

June 2, 2019

Rev. 22:14-15:

***“Washed Robes, The Tree of Life
and Outside the Gates”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Washed Robes, The Tree of Life and Outside the Gates serves as the theme for our message this morning and is based upon our epistle lesson (Revelation 22:14-15). One might ask: "what is the thread that binds the three images together?" That's a good question. I think that the best way I can answer that is through the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes (12:13-14). The three images are "the end of the matter; [when] all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."

The fear of God is the understanding and belief that apart from God we are nothing and have nothing, and to have him is to have the one who is good and in whom all good things come. To fear God means to be a child of God who has died to sin and daily dies by running away from evil because he knows it will separate him from God and his goodness. To fear God means to trust in the goodness of God in Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. In such fear, the children of God will want to keep the commandments. Such children know that they cannot keep the commandments as they are to be kept, and so they rely on Jesus who has kept the commandments for them. To those who ask what they must do in order to do the works of God, Jesus says, "This is the work of God: that you should believe in the one whom he has sent (John 6:28-29)." In the words of James Bollhagen:

In sum, the Preacher does not end by exhorting people to try to earn their way to pardon on Judgment Day. Rather, he preaches fear, love, and trust in God alone who justifies the believer and enables his child to lead a life of abundant good works done in love (Romans 13:10; Ephesians 2:8-10). This gospel message is "the all" that mankind has now heard from God through Ecclesiastes and through the whole of Scripture, and it is "the all" that defines human life itself.

And so, **Washed Robes, The Tree of Life and Outside the Gates** are all end-time realities that take us all the way back to the very beginning. We come full-circle. We move from naked shame and fig leaves to washed robes. We find some people, banished from the tree of life, returning to the tree of life. We find others, who had the opportunity to eat from the tree of life, forever outside the gates. For the children of God, there is a return to a paradise even made better than before since there will no longer be any possibility of falling into sin. But for the dogs, forever closed gates and weeping and gnashing of teeth. Solomon isn't kidding. "God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil." The dogs don't want to hear that. We only have to be nervous about this if we are like the dogs.

And there's the rub. In each of us there is a dog trying to get out - a sinful nature where self-love desires to rule over the master who created and loves us. Our lesson is pretty tough don't you think? "Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." All of the terms are self explanatory except "sorcerers." A sorcerer includes all practitioners of the satanic arts, including the habitual abuse of drugs and potions to induce a false sense of spirituality, or spiritual escape. "Outside are the dogs." They are outside the gates of heaven. Now I realize that all of the dog lovers here might be offended by this until you read how dogs are

characterized by Solomon (Proverbs 26:11): “Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly (Proverbs 26:11).” Also, Jesus speaks of dogs when he prays in Psalm 22:16, “For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me.” Dogs will devour just about anything without much regard to what they are eating. Evildoers set out to devour Jesus. The “dogs” of the unbelieving world hate Jesus because he testifies that their works are evil (John 7:7). His words demand a “cease and desist” to all those who love and practice falsehood.

So, you have two things going on here. Dogs love their vomit. Dogs devour the life of all the living. This is what every child of God should avoid by the grace that God has given to them in Jesus. The Gospel of Jesus Christ elicits within us a will that struggles with and overcomes sin. Evil suggestions and ongoing enticements will always be with us in this life as saved Christians. There will be times, without clear thinking, when we find ourselves caught up in a moment and even do evil works still in a state of God’s mercy. But, the moment when we knowingly plan and unrepentantly scheme to do evil and do it and love to do it is to live in the doghouse - and if you are living in the doghouse, it is safe to consider that you may very well be a dog for the moment or forever. Luther states, “When repentance [sorrow over sin] has ceased, when faith has been crushed, then a man is in a state of mortal sin [spiritual death].”

Now, I realize that all of this is rather scary. It’s supposed to be. Warnings from God are never comfortable. Hopefully, we are all looking at and smelling the vomit in our lives and losing our appetite. Certainly, those who have been acting like dogs and are bothered by all of this are in a really good state and ripe for repentance and restoration. As John writes, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).” But for those who love and practice falsehood, look out! Martin Chemnitz writes:

from evil activity comes the habit of sinning; from the habit of sinning comes the excusing of sinning; from this comes the defense of sinning. Later comes an obstinacy, and then a glorying and exulting in it . . . after boasting and glorying in sin . . . the reprobate mind of which Paul speaks in Romans 1:28, “God gave them up to a perverted mind,” from which comes the final step, the sin against the Holy Spirit.”

The writer to the Hebrew writes (6:9), and I say it to you and to myself: “Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things - things that belong to salvation.” Our epistle lesson - all the Scripture, for that matter - was written for our salvation. If we are currently running with the dogs, or find ourselves later doing so in life, we pray that the Holy Spirit would use such warnings from Scripture to shake us out of our stupor, as the Holy Spirit used the prophet Nathan to shake David and bring him back to faith.

With that, we are now brought to a consideration of **Washed Robes** and **The Tree of Life**. Our lesson states: “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates (Revelation 22:14).” The key passage that helps us to understand the theme of “washed robes,” that extends through Revelation, is this one: “He [Jesus] is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.” The blood on the robe

of Jesus is his own blood that was shed to cover (forgive) all of our sins and the sins of the world. Christians are frequently described in the book as having “white” or “washed” garments. The robes are made clean or washed in “the blood of the Lamb.” As Louis Brighton writes:

Therefore these “white” [or washed] garments represent the shed “blood” and righteousness of Christ himself as it covers his people’s sin and robes them in heavenly glory. The garments are “given” to the Christians through faith because of the accomplishments and grace of Christ, not because of their own works or virtue, though at the same time Revelation affirms that good works result . . . Remaining faithful to Christ despite persecution and temptation is the way in which Christians must guard their garments and not defile them. [See also Rev. 19:7-9]

In your Baptism you have a robe that has been given to you in Christ. You are either wearing that robe by faith, or you are not. Either way, the robe exists as it has been given to you in Baptism. As Paul writes, “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Gal. 3:26-27).” If, for any reason, you have taken off your robe to live as a dog (or do so in the future), now is the day to leave the doghouse to once again put on your robe that washes all your sins away. One is clothed with the robe through confession and absolution.

Having been clothed in this robe of Christ, fix your eyes on the Tree of Life who is Jesus, who died on the tree to become a fruit that you may eat and a leaf that heals forever. Even now, hidden in, with, and under the bread and wine is the heavenly, where one receives Jesus’ body and blood today by faith. Here he says, “I love you and forgive you. You may enter by the city gates.” May he grant us grace then to learn and live the meaning of what Job says (28:28), “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.” May nothing prevent us from receiving what was shown to John:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever (Revelation 22:1-5).

These words are trustworthy and true!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott