

The Festival of St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles with the Rite of Holy Baptism for Matthew James, Josea Jerry, and Nora Evelyn Haney  
1 July, Anno Domini 2018  
St. Matthew 16:13-19  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Two apostles - Peter and Paul. Two peoples - Jews and Gentiles. One Gospel - salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. And on this immovable eternal rock, the Lord Jesus Christ continues to build His Church, one Baptism at a time. Today the apostolic confession "You, Jesus, are the Christ, the Son of the living God" has been laid upon Matthew, Josea, and Nora. This wasn't something they did themselves or worked hard to obtain. They are blessed because they are washed, they are redeemed, they are reconciled to God and now bear His Name as His own dear children. This is a day of rejoicing throughout heaven and earth!

It doesn't matter what language you speak, what country you live in, the color of your skin, whether you are rich or poor. There remains only one true Gospel, only one way of salvation, even as there is only one true Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. There is not one way of salvation for Jews, another for Gentiles, another for millenials, another for cowboys. This was the question that drew together the very first ecumenical Church Council in Jerusalem - is salvation alone through faith in Jesus, is it a completely free gift that is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit through the proclamation which is rooted in the apostolic preaching or is there something man must do to complete what Jesus began?

This is a wonderful example of what we have been learning and discussing in Bible Class. Every other religion, every sect, every heresy, every cult is rooted in the same problem - they base our salvation and eternal life in some way on what man does, on the Law. Some say you must make the beginning, doing what you are able and God will respond - God helps those who help themselves. Accept Jesus into your heart. Make Him your Lord. Some say that God will get you going and then you need to complete your salvation by your love and obedience. This was the problem that Peter, Paul, and the rest of Council were forced to confront. The Judaizers were insisting that the Gentiles who believed in Jesus and were baptized, still

needed to keep the Mosaic Law, particularly, circumcision. Some skip Jesus' work altogether and say that He has shown you what you must do to be saved, He is nothing more than an example to you. This is the error of those who would have us move quickly past Jesus and focus on what we are doing or should be doing as those who claim to be Christians.

All of these fail to rightly distinguish the role of man's work from Jesus' work - they do not rightly distinguish between the Law and the Gospel. Yes, the Law does demand your work. Jesus is not an exemption for you from the Law's demands. Christians do not shrug off the Ten Commandments as just an impossible list of demands that they really don't have to keep any more. Jesus is not an excuse for you to break the commandments in even the slightest way. He absolutely does not free you to live a life that is indistinguishable from the unbelievers - spending your days in worry, in frivolous use of your gifts and talents, despising your family, cursing and mocking your neighbor, despising God's Word and the Holy Sacraments for whatever excuse may come to mind. What Jesus has done is won forgiveness for your failure to keep the Law and the condemnation you deserve. He is the Lamb who has born the wrath of God against your sin

Jesus offers peace to consciences who are plagued by their guilt and who long to be free from the chains of their sin, who desire to turn away from sin and desire to live according to the gracious will of God. Your work, no matter how good, is not good enough and cannot save you. The Law shows you how incomplete and imperfect your works are. Through the Law you see that, as God has said, "there is nothing good in you, that is in your flesh." And if there is nothing good in you, then there is nothing good you can do to save yourself or participate in the smallest way in your salvation.

That's why the Gospel can only be and is a free gift given you from God. You don't prepare yourself for it. You don't decide to believe it or receive it. You don't figure it out or earn it. God gives it to you in Christ as a gift, a completely free gift. You don't get it because you deserve it. You don't finish it because it is already finished when you receive it. The Gospel demands nothing of you. This is why the Gospel is good news and brings such comfort to all who believe - it is finished, it was accomplished in its entirety when the Son of God breathed His last on the cross and died under the full weight of the world's sin, of your sin. This has saved you. Jesus has reconciled you to God in Christ. In Baptism Jesus' death and the

forgiveness it has won is given to you that you may with all boldness and confidence say "My sins are paid for. I am saved because Jesus' death to sin was my own death to sin. And because He lives, I too live now and walk in the newness of life. I walk now, not according to the sinful, selfish desires of the flesh which bring only death, but according to the will of the Spirit who gives life."

The love which was asked of the Gentiles was not in order to assure their salvation. The Holy Spirit had already affirmed them to be saved by the same Gospel as the Jews. Rather, it was that there might be no impediment to the same faith of Jews, that no offense would be given as a stumbling block. Christian love springs from the same root. The Christian loves and bears the weaknesses of others and even delights in keeping the commandments because he is already confident that Christ has set him free. The Christian loves because he has been loved, he has tasted the Lord's love in the sacrament of Christ's true Body and Blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. The Christian delights to sacrifice himself for his neighbor - to help the poor and the widow, to give his offerings, to lay aside his own desires - because he does not need his works to earn God's favor.

Anything less than a fully free forgiveness, from start to finish, is not the Gospel. It is a perversion that leaves consciences in the terror of their sin and the delusion that they can and must work to save themselves. All who preach such a salvation are to be refused and resisted because they are preaching the doctrine of devils, laying yokes on disciples which the Lord does not lay upon them. And let us also put to silence the Old Adam within our own flesh who either takes pleasure in his own works or who believes that the grace of Christ is only for those who are more deserving than he. Jesus, the Son of Man incarnate, has died precisely for you that you might be saved from your sin

Two apostles. Two peoples. One Gospel. And on this Gospel the Lord continues to keep and build His holy Church, baptizing sinners into His atoning death and resurrection and clothing them in robe of His righteousness. It is this Gospel that has set you free.

In the Name of +Jesus.