

DEVOTION FOR THE THIRD WEDNESDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PSALM 119:145-152

With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O Lord! I will keep your statutes.

I call to you; save me, that I may observe your testimonies.

I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in your words.

My eyes are awake before the watches of the night that I may meditate on your promise.

Hear my voice according to your steadfast love; O Lord, according to your justice give me life.

They draw near who persecute me with evil purpose; they are far from your law.

But you are near, O Lord, and all your commandments are true.

Long have I known your testimonies that you have founded them forever.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;

As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen

Old Testament Reading: Deuteronomy 1:1-46 *Israel's disobedience remembered*

New Testament Reading: Acts 15:1-41 *The Church debates the Gentile question*

“WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?”

Very early the Jerusalem church had to ask, “What is the gospel in relation to the requirements of the ceremonial law?” The question was forced by the conversion of the Gentiles. Everyone accepted the conversion of the Gentiles, (whether they liked it or not) since the Holy Spirit had fallen upon them, as He had on the Jewish believers the day of Pentecost. Following the outpouring of the Spirit, the Jewish believers continued in their customs according to the ceremonial law. They continued to worship in the temple. They kept the Sabbath. They had their male children circumcised. They were Jews and that’s what Jews did, even if they believed Jesus was the Messiah. But what about the Gentiles?

Paul and Barnabas taught that the gospel was all sufficient for a believer’s forgiveness and eternal salvation. Obedience to the ceremonial law was part of the covenant God made with Israel through Moses, but it was not part of the covenant God had made new and extended to all people, in the blood Jesus shed on the cross. Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the law in our place. Obedience to the ceremonial law was now a Jewish custom. It played no part in forgiveness and salvation. These were the gift of God for the sake of Jesus. Jewish Christians could keep the ceremonial law as part of their Jewishness, but Gentiles were not to be forced to become Jewish in their customs. We don’t have to observe the laws of Moses to be saved, or the ceremonies of the church for that matter. We are saved by God’s grace in Christ Jesus, received through faith in His Name.

Christians throughout the world have many different customs, developed over time. Some customs are related to cultural background and ethnicity. Some practices were created to address issues at a certain time and place. Customs, rituals and ceremonies are part of our Christian walk. We practice them because we are Christian, but they don’t make us Christians. They don’t earn forgiveness and we don’t deserve eternal life because we follow them. We may say grace before receiving our daily bread to express our faith, but we are not saved because we receive our food with thanksgiving. Just the opposite. We give thanks because we are saved by grace for the sake of Christ Jesus.

The gospel is God’s grace of forgiveness, earned by Christ’s death; and the gift of eternal salvation, promised in His resurrection. This gospel is what makes a person a Christian. Ceremonies show we are Christians. This gospel is received through faith in Jesus. This gospel is sufficient for our salvation in time and for eternity. As Peter said in the assembly of the Jerusalem Church, “*But we believe that we will be saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.*”

“ROCK OF AGES” (Public Domain)

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood, From thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure: Cleanse me from its guilt and pow’r.

Not the labors of my hands, Can fulfill thy law’s demands;
Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone; Thou must save and thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to thy cross I cling.
Naked, come to thee for dress; Helpless look to thee for grace;
Foul, I to thy fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath, when my eyelids close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown, see thee on thy judgement throne,
Rock of Ages, Cleft for me, Let my hide myself in thee.

PRAYER

Holy Father in heaven, bless us always to worship and serve you in truth and holiness. Guard us so that we never see our worship and service as effecting or contributing to our salvation; but instead as an expression of thanks for the gift of salvation. Bless us always to rely on your grace for the sake of Christ and to call on His name for salvation in time and for eternity. In Jesus’ Name. Amen

THE LORD’S PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven.

Hallowed be Thy name.

Thy Kingdom come.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory,

Forever and ever. Amen

THE CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

BENEDICTION

John 6:40

“For this is the will of my Father that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”