

Sermon - 02/05/23  
Ps 112; Is 58:6-12; 1 Cor 2:1-16; Mt 5:13-20  
02 - 05 - 23

**The Law Fulfilled – Not Abolished**

Years ago, in Albuquerque, a young Greek Orthodox couple came and asked me to exorcize their apartment. The wife was especially eager to free her home from evil influences. I anointed each door and window frame of the small apartment with oil – and prayed with the couple. The prayer of blessing is effective against spiritual darkness. Some things cannot be blessed, but it is amazing what can be blessed and set aside for the sake of Christ's kingdom. God is faithful in everything – great and small. You who bear Christ in your hearts are called to dispel darkness by stepping in and bringing the Light of Christ with you. When I bless a home, I offer two gifts to the family: a box of sea salt and a candle – salt and light. A few years ago, I blessed an apartment in the Cornell Estates care facility. Church folks sometimes get stuck in conventional interpretations. Faith in Jesus has shaped lives over thousands of years. Faith emerges in forms we have never seen before. I remember that young couple and I believe that God is still faithful to the promise never to leave or forsake them even now.

Last week we looked at the Beatitudes – Jesus' restatement of the Law God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai. Jesus is speaking on a mountainside (Mt 5:1-12). He describes how blessed we are to hold this Law within our very selves – not written on tablets of stone, but written on flesh – our flesh. (2 Cor 3:3) God in Christ is affirmed and glorified in His believers – Christ's followers.

Jesus says you are the salt of the earth. The presence and flavor of salt are unmistakable. There's nothing else like it. Salt heightens the flavor of food. Think of a boiled potato or a hard-cooked egg. Needs something. Needs salt. It could be salsa or Hollandaise sauce – or even ketchup or Worcestershire. And Jesus warns you and me – ***don't lose your saltiness***. Be sure you add zing – remember to be that preserving agent in relationships – and don't be shy about speaking out the warning against sin. Salt brings cleansing. You are the salt of the earth, but salt that has lost its saltiness will be thrown out, says Jesus. A strong warning in the last days. Your witness of who Jesus is – that is your saltiness.

Then, Jesus says ***you*** are the light of the world. Here we thought ***He*** was the Light of the World. What you saints bring into the world ***is*** the Light of Jesus that dwells inside you. Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. The one who follows Me shall not walk in darkness; but will have the light of life." (Jn 8:12) The Lord gives a warning along with naming the disciple's character trait: Keep the Light of Jesus shining brightly. Do not cover it – do not hide it. This brings glory to God, not yourself.

Jesus calls you and me to bring salt and light – to ***be*** salt and light – to show forth these qualities all the time – every day of the year. You might be asking, "Preacher, does this mean I belong to Jesus, not myself?" What do you believe about that?

The Lord Jesus sets before us these seemingly impossible Beatitudes – or marks of a holy life – the blessed way of being. Remember, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." -- All the way through to "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Look at the rulers of the empire in Jesus' time. Order was maintained by military threat. There was a Roman regiment in every outpost of the Empire. They kept the Pax Romana – the law of force. And so it was in the City of Corinth. The Apostle Paul writes to the church at Corinth about their power struggles inside the church. They look a lot like the society around them. They are behaving like privileged, over-indulged children. They have broken into factions around the leaders of the congregation: party of Apollos, Party of Peter, party of Paul or party of Christ. They believe that intellectual knowledge leads to salvation – or that

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philosophical wisdom leads to understanding God. But, Paul cuts through this humanistic argument by declaring the truth of Jesus Christ revealed to believers through the Holy Spirit. We are truly led by the Spirit of God.

It is just as challenging for human hearts and minds in our time of history – this information age – to release the arrogant, grasping ways of human rule. Rather to bow low before God and believe God for the covenant promises fulfilled in Jesus Messiah – God’s Law fulfilled. We may even complain to God: Lord, I cannot accomplish this Law of Love!

The first disciples, and the fractured Corinthian fellowship and we today face the darkness of the human heart. Before the light of Christ enters, we are slaves to sin. Isaiah saw it back in the 8<sup>th</sup> c. BC – he says, “remove the yoke of bondage, stop pointing the accusing finger, quit shouting about the evil in others.” When you and I confess our own dark motives and tendencies, we are ready to allow Jesus to dwell in our hearts and cleanse and dedicate and sanctify us. Jesus puts us to work for good – for those who are excluded, pushed to the side, exiled to the margins of the community. We give evidence of His power and love by the way we live.

Every commandment that God has put in place is accomplished in us by Christ. Our blessedness ***is His own righteousness*** that enters us through faith in Him and the work He completed on the cross. And His resurrection to New Life. Through obedience to His Word, darkness gives way to His presence inside you and me. Christ in you is the hope of glory. (Col 1:27) Salt in a decaying world, a shining light in the darkness.

The Prophet Jeremiah also prophesied that the Law would be fulfilled in God’s people:

“I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jer 31:33b-34 NASB)

God’s Law is not abolished — but is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Your kingdom work is proof. Amen.