

The Festival of the Reformation of the Church
St. Matthew 11:12-15
October 31st, 2023
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

The Law Prophesied Until John

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

At Mount Sinai Moses received the Ten Commandments from the Lord God, which had been written with His own hand. The Law of God was intended for the good of His people. It declared that He would be their God and they would be His people if they obeyed the Law of God. Moses had not even made it down the mountain before the people of Israel rebelled against the Lord God fashioning a golden calf and calling this idol the Lord God. This was only one instance of how often the people of Israel rebelled against the Lord God; one instance of how often they chased after foreign gods. On account of their continual sinfulness the Lord set up the sacrificial system. They could offer up an animal for destruction in their place. They could offer a burnt offering to the Lord and receive forgiveness for their sins.

But the people of Israel, as are all mankind, prone to making the work into the benefit, and not the grace of the Lord God which was given on account of faith that the sacrifice was indeed a propitiation for one's sins. The Jews turned the sacrifices into a work that they must perform instead of a gift of the Lord God to atone for their sins by the sacrifice of a lamb, or other sacrificial animal. Therefore, the Lord God sent to them prophets to speak to them His Word; to proclaim to them that these sacrifices were not enough. The blood of bulls and rams could not atone for their sins, because they made it a work which they do, and not something that the Lord was doing for them.

The Law was also there as a constant reminder that they were poor, miserable sinners. They had Commandments which they believed could be easily kept according to the outward tenets of the Law. But those who truly had faith in the Lord God, such as King David and others, saw how poorly they kept and obeyed the Law. They faithfully offered the sacrifices of bulls and rams, but looked to the promise of the Messiah, Who would rescue them from their sins and trespasses. The Law stood as a blockade against them being reconciled to the Lord God. The blood of bulls and rams could not appease the Law of God. They looked for the coming of the Messiah.

The Law and the prophets prophesied until St. John the Baptist came. The Law prophesied the

destruction of the Israelites on account of their being unable keep and appease the requirements of the Law. The Prophets prophesied that the Law must be kept perfectly, that the lack of faith of the Israelites, the turning the sacrifices into a work they had to do to appease the Lord God would not be enough for them. The Prophets also prophesied that there would be One Who would come to redeem the people of Israel. The Messiah would come and redeem Israel and buy them back from their sins.

St. John the Baptist was the last of the prophets. He also proclaimed what the prophets before Him had proclaimed. He preached both Law and Gospel. Condemning the Brood of Vipers who came not on account of faith, but to look for an excuse to dismiss his words, even as their forefathers did to the other prophets. He also proclaimed that the One Whose sandal straps he was not worthy to untie was there in their midst. The Lamb of God, the One Who takes away the sins of the world was there among them. The prophets of the Old Testament prophesied of a Redeemer to come. St. John the Baptist proclaimed a Redeemer Who stood among them.

The Lord God had come down from Heaven and taken upon Himself our flesh. He stood among His people in the flesh of the Lord Jesus, the Christ. Elijah had come to prepare the way of the Lord. The final prophet came to point all those who would hear that the Lord + Jesus—the Lord God in the flesh—stood among them. There was now no longer any need for the sacrifice of bulls and rams. For the Lamb of God, the Son of God, would offer up His perfect and sinless life as a ransom for all mankind. The Lord God would redeem His people from their transgressions of the Law—their idolatry and shame—by His own working and doing. The Israelites would now have a true Redeemer; a true sacrifice for their sins in which they could cling to in faith and be saved.

But the Jews rejected the Lord + Jesus as their Messiah. Therefore, the Apostles, who would carry on the task of the prophets by proclaiming a Messiah that has come, brought that Gospel message to the Gentiles. The Gentiles had rebelled even greater than the Jews. They had no knowledge of the Lord God at all. The Jews knew of the Lord God and chose other gods. The Gentiles had long ago abandoned the true Lord God as their God, and worshiped all the false gods that they made up. They had made “being good” into the way one enters into eternal life.

The Apostles rescued the Gentiles from their false worship and beliefs. They too heard the preaching about the One Who perfectly fulfilled the Law of God and paid for their sins with His own innocent and precious life and blood. His death destroyed death, and His resurrection from the dead, opened up the gates of Heaven to all those who cling to Him in faith. Mankind no longer needed to do any work to earn their salvation, for the Lord + Jesus already completed completely the works necessary for salvation.

Mankind, however, is prone to wanting to contribute to his salvation. He feels the need to do “something.” Therefore, the Church in its ignorance developed a system where people could pay their way into Heaven. Not only could they pay their own way, but they could pay for the souls of their loved ones who were stuck in the unbiblical place of purgatory: the place of limbo between Heaven and Hell.

Many in the Church disagreed with this practice heartily. And on this date, October 31st, five hundred and six years ago in 1517, an Augustinian monk, Doctor Martin Luther, nailed ninety-five theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenburg, in order that these abuses might be debated. This small act—a seemingly insignificant act at the time—sparked what would come to be called the Reformation of the Church. It is this Festival which we celebrate this evening. For this nailing of the Ninety-Five theses, and the subsequent distribution of them not only in Latin, but in German and other languages, sparked debate in all corners of the Roman Empire.

Mankind—the Church—once again remembered that we are not saved by doing good works, but we are saved solely and completely by the grace of the Lord God. We do not contribute to our

salvation. The Lord + Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, won our salvation once and for all with His death on the cross. We simply receive His gift. And He gives us this gift of forgiveness in His Blessed Sacraments of Holy Baptism, the Absolution, and the Lord's Supper. There He offers us forgiveness of our sins, and wherever there is forgiveness, there are also eternal life and salvation from our enemies. In these means of grace, our breaking of the Law of God, our idolatry and trust in other gods is forgiven. For by these means our faith in the Lord God is once again strengthened and renewed whenever we participate in them. Whenever we hear the preaching of the Gospel of our Lord + Jesus, our faith is strengthened and renewed by the Holy Ghost. By these means we learn to trust our salvation solely to the Lord + Jesus, and not rely on any work we may want to contribute.

This is why we continue to celebrate the Festival of the Reformation, so that we may have an annual reminder to ourselves that we are not saved by the works of the Law. We are saved by grace alone through faith in our Lord + Jesus. Let us therefore, my dear friends, rejoice this day that our Lord + Jesus has fulfilled perfectly the Law for us, and that He has paid for all of our sins which we daily and often commit. And let us rejoice this day that five hundred and six years ago, the Gospel was restored to its full glory so that we may once again fully hope in salvation through our Lord + Jesus, the Christ alone. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!