of one of the greatest events in Christian history. It was on Wednesday, October 31, 1517 Martin Luther strode through the crisp autumn air of Wittenberg's streets, making his way toward the Castle Church. Clutched in his hand were nails, a hammer and a revolutionary document. Arriving at the Church's large wooden doors, Luther nailed up the document we now call, "The Ninety-Five Theses."

Without the ideas expressed in Luther's 95-Theses, the world in which we live would not exist, and we would not be celebrating Creation Sabbath each year. I want to draw your attention to just two of the 95-Theses. In the 27th thesis, Luther quotes a catch phrase used by those selling papal indulgences:

"They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest,

the soul flies out of purgatory.”

“Menschenlehre verkündigen die, die sagen, daß die Seele (aus dem Fegefeuer) emporfliege, sobald das Geld im Kasten klingt.”

The 95-Theses were a response to the sale of Papal indulgences that were being sold to finance the building of St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican. Customers were assured that these indulgences had the power to liberate souls from purgatory, sending them straight to Heaven.

To counter this evil swindle, Luther appealed to something that had become far removed from the life of the average Christian—God’s Word. There is nothing at all in the Bible about paying for indulgences; instead, salvation is by God’s grace, it is a free gift!

Returning the source of authority in Christianity from the Pope to the Bible led to a restoration of the doctrines central to biblical Christianity. The Bible in the hands of believers lead by the Holy Spirit

powered the Protestant Reformation and it is the power of God’s Word that sustains the Church today. As Protestant Christians, we Seventh-day Adventists embrace Luther’s famous Latin dictum “Sola Scriptura.” It is God’s Word alone that has authority, not tradition, not what we think, not what some “expert” thinks. The Bible and the Bible alone forms the foundation of our beliefs, our understanding of the world and our hope for the future.

The second thesis we will look at is Luther’s 62nd:

“The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.”

“Der wahre Schatz der Kirche ist das allerheiligste Evangelium von der Herrlichkeit und Gnade Gottes.”

Our human inclination is to view the church’s achievements as its greatest assets. Think of how many times we have heard reports of baptisms, membership growth, new churches, hospital building, or even the heroic lives of members—such as Desmond Doss—but none of these has meaning

outside the Gospel. The best that we can claim is that baptisms reflect the life-changing power of the Gospel. If lives are not changed, if souls are not won and people are not liberated from slavery to sin, what does any of our work as Christians ultimately mean?

That is the power of the Gospel revealed in God's Word. It is not just a theory about the way things are or how we should live our lives, the Bible is a record of God's actions throughout history—past, present and future—and that is good news! The Bible is unique in its power because it is a unique book. It stands alone among religious books in its combined attributes, which include:

1. Unique attestation independent of itself—

There is no other book of history that has so much archeological, documentary and scientific evidence in harmony with what it records and claims.

2. Unique wisdom—The Bible gives sublimely wise advice that runs counter to human logic;

love of your enemies (Matthew 5:44), practice unreasonable forgiveness (Matthew 18:21,22) and much more.

3. Unique perspective on human nature and value—Every human is fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14), all humans have been slaves to sin (Romans 3:23), all would have nothing but death to look forward to were it not for the glorious grace of God (Romans 6:23).

4. Unique good news—Even though humans have failed, God has redeemed us (Matthew 18:10, Luke 19:10) and His salvation is a free gift.

5. Unique path to salvation—Not through our own works, but through the grace of God (Ephesians 5:8,9 and many other texts).

6. Unique form of worship—Rest (Exodus 20:8-11).

7. Unique power to change human lives for the better—Because the Bible is a true record of history, a true source of wisdom, a true guide to human nature and a true source of knowledge

about the only True God, its message truly changes human lives. On an empirical basis, I'm sure that every Christian in this congregation could offer a personal testimony to the power of God's Word in their own life and we have the recorded testimonies down through the ages of others whose lives have been dramatically changed.

No doubt there are other unique attributes of Scripture that could be listed, but on Creation Sabbath, it seems appropriate to concentrate on the Gospel revealed in Scripture. What is this "true treasure of the Church" that Luther talked about? It is something that is explicitly denied by many in the world in which we live. The claim is made that humans are exclusively the product of our genetics and environment. You may have heard these expressed as nature and nurture. If we do evil things, it is not our fault, it is just the way we are. Our lusts, our inclinations, our desires and ultimately our actions are beyond our control, they are dictated by our genetics and environment. We

can't be judged for what we do because we can't change ourselves.

But Jesus Christ, our Creator, rejected this way of thinking:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. 35 And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. 36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” John 8:34-36 NKJV

We may not be able to change ourselves, but, if we let Him, our Creator can change us! It is worth considering the context of this text. Those who were confronting Jesus claimed to be heirs of Abraham and never slaves to anyone. This was after Jesus had told them that “the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32 NKJV).

The Jews of that time were filled with pride and blinded to their pitiful sinful state. Jesus, “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6 NKJV) stood before them offering them true liberation, something totally

transforming. He could do that, because “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3 NKJV). Human beings are not products of a cold uncaring universe, subject to whatever chance way they happened to turn out. Humans, and all of nature, are creations of the God who “is love” (1 John 4:8 NKJV).

Jesus, our Creator, is “Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us’” (Matthew 1:23 NKJV). When He returned to Heaven, He did not leave us to our own fate. Before He left he promised:

“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” John 14:16-18 NKJV

God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth came down and was with us, and He is with us now; here in this church, here in every heart that is open to Him. Our

Father, Our Creator has not abandoned us, He has adopted us! Just as Adam was God's son (Luke 3:38), through Jesus Christ and unspeakable grace, we are a new creation, born again as His children. No wonder the Apostle John exclaimed:

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” 1 John 3:1 NKJV

How can we explain this? Isn't the Gospel incomprehensibly good!?! Because God is our Creator, of course He can and will make us a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). This logic of salvation cannot be improved upon and is fundamental to the Christian understanding of human nature, the world and all of reality. No wonder Martin Luther was so firm and clear as he championed the biblical creation as it is recorded in Scripture. To abandon the reality of creation is to abandon reality itself, including the reality of salvation. Luther would tolerate none of that, because he understood the infinite value and Truth of Scripture, he wrote:

“When Moses writes that God created heaven and earth and whatever is in them in six days, then let this period continue to have been six days, and do not venture to devise any comment according to which six days were one day. But, if you cannot understand how this could have been done in six days, then grant the Holy Spirit the honor of being more learned than you are. For you are to deal with Scripture in such a way that you bear in mind that God Himself says what is written. But since God is speaking, it is not fitting for you wantonly to turn His word in the direction you wish to go.”

(What Luther Says. A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian. Compiled by Ewald M. Plass. St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia 1959. p 1523.)

Luther was probably more concerned about people who wished to claim that the creation occurred in a single instant, rather than The six days the Bible records. Today there are those who wish to deny the creation all together, or stretch it out over eons of suffering death and struggle for survival.

What is wrong with the Biblical account? Nothing; it is true, it makes sense and ultimately is central to the Gospel. Our Creator has already demonstrated that He can create us, and the creation of our Earthly father, Adam, was not the result of any works of his own. Adam's creation was and our creation is an act of pure grace on God's part. How evil it would be to twist the creation into a Darwinian struggle for survival in which, through the works of our dead ancestors, we have come to the glorious state we enjoy today! What kind of gospel would it be that offers us a perfect body, mind and soul through a million future deaths as we evolve to perfection? Where is the grace in that?

Ultimately, the creation was a fundamental pillar of the Reformation because it is a fundamental theme of Scripture and fundamental to the Gospel. No wonder the first article of Martin Luther's short and long catechisms is:

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

(Martin Luther. The Large Catechism. Translated by F. Bente and W.H.T. Dau. Published in: Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921. pp. 565-773)

Like Martin Luther, “I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God.” (Heiko Oberman. 1989. Luther: Man Between God and the Devil. Yale, p. 39.) All Bible-believing Christians believe in and worship our Creator. Because the creation is true and necessary, the creation makes sense of reality and is at the center of the Gospel. So here I and all Bible-believing Christians stand. Like the creation of Adam, our fallen earthly father, our new creation, our adoption as sons of our Heavenly Father is an act of pure and astonishing grace. Will you join with me, Martin Luther, the great reformers and millions of other Christians in embracing the amazing grace of God, our Creator and Redeemer? My prayer is that every one of us will.

Benediction:

25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began 26 but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith— 27 to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen. Romans 16:25-27 NKJV

Some other ideas and variations:

Substitute one of the following for the scripture reading:

1. The Creation Sabbath film, “The Hole,” available at: <http://grisd.org/home/events/the-hole/>
2. One of the following responsive readings:
 - a. 719 Our Lord the Creator
 - b. 760 Times of Beginning

Learn a new song for special music, a new expression of God-endowed human creativity. “God Is Love” by Timothy Rees, sung to the tune of Hyfrydol (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqqBu1VVHqM>) or Abbot’s Leigh (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyYWW_P9MH4) would work well. The words can be found at: https://hymnary.org/text/god_is_love_let_heaven_adore_him