

Your Righteousness is Christ

Once again Jesus has gathered His disciples on the mountain – and with His Word this morning, He begins to teach us. “You are the salt of the earth,” He says – “You are the light of the world.” Not, TRY to be such things – but you ARE – so be who you ARE.

In other words, God wants you to be a good influence on those around you – like salt that seasons, and light that gives light to others. Your good works are salt and light to those around you. It is the GOOD that God desires for them – and He delivers it through YOU – His salt, and light.

And what is the result? “So that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

You “remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” – you “honor your father and your mother” – you “do not give false testimony against your neighbor” – so that they will GLORIFY GOD. They will see God – that He is a God who gives rest – who orders our lives – who tells the truth. They will see that God is GOOD.

How does this take place? In our text, Jesus connects your influence as salt and light with the Law and the Prophets. In other words, all that God has commanded, and promised, in the Old Testament.

What God commands and promises reveals what He wants – it reveals the will of God – what He wants to be done. And in Jesus, “it is finished.” “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

All that the Father desires – is filled to the brim by Jesus. What the Father commands – Jesus has done. What the Father promises to do – is carried out, fulfilled – in Jesus. “It is finished.”

A simple way to speak of all this is to use the Ten Commandments. In the Ten Commandments, God reveals with the first 3 commandments how He wants us to live with Him – how we are to love God, living in faith towards Him.

And in the rest of the commandments, He reveals how He wants us to love our fellow man. It's a life of FAITH and LOVE. It's the life God the Father wants you to live – it's His will for you – because it is GOOD for you, and for your neighbor.

The psalmist captures this life beautifully in the very first Psalm. “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree that is planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

The Law of God, the will of God for your life, has not been abolished. It has not been taken away – but rather, fulfilled in Jesus. But BEWARE, for the evil one is not too proud to use the Word of God against you – perverting it to abuse you – tempting you, and deceiving you, to use is not for GOOD and the GLORY of God – but for evil.

He sets the Law before as a ladder and tells you that you have to obey the Law to climb your way to heaven. He sets the Law before you as a measuring stick – so that you can compare yourself with other men – as a means to show how you are better than them, and more deserving of God's favor.

And that's ultimately where he drives you – to stand before God – foolishly thinking that you are righteous before Him – that you are like the Scribes and the Pharisees, who were considered to be the “holy ones.”

But Jesus quickly puts an end to that! “For I tell you,” He says, “unless YOUR righteousness EXCEEDS that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will NEVER enter the kingdom of heaven.”

And the devil is right there to trick you again – so that you hear Jesus saying that you have to be HOLIER than those “holy people.” He coerces you into a life of slavery – one in which you have to try harder, redouble your efforts, put everything into it – in order to please your Father who is in heaven.

But you can't. You don't. You always fall short – just like the rest of mankind. And Jesus knows that – and that's why He says that your righteousness must EXCEED that of the scribes and the Pharisees. For YOUR righteousness is not one you have worked for – but rather, it is the righteousness of Christ which He gives to you.

Remember His “it is finished” – well, “it is finished” FOR YOU. I've done all this “for you,” Jesus says. My obedience to the Father's will – my death for the death you have earned by your sin – I did this all “for you.”

In Holy Baptism, Jesus clothes you with HIS righteousness – so that YOUR righteousness does EXCEED that of all mankind's efforts – for it is the very righteousness of the Son of God.

Clothed in Christ – you now stand before the Father as the obedient son – holy and righteous in God's eyes – and He declares, “you are my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased” --- all because of Jesus.

But beware, for the evil one seeks to corrupt this Gospel too – making you think it is a license to sin – that you can do whatever you want and it doesn't matter – because Jesus has done it all – and so the devil leads you to go your own way, and live your own life – one in which you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

That is not what the Father desires for you. He wants you to live in FAITH towards Him and in LOVE for your fellow man – and that's why He sent His Son – so that you are free to live according to His will.

Free from the condemnation of the Law – and free to walk according to the Law – for your good – for the benefit of your neighbor – and for the glory of God. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.