



Regeneration Summit IV Chicago, IL, Winter 2012

Structure and Basics

Location

Our Savior Lutheran Church, Carol Stream, IL.

Dates

January 29-31, 2012, Sunday evening thru Tuesday morning

Format

20-30 minute presentation followed by structured conversation and reaction.

Hosts

Dan Hudson (The Sanctuary)

Bo Graham (Our Savior)

Content

Holistic Gospel For Today's Good Works (Gospel Ministries Meeting Identity)

Question

How do we make the message of the Gospel applicable to a culture outside of Christianity and the shame of sin and work? What is it that we, soldiers of the cross, battle against and how do we answer?

Discussion

We have heard the stories of Martin Luther beating himself down over even the most minor of sins. He saw himself as imperfect before a God who demanded perfection in order to be saved from eternal destruction. At the founding of America the message from the Church to culture was that we are all sinners in the hands of an angry God. There was little resistance to both of these ideas. Luther's reaction was understandable because all knew of sin and of God. The words of Jonathan Edwards made an impact on many because they also had some kind of knowledge of sin and some kind of God. Even the unbelievers of the time could describe a sin and what was meant by God. The deists of the nineteenth century would always start with the Scripture before veering off into heresy.

What if Jonathan Edwards went out on to the street today and made the same statement? He would have a debate on his hands on both the existence of that kind of God and whether man is that sinful anyways. The belief of a God reminiscent of the Old and New Testament, Triune God has slipped from the background of Scripture. The God in the minds of man, especially in Western culture, is a God of one's own deciding. Their simple response would be, "the God I know would not be angry." The man

they know is not sinful. Sin exists for others...maybe, but the decisions man makes can be explained away and not considered wrong. The age we live in is an age of relativism.

The world of Martin Luther was similar to that of Jonathan Edwards. The people believed in the existence of God or of a deity based off of scriptural origins. Sin was also an acceptable idea. Guilt and shame could be experienced because there was some idea of right and wrong frameworked in the concept of sin. This caused man to struggle with the need for good works to attain salvation. The traditional method of Law/Gospel application in all ministries deals with this problem. But, do the people of today labor from the same struggle as Luther? Yes, but not over the same kind of good works.

The struggle for good works before God has changed to a struggle of good works before others and ourselves. The need for justification before God has changed to a need for justification before other people. Man labors to find a justification for their purpose and their identity. Workaholic tendencies, individualistic focuses, and privatized struggles are a few of the surface-level sins showing this problem. The struggle to be heard, to be seen, and to be understood is the focus of today's good works. When all of those needs have been met can the justification for identity and purpose be found.

As with all things, the answer to this problem and the relief from this struggle can be found in the Gospel. The Gospel speaks to the heart of man with a language that it can hear nowhere else. The Gospel message of the cross brings the relief needed from these good works. However the ministries of our churches and their application of the Gospel message needs to be expanded to include the whole Gospel narrative. We can no longer assume that people will see themselves as sinners and needing a justification before God immediately. The hearer is in need of also understanding the right relationships we have with each other because of our right relationship with God. The full story of Christ's presence in our lives and the continued work of the cross in our lives can speak against the drive to find identity and justification with man. Our identity is wrapped up in Christ and our purpose lies in the cross.