

## **Revelation 14:6-7**

The Gospel was never meant to be kept under lock and key. It was meant to be proclaimed. Like a songbird. God gave these tiny creatures the ability to sing beautifully. How different our world would be without the melodies of the songbirds. God never intended for them to sit in silence, but to open their mouths in singing. And this also is what He wants for His Gospel. He wants Christ to be proclaimed; for mouths to open and sing the sweet melody of His love and mercy toward all people.

Martin Luther was such a songbird. But he was not the only one. Many before him, and many after him are seen in our Revelation text: *“Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead with an eternal Gospel to proclaim...”*

Angel means *messenger*. One who preaches, who proclaims. And today we see such messengers as songbirds; those who fly directly overhead, who have a beautiful message, a song in their heart which with their mouth they proclaim to all who will listen.

The devil hates God’s songbirds. He tries frantically to silence them. Indeed, for many centuries prior to the Reformation the Gospel had been mostly hushed. Good works were preached. Indulgences for forgiveness were purchased. But the sweet melody that God freely forgives sinners, not due to anything on our part, but for Christ’s sake alone...this melodic song was simply not sung. And when a songbird began to sing such a song in those days, it was silenced often in a brutal manner.

But then God in His grace caused the songbird we call Martin Luther to fly directly overhead, and this songbird could not be silenced. Many attempts were made, but these only made his melody sweeter.

First Luther, then other songbirds began to chirp the same song, a beautiful song, the song that today is in your ears; the eternal Gospel by which we are saved.

Now when a songbird sings out in nature, what we are hearing quite often is the song of the male trying to attract the female. To do this he sings most beautifully. He puts forth the most delightful chirps. For what female would want to come to be the mate of a songbird who croaks out a harsh tune?

Just so, God gives to His songbirds the sweetest, most delightful melody to sing. For He desires that the female comes to His song. That female is you. You are the bride, His bride. He washed you in your baptism and declared who you now are. And He desires you. So the song He puts in the mouths of His messengers is the Holy Gospel itself.

This Gospel is eternal, says our text. It has never changed its tune, nor will it. Christ died on the cross for all sinners. Through Him, God is reconciled to you. He is at peace with you. Jesus bore the punishment you and I deserve. God forgives you. There is nothing you have done to earn this favor with God. It is purely by His grace that He pardons your sins. And where there is this forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. In Jesus you have the gift of heaven. Nothing you do can take you there. Heaven is yours freely in Christ. And no one can take this gift from you.

What sinner would not come running to hear this sweet Gospel? What female bird would not be attracted to such a beautiful song? But sadly it is so true that not only do few desire the song of God's songbirds, few even listen to the song.

Is this true also of us? Have we grown weary of hearing the same Gospel again and again? Have we trained our ears to listen to the melodies that, not God, but that the world puts forth? In every congregation there are those who used to be faithful, but over time have slipped away into a pattern of unfaithfulness. And here too. Which is why we must pray for each other, and encourage each other to be faithful, to listen and keep listening to the song of the Gospel.

And this song is for you. Whether you have been faithful or have been unfaithful; whether you feel close to God or not, He wants your ears to hear the beautiful song of Christ for you. Not just them, but you, too, are loved by God. Not just them, but you, too, are declared forgiven of all your sins.

Maybe you have some dark days in your past. Maybe you are going through a dark time right now. The nightingale, it is said, sings perhaps the most beautifully of all the songbirds. But do you know when his song is the sweetest? Not on a sunny day. Not when the moon is bright and high in the sky. The nightingale sings most beautifully when the night is its darkest.

This is how it was in the days before the Reformation. Deep darkness had come upon all the world, for the songbirds of the church were not singing. But it was God, not Luther, but God who used this man to be His messenger, flying directly overhead, and like a nightingale singing in the darkest night, the sweet Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ was again proclaimed.

How dark is your night? How tightly has sin gripped you? How overwhelming is the burden you are carrying? Listen to the nightingale. His song is for you. "*The hour of (God's) judgment has come...*" he sings in our text. His judgment is not upon you, for you are forgiven. His judgment is on those who are against you. On your enemies. Because your enemies are also God's enemies. His judgment upon them is your deliverance. He will rescue you. He will lift you up. He will remove from you every harsh burden you carry.

And what He will do He is already doing now. The song in our text has this meaning. God's judgment is now, and on the Last Day it will come to its completion. On that day, no more night for you. Only the light of heaven forevermore. But even today, as you listen to the song of the nightingale; that sweet song of God's love and mercy for you - yes, dear forgiven sinner - for you...there is light and there is hope.

In the midst of darkness one can lose hope. Your darkness is not as deep as it was before the Reformation. But God sent the song of the Gospel to be sung then, and He brought His beloved bride to Himself in love.

On this day as we celebrate the Reformation, open your ears and listen. The songbird is singing. And God is drawing you to Himself in love. Morning's light will dawn. But until then, Jesus is your light, and your nightingale delights in singing Him into your ears and heart. Amen.