

INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 14, 2014
14th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 2 Samuel 12:1-15 Acts 20:17-35

Hymns: 20; 351; 360; 453:2 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 5:13-19

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. 17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Living a Sanctified Christian Life.

One of the conflicts that has been addressed in Christianity from the early days of the New Testament has been the conflict that goes on within the Christian himself. Every day we are driven by the Spirit, by our faith to live to the glory of our Savior. Every day we are driven by the passions of our sinful flesh and by the world to live for ourselves, and for our sense of self-fulfillment, or our desire to do what pleases us, with little or no regard for what the Lord would have us do. We may either think that it is not all that bad because the whole world is doing it; or we may think we aren't hurting anyone else so why should anyone else care; or we may think that it doesn't matter because I'm going to sin some way today anyway, and at the end of the day I will ask God for forgiveness and that will take care of it. In any case such thinking not only defies God, but such thinking mocks the sacrifice Christ made to save us.

Some point at this sinful thinking which sometimes goes on within Christian's minds and declare that is what we should expect for preaching such "cheap forgiveness." In some churches they would fight against this mind set by teaching that there must be evidence that one's sorrow over sin is genuine before forgiveness is declared. Other Christian churches outline certain acts that should be fulfilled to demonstrate a person's worthiness of the grace of forgiveness. But that is not what the gospel declares. It tells us that **"where sin abounded, grace abounded much more"** (Romans 5:20), and that **"having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"** (Romans 5:1), and that **"while we were still sinners Christ died for us"** (Romans 5:8).

The real difficulty is in abusing the grace given us in Christ. When we do what the world says is right today, or what is convenient for us, then we are doing what is right in our own eyes and not observing the will of God. This struggle is a daily struggle in the life of the Christian. It will continue to be a struggle for us as long as we live.

All this is nothing new. As I said, it goes back to the days of the early church. Actually it goes back much farther than that. In the

book of Judges, at the conclusion of a particularly sad account in that book, we are told of the people of Israel,

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Solomon made this observation in the book of Proverbs:

Proverbs 21:2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, But the Lord weighs the hearts.

Even then it was nothing new. If we go back to Genesis and the account of the fall into sin what do we read?

Genesis 3:6 So when the woman **saw** that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and **a tree desirable to make one wise**, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

Adam and Eve did what was right in their own eyes and brought death and corruption into the world, and so “**death spread to all men, because all sinned**” (Romans 5:12)!

Even the Apostle Paul struggled with this inner conflict. He wrote of himself in Romans 7:

Romans 7:19,24-25 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. ... 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

“**I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.**” How should we thank God? By living our life for Him! He saved our lives! He saved our eternal souls! Jesus has gotten us this victory over sin. **He** died and rose again that we might be dead indeed to sin but alive to righteousness. **He is the power of a new life.** --

THEME: Life in Christ Shows Forth His Glory.

Jesus made this point very clearly in His Sermon on the Mount from which our text is taken. He used pictures in the first verses of our text but the point is made all the more clearly that we are to be --

I. Living as a Light and as Salt in the Earth.

Matthew 5:13-16 “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. 14 “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

It is not only the flavoring quality of salt that is important. It is the preserving quality of salt. **You are the salt of the earth.** The Christian’s presence in this world makes a difference. Christians impact the entire community with the righteousness that is theirs by the grace of God. That is our role in this life. We are to bring the flavoring of Christianity into the community, or the preserving power of salt into the community as we, as children of God, live a godly life in the presence of our neighbors.

It is a gift of the Holy Spirit that we possess these qualities of salt. It is a gift to our community that we bring to our neighbors the right values, the right judgments, pure and selfless motivations and loving actions. We are a testimony against evil and for that which is good. That may indeed be the preservation of a community, that the society in which we live will remain in the state of grace in which the Lord continues to present His saving gospel to the people who live in that society. This is a great blessing, and it is a blessing that the Lord brings to Austin, and to Minnesota, and to America **through you**, the children of God.

This assumes that the salt of the earth retains its saltiness. When we slide along with the ways of the world, and allow our Christian values to degrade as we adopt the relative and ever changing values of the world, **we lose our saltiness.** Our communities also lose the preserving and seasoning qualities of the salt that the Lord would have us bring. And what does Jesus say? If the salt loses its

saltiness how can it be seasoned? It is no longer of any value. Such salt is nothing more than white sand. We don't want white sand in our salt shakers! Who wants to sprinkle sand on their eggs at breakfast or their vegetables at dinner. It serves no purpose in the salt shaker. It should be dumped out and thrown away.

Consider the other picture of being a light. You are a light. **“You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”** (Ephesians 5:8). We should not be walking in the darkness of sin and death. The Holy Spirit “enlightened” us. We were not only given light for our spiritual understanding, but that we might be a light for others. We are not only one little light in a dark world. We, the Christian Church as a whole, are the city of God. We are a city set on a hill. There is a lot of God-given light shining from Zion, the city of God. When a city is set on a hill, on a higher elevation that city can be seen for a long distance.

Yes, with all the lights of our modern world we can see the light of a city reflecting off the clouds at a pretty good distance. Most nights I can see the lights of Albert Lea from my back yard. But that is nothing like when a city is set on a hill. I remember approaching Cheyenne Wyoming at night as I was traveling some years ago. I was so sure, as bright as the lights of the city appeared, that we had to be close, and that very soon we would be entering the city. That was not the case. That city is at a high elevation, and it was still many miles away when I thought it had to be but a few miles. Its light was visible, and could not be hidden.

That is what the Lord has done with us. The Christian community is to be a bright shining light that shines clearly in the darkness of this world. Yes, we see the evil of this world, but the Lord presents the response with the light of the gospel, the light He has placed in our hearts, a light that He desires to shine in our lives. We are to shine in the darkness so that sinners might know God's love, and the salvation that is found in Jesus' name.

This starts with the individual Christian living his life to the praise and glory of our Savior Jesus Christ. This is the Lord's will for us in this world. He lit the light within us, and He doesn't want this light hidden. One lights a lamp to dispel darkness in one's surrounding, whether that be inside our homes or outside. We don't

normally turn on a light just to block that light from shining. That is self-defeating. And yet if we allow ourselves to be swept along with the world, and live and talk and behave the way the world does, and pursue the same fleshly pleasures as the world around us, what are we doing but blocking the light of the Lord from being seen. It goes against the very purpose for which God has us living in this world.

Let your light shine! Don't be ashamed that you are a light in the middle of darkness. How can that even be that light should be ashamed of shining in darkness? And yet that is how many, too many Christians behave, as if they are ashamed of the light, as if they are ashamed of the Lord Jesus and the truth that He brought into the world, the truth that brings life. **Let your light shine that the people around you can see**, so that the people around you can see that you live differently, so that they can see your good works, and not glorify YOU as being such a remarkable human being, but so that they see the Lord in your life, the Lord who is your life, and glorify your Father in heaven.

Our life is about living to the praise and glory of our Lord and Savior. We are to live --

II. Honoring Christ by Observing God's Word.

That is what Jesus is about. He came into the world not to bring an end or to destroy the Old Testament Scriptures, including the Law of God. No, Jesus did not come to destroy, but rather to fulfill and complete, and bring God's gracious promises first presented to Adam and Eve, and Abraham, and Moses and the prophets into the reality of fulfillment.

This is what Jesus stood for. This is what Jesus taught. This is what Jesus lived. This is why Jesus died and rose again, that He might establish God's Word as true and faithful, and not only for a small period of history some 2000 years ago, but for all time, from the day of creation, until the Day of His final coming in judgment.

Matthew 5:17-19 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19

Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

So Jesus affirms not only that He is present in this world to bring the Word of God into fulfillment in every way, but Jesus also affirms the everlasting authority of that Word. So then it wasn't being set aside as irrelevant by Jesus' ministry, quite the contrary, it was more relevant then than ever before. It is not irrelevant now. The Word of the Lord stands. It stands in its truth, and it stands in its authority. It is the authority for both faith and life, because it is and ever shall be **the Word of God**. Every Word of God is true. God is faithful, and when God establishes His Word and will so it shall be. When God makes a promise it shall be fulfilled. So then not only is the Word **historically** true, but it is **prophetically** true. What God declares will happen will indeed come to pass as God, and God alone, has determined.

Jesus' statement is most emphatic. However, it is not only for Himself and His credibility that Jesus is concerned. A negative attitude of others toward the Word impacts lives, and not only the lives of those who regard God's Word lightly. It impacts the hearts and minds of those who hear the wise of this world dismissing so much of the Word as being flawed by one author's prejudices, or another's superstitions, or another's hyperbole.

The result is that for many the authority of the Word has been undermined, and the Scriptures have been declared as irrelevant in determining what is right and wrong. What is left but people doing what was done before, **doing what is right in their own eyes**, pleasing themselves, serving themselves, and not the Lord. Any excuse will do, just let me do it my way, and not the Lord's. Where is that going to leave them? Does political correctness or personal expediency trump the truth of God's Word? Can man undo the judgments of God? Can man wipe away the evil from sin? Those who as ministers of God's Word teach men so shall be called least in the kingdom of God.

It is easy for some to accuse the apostles of stretching the truth because they wanted others to see Jesus as being as great as they

saw Jesus to be. No, that is not the way it is! When we pick up the Bible we are not opening a book filled with mythology, and hyperbole, and bigotry of men. We are not dealing with the flawed and twisted ideas of men. We are finding the consistent truth of God that endures forever. We can count on it as being true and reliable. We can build our lives upon this truth. Not just our temporal lives but our eternal lives. Not just **our** lives but the lives of the **people we love**, the lives of the people who surround us in life. When we hold to the truth of God's Word, and teach others what we learn from God's Word, the salvation that we have in Christ, and the direction and purpose and value He alone can have given our lives, then we honor Jesus before the world.

This is a large part of our sanctified life as children of God. As redeemed children of God we appreciate what God has done for us in Christ. We appreciate the sacrifice the Father made in sending His Son into the world. We appreciate the sufferings of our Lord which were necessary for our salvation. We appreciate the life we have been given by Jesus' resurrection, that we also have been raised, already now, from spiritual death so that we might walk in newness of life.

That is what the world is supposed to see in you and in your life. Of course the Lord knows all that you do, and He knows what is in your heart. Your neighbor also knows it from your words and actions. As children of God who love Jesus even as He has loved us, it is to be our earnest desire to live every day to the praise and glory of Jesus. Now, today, it is your chance to say "**NO**" to sin and your sinful flesh, and to say "**YES**" to **righteousness**, to the praise and glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. "**This was the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes**" (Psalm 118:23).

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.