

The Paramount Blessings Of The Reformation.

Text: Jer 29:4-14

1) Its blessings of doctrine

Suggested Hymns:

2) Its blessings of life

195, 197, 182ALHB, 85, 437

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Jeremiah 29:4-14, ***⁴ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. ⁶ Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters -- that you may be increased there, and not diminished. ⁷ And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace.***

⁸ For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. ⁹ For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the LORD.

¹⁰ For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. ¹¹ For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹² Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

¹⁴ I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

To every true Lutheran, Reformation Day is of the greatest importance. As he thinks of the wondrous work of God which we call the Reformation of the Christian Church, a thousand blessings occur to his mind which through that amazing movement God has conferred upon the Church in particular and upon the world in general.

Many of the very best things we enjoy today are blessings of the Reformation, such as freedom of conscience and religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the free and general education of the masses, a renewed interest in science, democracy in its best sense, and untold others.

The Reformation was an exodus out of the darkness of medievalism. It was the opening of a new era of thought and progress, not separate from the Word of God, but through and with the Word of God.

But sadly the Reformation is still misunderstood and misinterpreted by many people today. Catholics brand it as an evil thing, the greatest disaster that ever happened in the history of the New Testament Church.

Others regard the movement merely as an economic or social movement, a forerunner of similar movements in the realm of scientific, social, and political progress.

If we wish to give God due thanks for the Reformation, we must value it rightly as a spiritual movement within the Church, which God has blessed us so graciously in both temporal and spiritual matters. Let us consider the Paramount Blessings which the Lutheran Reformation has bestowed upon a groping, suffering world. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Its Blessings of Doctrine

Great blessings have been bestowed by the Lutheran Reformation upon our first, by doctrine.

Doctrine is of supreme importance; not indeed the cunningly devised spurious doctrine of men, but the pure, saving doctrine of God's Word. Our text was first addressed to the Israelites in the Babylonian Captivity. The carrying away of Israel into that long and dreary captivity was a punishment which God meted out to His people because of their apostasy.

Yet God was merciful to His people even now when they languished as captives in the distant country of Babylon. There He desired to bless them. There they were to ***Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit***, increase in number, seek the peace of the city, ***and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace.***

But they were also to beware of false prophets, who had misled the Israelites already in their homeland. Our text says, ***Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. ⁹For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the LORD.***

God alone wished to be their Lord. His Word was to be their rule and standard of faith and life; and guided by that gracious principle they were to enjoy His blessings as before, for they would find Him in His grace and have their prayers answered.

Our text reads, ¹⁰ ***For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. ¹¹For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹²Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. ¹³And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.***

¹⁴ ***I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.***

These were the blessings which the Israelites were to enjoy through faithful adherence to the pure Word of God. And indeed the pious believers in Israel were loyal to God's Word and in the end received all the spiritual and temporal blessings which God has promised to all who are faithful to His Word and cause.

The dreadful apostasy of Israel before the captivity reminds us of the apostasy of the Church before the Reformation. As in Israel, so in that medieval Church idolatry abounded after the Bible had been removed from the people and the way to salvation by faith in Christ had been obscured.

We cannot go into all the details, but let us note a few of the evils which troubled the Christian people, such as the great spiritual ignorance of the people, the worst kind of work-righteousness, the most horrible sort of saint and idol worship, and the dreadful prospect of atoning for transgressions in purgatory.

The Church of Rome is evil today, but who can adequately describe the evil nature of that corrupt Church, before Luther upon the basis of the Bible raised his voice in protest to that rank idolatry. Due to the teachings of Rome Luther also suffered greatly in the days of his youth until God, in His great mercy, led him into the Bible and revealed to him the precious Gospel of salvation in all its purity and comfort.

And thus, through Martin Luther, God brought about the great Reformation, by restoring the pure doctrine of the Gospel to the people.

The Lutheran Reformation gave to mankind the open Bible, that is to say, accessible to all people and rightly expounded for all people. That great blessing had been removed from the Christian people by the Papacy. The laity could not read the Bible for it was not in their own language therefore they did not possess Biblical doctrines in its truth and purity. There were no prayer books, devotion books, and hymn-books for the people to read and understand.

The Lutheran Reformation also bestowed upon the world the treasure of the open wounds of Jesus, justification by faith. In 1535 Luther wrote these words, *What is Justification? By the one solid rock which we call the doctrine of justification we mean that we are redeemed from sin, death, and the devil and are made partakers of life eternal, not by ourselves ... but by the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ.*¹

The Lutheran Reformation finally bestows upon the world the open heaven — heaven by grace, without works as we read in Ephesians 2:8, ***For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.***

The Lutheran Reformation has also exposed Antichrist and all antichristian false prophets; in particular the Papacy. Our text says, ***Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the Lord.***

What wondrous blessings were thus bestowed upon groping, suffering mankind by the Lutheran Reformation!

And how shall we show ourselves to be grateful for these blessings? By loving that Word, following it, defending it, spreading it; for through that Word we still spread the blessings of the Reformation.

2. Its Blessings of Life

Through the Reformation the world has been given anew not only pure doctrine, but also a godly life, enjoyed by all believers in Christ. A godly life — how important this is for the individual and collective welfare of mankind!

In our text God instils also a holy life upon the captives in Babylon. As they were to honour God by holding to His pure Word, so they were to glorify Him by a holy life. They were to recognise the captivity as God's loving chastisement. They were to engage in useful pursuits, *Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit.* ⁶ *Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters.*

They were to exert themselves politically on behalf of their own country, to *seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive.*

They were to avoid all people who would mislead them into a wicked life, *Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you.* The false prophets usually mislead people into unholiness and wickedness.

But they were to walk before God in true holiness, ¹² *Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.* ¹³ *And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.*

The Babylonian Captivity was at the same time the reformation of the Israelitish Church, because through it God restored pure doctrine and holy life. God surely had thoughts of peace and not of evil.

Just so the Lutheran Reformation has bestowed upon mankind true blessings of life. The corrupt life of priests and monks had many evil effects upon the people before the Reformation. A wicked life was the natural result of the false doctrine taught by the papistic false prophets, the Popes leading both in impure doctrine and impure lives.

But the Reformation greatly improved the life of believers! In the first place, through the restoration of the Gospel it made good works and a holy life possible. Only a truly converted person can do good works, and only through the Gospel can sinners be converted.

Secondly, the Reformation supplied true motives for a holy life — faith in Christ and true love flowing from true faith. Work-righteousness is not a true motive at all for a holy life, and yet the whole pre-Reformation Church was steeped in work-righteousness.

In the third place, the Reformation pointed out to the people the divinely prescribed godliness, not the Pope's false, fabricated piety of monkery. True piety of life is pointed out beautifully in our text, ⁵ *Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit.* ⁶ *Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters -- that you may be increased there, and not diminished.*

Remember what Luther says of the good works of fathers, mothers, servants, as opposed to the false piety of Romanism.² Luther wrote to the clergy assembled in Augsburg in 1530 about the false teaching of penance. Remember that in Roman Catholic teaching the confessor could impose works of penance upon the confession of sin by a layman.

Luther wrote, *From this abomination [of penance] have come all the other outrages (they had to come from it, too, and there was no way of warding them off), namely, the self-righteousness of so many of the monasteries and chapters, with their worship service, the sacrificial masses, purgatory, vigils, brotherhoods, pilgrimages, indulgences, fasts, veneration of saints, relics, and the whole parade of the hellish procession of the cross.*

For what else is possible? If a conscience is to rely and build on its own works, it stands on loose sand which moves to and fro and continually sinks away. It must always seek works, one after the other. The longer it looks, the more it needs.

What is more, through such shameful doctrines all the legitimate good works instituted and ordered by God were despised and even reduced to nothing, such as the work of a ruler, subject, father, mother, son, daughter, servant, and maid.

They were not called good works and did not belong to penance either, but were known as a “secular existence,” a “perilous estate,” and “lost works.” Thus this doctrine entirely trod under foot both the Christian and secular life and gave neither God nor Caesar his due.”

Luther learned from the New Testament that repentance meant not to do penance, but to repent, that is, to sorrow for sin and look in faith to Christ for forgiveness.

In the fourth place, the Reformation has made believers most ready and willing to do good works and live a holy life, since it has taught them the high dignity of believers as priests and kings.

We read in 1 Peter 2:9-10, ⁹ *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;* ¹⁰ *who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*

Our text points out that the people themselves *will call upon [God] and go and pray to [God], and [He] will listen to you.* ¹³ *And you will seek [God] and find [Him], when you search for [Him] with all your heart.*

And now note the new holy life as it is lived by true believers in truly Christian churches in particular and in Protestant countries in general. We have Sunday-schools, Christian Schools, and active missionary interest among Christians.

Indeed, the Reformation has bestowed upon the world the great blessings of a holy life. Let us be grateful. Let us live as we are told in our text.

So in conclusion, let us take heed of Luther’s explanation of the First Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, *“God’s name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it.” Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven! Amen.*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ E. M. Plass, *What Luther Says*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1991, p 701, 2186

² Luther's Works Vol. 34, Page 20,
An Exhortation of Martin Luther to All the Clergy Assembled at Augsburg for the Diet of 1530