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August 12-13, 2023 - Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Rom. 10:5-17; Matt. 14:22-33; Job 38:4-18

We've all heard the usual objections before: "How can you all believe in some book that is thousands of years old?" "How can you believe a man in the sky is watching over you?" "Just look at all *the science!* You seriously believe someone created this world? What about the Big Bang and evolution? You really believe in Adam and Eve?" "And you seriously believe the entire world got flooded?"

Now, of course, for the thousands of years our world has been around, just about everyone believed these very things. Until the last five minutes, these were the baseline beliefs people held publicly. It was the norm in the Western world.

But today there is just so much pushback against the faith we share. The Ten Commandments form the moral standards of any functioning society, but now? There is no agreement on right and wrong. In fact, what the world so firmly says is right is exactly what Scripture says is wrong.

Yet even among the world's confusion and chaos, most everyone agrees that there *is* a right and a wrong. But if the world is so opposed to God, where do they get right and wrong from? Who determines it but the sinful heart of man himself? As Christians, we know where our righteousness comes from. It comes from our Lord who died for us. It comes from our Lord who has such dominion over the entire universe that He walks on water. In the face of all objections, we can rest assured that **THE LORD IS LORD.**

I.

We may not find it too difficult to "**confess with [our mouth[s] that Jesus is Lord**" (Rom. 10:9), at least not in welcoming company, but there is always going to be a part of us that really doesn't want to believe that. We all carry this desire deep down to accomplish things ourselves. It is that pride that says, "I don't need

your help.” Look at any other religion, or even other denominations, really. They all set up systems where you can find your way to god or to some form of spiritual enlightenment. Whether this is through following strenuous lists of laws or just “making your personal decision”, they all place the onus on the self. They try to put salvation in your hands, not God’s.

And that’s the same issue Paul was dealing with as he wrote to the Romans. He’d long been a Pharisee himself - he’d believed that he could be righteous on account of his own works, that he could work his own way up to God, and he was quite determined to ensure that EVERYONE knew how righteous he was.

We’ve all done something we were proud of and wanted to be sure everyone else knew about. For the Pharisees, this was about keeping the Law *PLUS* all the extra laws they added on themselves. The only problem is... we all fail. The Pharisees may have even convinced themselves they really were keeping the entire Law and that they deserved salvation because of it, but they were fooling themselves. Paul wrote earlier in the same letter that, “**all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**” (Rom. 3:23). We never came home from school all excited to show our parents a failing math test, so why should we boast about a Law we haven’t actually kept?

The Law will never save us. The Law only accuses. We can try to do all the good deeds in the world, and it will never be enough to cancel out even one sin against God. We have fallen short, and “**the wages of sin is death**” (Rom. 6:23). When we try to “do it ourselves”, that is the *only* fate that awaits us. When you’re following a recipe and you make just that one mistake - you forget to put the butter in - it doesn’t matter if you did everything else right or how many good tricks you added in; the whole dish is ruined and destined for the trash. And so, we who were born in sin have no hope of working our way out of it. We can do *NOTHING*.

II.

Fortunately, ending there wouldn’t be a sermon. Though we could never be truly righteous on our own, we have *received* righteousness. It is the “**righteousness based on faith**” (Rom. 10:6), for although we entered

this world in a state of rebellion against God and have fallen into sin time and time again, there is One who didn't.

There is One who didn't just "not break" the Law and didn't just do his "fair share" of good works. There is One who took obedience to God to its fullest extent. He came down from heaven with a singular purpose, being "**obedient to the point of death, even death upon a cross**" (Phil. 2:8). The One who never sinned, whose heart never fell corrupt, came to pay the price of all our sin. He showed mercy as He took what we deserved and grace as He opens the gates of heaven to us. "**Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame**" (Rom. 10:11).

The very righteousness of Christ has come upon us and covers us as a sparkling white robe. It has wrapped around our very souls as we have received eternal life in our risen Lord. And it has prepared us for the world's greatest objection. "Do you Christians really think you're better than the rest of us? Why should *you* get to go to heaven?"

And the answer is no. We aren't better than anybody else. And we've never claimed we *should* go to heaven. We confess at the beginning of every service that we've deserved "**temporal and eternal punishment.**" We know that we cannot be righteous and expect to live by our works, but "**The righteous shall live by faith**" (Rom. 1:17 cf. Hab. 2:4).

The Holy Spirit has brought God's Word near to us, in our mouths and in our hearts (Rom. 10:8). And it is by the power of that Word that we don't decide we deserve it, but even better, we KNOW that we are saved. We know that only life awaits us as our sins have been washed away and forgiven. We know that we are destined for Paradise in the very presence of our Lord who comes to us even here in His Word and in His Body and Blood.

And so, what is the difference between us and unbelievers now in this world? It's not that we always sin less or have earned a better fate. But in faith, we've received two abilities we didn't have as unbelievers. First,

we are able to do good works; for only works done in faith are pleasing to God. And second, we are able to call upon the Lord. This is something we could never do before, as Paul writes. **“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?”** (Rom. 10:14).

But as Christians, we know without a doubt that God hears our prayers. Whether we'd long known God's Law like the Jew or were only recently exposed to the Gospel like the Greek (Rom. 10:12), in faith we have everything. God provides for our every need and listens to every word we pray.

We once knew only sin. We were utterly and totally corrupt and fallen. And now? We find ourselves as saved children of the living God. We find ourselves *able* to do good works that please Him. He seized us from Satan's grasp and keeps us in the palm of His loving hand.

And if God can pull off a miracle such as that, is anything else really that hard to believe? He claimed us as His own and gave us life through the Word written in that “old book” and continues to watch over us, His dear children. He created life in us where there had only been death. So yes, we trust the One who was there and we believe that He created the heavens and the earth, and that through the destructive flood, He brought life and renewal to the world He loves - the world He so loved that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him may not perish, but have eternal life. That same Son who is Lord over all. Even the winds and the waves obey Him as He comes to us through the ever-flowing waters of our Baptism and says, **“Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid”** (Matt. 14:27). And because He has come to us in His blessed Word, we are able to worship Him and reply, **“Truly you are the Son of God”** (Matt. 14:33).

“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). The same Word by which God created the world has been brought to us in the same breath of Spirit that gave Adam life and has given us life eternal in Christ Jesus.