

West Valley Church
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Good News! **Advent Part 5** *Isaiah 52:7; Revelation 14:1-13¹*

This is the time of year when resolutions are on our minds. In his book “A Journey to Bethlehem,” Jason Soroski gives the following definitions of a “resolution:”

Webster defines the word as being "marked by firm determination." The word dominates every New Year's Eve.

To the *musician*, a "resolution" is a harmony line moving from a dissonant tone (one that does not fit the melody) to a consonant tone (one that fits). Harmonies can dance and amaze us with varied complexities for a while, but they must eventually resolve.

To the *writer*, a resolution is the end of a story, the final element of a twisting plot filled with conflict, finally resolved to an ending where all is well.

To the *chemist*, resolution is the separation of a chemical compound back into its constituents, or simplest parts.

To the *statesman*, it is an expression of the determined will of an elected body.

To the *graphic artist*, it is the sharpness of the pixel count on a screen, and the quality of the image produced.

By any definition, a “resolution” is characterized by a return to simplicity, a focus on sharp definition and determination, broken down to its simplest, most harmonious parts. Without resolution, art, science, government, and life in general all fall into chaos. Without resolution, there is no foundation on which to stand.² So this morning we are not going to focus on *making* resolutions; we want to *get* resolution by being focused.

During this Advent season, we’ve been spending time in worship focusing on the *Good News*. Over 2700 years ago the Prophet Isaiah said:

“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news, the good news of peace and salvation, the news that the God of Israel reigns!” (Isaiah 52:7, nlt)

¹ Primary sources: Carol Rotz, *Revelation: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Beacon Hill Press, KC, 2012), William Barclay, *The Revelation of John, Volume 2, The Daily Study Bible Series*, John Barry, ed., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016)

² Jason Soroski, *A Journey to Bethlehem* (Create Space, 2016), page 25

At Advent we celebrate the arrival of the Good News in the person of Jesus Christ, and for each of the Sunday messages in December, we have been looking at some instances of those who brought us the message of “Good News!” We’ve looked at Isaiah’s words and Jesus’ own words. We’ve also looked at the delivery of Good News on two occasions by an angel – once to Zechariah when he was in the temple, and the other time to the shepherds. Today we are going to briefly look at the delivery of Good News again by an angel, but this time it is all the way at the end of the Bible in the book of Revelation.

Let’s look at the passage from Revelation 14, the first thirteen verses, and can I ask you to honor the Message of Good News from God by standing with me as I read it to us? Thank you. This is what the Word says:

“Then I (*John, describing his vision*) saw the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him were 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of mighty ocean waves or the rolling of loud thunder. It was like the sound of many harpists playing together.

This great choir sang a wonderful new song in front of the throne of God and before the four living beings and the twenty-four elders. No one could learn this song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. They have kept themselves as pure as virgins, following the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been purchased from among the people on the earth as a special offering to God and to the Lamb. They have told no lies; they are without blame.

And I saw another angel flying through the sky, carrying the eternal Good News to proclaim to the people who belong to this world—to every nation, tribe, language, and people. ‘Fear God,’ he shouted. ‘Give glory to him. For the time has come when he will sit as judge. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all the springs of water.’

Then another angel followed him through the sky, shouting, ‘Babylon is fallen—that great city is fallen—because she made all the nations of the world drink the wine of her passionate immorality.’

Then a third angel followed them, shouting, ‘Anyone who worships the beast and his statue or who accepts his mark on the forehead or on the hand must drink the wine of God’s anger. It has been poured full strength into God’s cup of wrath. And they will be tormented with fire and burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. The smoke of their torment will rise forever and ever, and they will have no relief day or night, for they have worshiped the beast and his statue and have accepted the mark of his name.’

This means that God’s holy people must endure persecution patiently, obeying his commands and maintaining their faith in Jesus.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this down: Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they are blessed

indeed, for they will rest from their hard work; for their good deeds follow them!” (Revelation 14:1-13, nlt)

Thank you for standing; you can have a seat. Now, there is a lot going on in that passage, and it’s not my intention today to get us bogged down trying to decipher the meaning of the images and metaphors. If you *do* want to do that, I’d encourage you to contact our office and we can give you our sermon series from a year and a half ago where we spent the entire summer going through the book of Revelation.

But instead, today, I’d like us to get the big picture take-away of what God wants us to know about the Good News this morning, so that we can get resolution for the New Year that starts tomorrow.

The first is that...

1. The Good News is *Forever*

Headlines today are here and gone. I’m amazed at how quickly what is front-page news and plastered all over the networks one day has all but disappeared the next (it seems the only news that remains the news for longer than a few days is the stuff that the media is trying to convince us is true, but maybe it isn’t! You can tell how much I trust the media...). News comes and goes. But we see in this passage one of the most amazing things about the Good News. The Good News isn’t just something that arrived on that first advent with the birth of Christ with the angels singing and the shepherds sharing and the wise men finding, and then it was over. The Good News isn’t something that is preserved in the stories of the Gospels, contained in the pages of those books as if they are locked into ancient literature. From this passage we read, we see that even when we get all the way to the very end of time, when God is wrapping up history on this planet, as we know it, it will *still* be Good News. Like the hymn writer said, “When we’ve been there 10,000 years” – it will still be Good News – the best news ever – that God saves people from their sin by giving the life of his one and only Son. God is still God forever. God loves us forever. Because he is so great and so filled with love, God is worshipped forever. The Good News goes on forever!

This means that it is Good News *today*. This means that it can be Good News for you! If you haven’t accepted it yet, you can. If you’ve forgotten that it is Good News, or you think it was good for just one time in your life, I remind you that it is Good News forever!

Next, we see from the angel’s announcement that...

2. The Good News Means *God Wins*

There is a saying going around these days that says, “Love wins.” It started out as a popular book title for some bad theology, and then has since become the banner cry for some political causes. I’m not sure that the people who use that phrase completely understand what they are saying. “Love wins” does *not* mean that we

get our way; “Love wins” means that God gets *his* way. But here is the thing: the Bible very clearly tells us that God is love. God *is* love. (1 John 4:8) Love is what God is. God demonstrated his love for us by sending his Son to die on a cross in our place. Jesus said that no one has greater love than to lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13), and that is what he did for us. Those who have aligned themselves in God’s Kingdom of Love are on God’s side. So the enemies of God are those who pursue the opposite of selfless love: selfishness, greed, envy, hatred, racism, bigotry, lust...on and on. These are things that the Bible warns us against. Those things, and those who are not aligned with God, are at war with God, and God will tolerate them only as long as it buys people time to repent and accept the Good News. But one day, time will run out, and God, who is love, *will* win. God will defeat everything that is in opposition to his Love.

These days we wake up to news of a world that seems like it is getting more dire, more dangerous, more weird, more violent, more insane, more tragic. But you need to know that when you trust God’s Good News, you can be sure that you are on the side that ultimately wins; all the pain, all the heartache, all the evil and hate and sin and grief and death will one day be defeated.

So you’ll want to make sure you are on the right side, because another thing we learn from this passage is that...

3. The Good News Means ***Consequence***

This is something we don’t like to hear about a lot, but we can’t avoid it simply because it is uncomfortable. If there is Good News, we must be aware that there is also bad news. The Good News is good for each of our lives when we accept it. But if anyone refuses to accept it, it is no longer good news but bad news. It’s bad news because it means you are on the side of those that are opposed to God. I’m sorry to tell you that. But don’t try to blame God – it’s not his fault, it’s your own fault. God has done everything he can do to make the Good News available to *you*. There are *great* consequences for you when you accept it. However, there are also consequences if you choose *not* to accept it, and those consequences are not good for you. In case you need any more convincing, let me remind you from the passage that...

4. The Good News Means ***No Fear***

The passage ends by telling us that there is nothing for us to be afraid of – that for believers in Jesus Christ, we don’t have to be afraid of anything; not even the thing we fear the most – the biggest unknown, which is death. In fact, for believers, death is the final victory, rest, and release from the challenges of this world. Because Christ rose from the dead, he overcame the worst enemy we have: death itself. The Bible says:

“O death, where then your victory? Where then your sting? For sin—the sting that causes death—will all be gone; and the law, which reveals our sins, will no longer be our judge. How we thank God for all of this! It is he who makes us victorious through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (1 Corinthians 15:55-57, tlb)

Do you see – if the very worst that this world can throw at us is death, and Christ overcame that so we don’t have to be afraid of it, then there is nothing else that we need to fear, either.

The last book of the Bible is not just an apocalyptic message about the end of time and the consummation of God’s Kingdom; it shows that God uses it as yet another opportunity for people to hear the Good News. God keeps offering the Good News right up to the very end! It’s not too late! Accept the Good News and you can rejoice in it now in a way that overpowers what the bad news tries to do to your life, and you can rejoice in the Good News forever!

There *is* Good News: we can walk into this new year resolutely focused on Jesus Christ, so that no matter what we face or what we go through, we can always be in the center of God’s love for us, assured that his love is forever and that eventually God, in his love, wins. That is very, very Good News.

Communion is a time for us to get that focus, that resolve. By sharing communion we remind ourselves and one another that Christ gave his life for us; his body was broken and his blood was shed for us. That is the kind of resolve we need.

Jesus said that every time we share in communion we are remembering this Good News. The Bible also tells us that we ought to examine ourselves before we do it, because if we have not accepted the Good News, and are not living in that Good News, then we are taking upon ourselves the very opposite – we are condemning ourselves with the bad news. So before we share communion, we are going to have a few moments to examine ourselves and make sure our focus, our resolve, is right.

You don’t have to be a member of our church to share in communion with us, but you do need to have examined yourself and accepted the Good News.

As you do take a few moments, the pastors and I will prepare the elements to serve to you, and then I will invite you to join us.

Pray