

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Easter 7
Saturday, May 28, 2022, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, May 29, 2022, at 9:00 a.m.

“You Must Not Add To or Take Away From God’s Word”

Revelation 22:1-6, 12-20

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!

C. S. Lewis once wrote: “You will certainly carry out God’s purpose, however you act, but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John.” As we heard in our first reading from Luke’s account in the book of Acts of what happened to Judas, we see that how we serve, how we act toward God can have eternal consequences.

Jesus says, here at the end of John’s Revelation, “Behold, I am coming soon . . . to repay everyone for what he has done.” Our Lord then sets up two possible outcomes to life in the New Jerusalem, life in the resurrection: Blessed are those who wash their robes (in the blood of the Lamb it is implied – as we heard a few weeks ago from Revelation 7). Blessed are those who wash their robes. You have the right to the tree of life.

It is just and right that you live forever. The robe of Christ’s righteousness is free and complete. Our Lord says, “let the one who is thirsty come [and] take the water of life without price.” You will live forever in the safety and security of the New Jerusalem.

However, there is another option. There are those outside the city who are described in no uncertain terms. “Outside are the dogs and sorcerers.” Dogs are unclean animals among the Jews. The Law of Moses demands that sorcerers be put to death. Outside are the “sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”

These are harsh words from Jesus, but it is the final warning that I find most interesting. Not only is it the final one, but it is the most detailed, which implies it is the most important and emphatic. Our Lord says that if anyone adds to the words of this book, the plagues described, the wrath of God described in John’s Revelation will be visited upon that person. Also, if anyone takes away from the words of this book, God will take away his share of the tree of life and his place in the holy city – the New Jerusalem.

There are only two options. There is no middle ground. There is no one who is sort of, kind of, somewhat Christian. You are either in the city or outside of the city. As C.S. Lewis also said, “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

This is what fascinates me about the detail of Christ’s warning. The most detail and the strongest wrath is saved for the least obvious offense against God and His Word. Changing the meaning of God’s Word, even seemingly only a little bit; adding to it or taking away that which God has clearly stated – it is implied that this is worse than sexual immorality, murder, and sorcery.

Those sins are more obvious. Those are the things that make headlines, cause us to wring our hands, and shake our heads. But false teaching, adding to or taking away from God’s Word, is more destructive. Those open and obvious sins are simply symptoms of the greater disease of the rejection of the Gospel.

I believe that this is why God arranged the 10 Commandments in the order He did. He starts with the most harmful. It is easiest to understand when you look at them backwards.

If I covet something of yours, I have sinned, but I have done you no harm. If I tell lies about you or slander you, I have intended to do you harm, but you can choose to ignore me and my words, or if you demonstrate my words to be lies, you could actually be elevated in the eyes of others.

If I steal or destroy your money or property, I have done you actual harm. If I destroy your marriage or rob you of your virtue, I have done you lasting harm. You can't simply undo that sort of sin – all that can be done is be forgiven. If I kill you, you really can't undo that sort of sin – all that can be done is be forgiven.

When God arranged the commandments, it is implied that He considered Commandments 5-10 to be less harmful than dishonoring your father or mother. It would seem that being a defiant youth (or adult); having a lack of respect for parents or other authorities makes you worse than the murderers or sexually immoral in the eyes of God – if the order of the commandments are arranged in order of importance.

That would mean that breaking commandments 4-10 are not as bad as ignoring the "Sabbath day." When hearing the Word of God or receiving the broken body and shed blood of Christ is unimportant or even less important than other activities, it is implied that this is more offensive to God than the conduct of the murderers and the sexually immoral.

When God's name is misused and vainly thrown into meaningless conversations, or when God's name is used to teach false things, this is more offensive to God than the conduct of the murderers and sexually immoral. But it

is not quite to the level of worshiping an idol – whatever that idol might be. Of course, most idols are not little statues to which you pay homage. Your god is whatever is most important to you.

We wring our hands and shake our fist at all of the open and obvious sins against commandments 5-10 (6 in particular). These are just symptoms of the greater disease. When a person has a stroke, very often they will lose use of their arm or have slurred speech. These are the things we see, but the root cause is much deeper. The arm and the tongue are not the problem.

We see the murders and sexually immorality, but these are only the obvious outward symptoms of the deeper disease. God's Word has been rejected as having authority over you. People have added to and taken away from the Gospel. When the "Gospel" that people have believed is not the real Gospel, it should not surprise us that they act like people who do not have the real Gospel. It should not surprise us that they call "good" what God has said is evil, or that they call "evil" what God has said is good.

God closes Scripture with this warning that you dare not add to or take away anything in this book. The good news is "Blessed are those who wash their robe (in the blood of the Lamb), so that they may have the right to the tree of life." You will enter the city by the gate and will live forever in the safety and security of the New Jerusalem. And the good news is, Jesus says, "Surely I am coming soon." We join in John's concluding prayer saying, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" Amen.

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!