

“If you love me, keep my Commandments!” Mat 5:13-20

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. “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. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

In the context of our today's Gospel reading, I want to talk about a problem. We have this problem. Frankly speaking it is a terrible one and it does so much harm to the Church of Christ. Most churches in the West suffer from it. Some more and some less, and we are by no means an exception.

What is interesting, these are mostly what we would call evangelical churches that suffer from this problem. By evangelical I mean those churches which believe that we are saved by grace alone though faith alone.

Now would you agree with this statement, – there is nothing that we should do to merit God's forgiveness and eternal life? Would you agree with this statement? I'll say it once more.

There is nothing that we should do to merit God's forgiveness and eternal life. Is this what you believe as well? Sure, it is! This is the Gospel message in a nutshell.

Every sinner receives God's forgiveness and the gift of eternal life not by what we have done, or by how good we have been, but only by God's grace, when we trust that our sins are forgiven because of what Jesus did.

This is what we call the Good News. And we should not only know it, but we must hold to this promise as firm as we can. If someone asks you: “What would happen with you if you died tonight?”

What do you answer? Your answer has to be loud and clear: “I would see my loving and gracious Lord and God face to face. This I know for sure.” But then this someone could object pointing to your not so perfect life, to your mistakes, to your sins, to your failures to live up to God's expectations, what then?

Then you would say: “I know, I know. I am a poor, miserable sinner, and there is nothing good in me. But I will see my God not because who I am or what I

have done, but because Jesus Christ has taken my place in God's judgment and in exchange He has given me His forgiveness and holiness."

Then this someone can ask: "But how do you know that? How do you know that God will do this?" Then you answer: "Because I am baptized. In my baptism God made me His child."

And Jesus promised that He will have me with Him in His Kingdom. And He promised that no one and nothing will separate me from Him. This is what I know, this is what I live by."

Some of you in your hearts may doubt this. Don't! This is what the Gospel is. This is the main message of the Church. Jesus Christ has done it all. It's finished. You don't have to do anything to merit your salvation, it is a pure gift of God. Unconditional gift of gracious and loving God. Just receive it!

So far, so good, right? Now we are getting to this problem. Many churches and many Christians have taken this wonderful summary of the Gospel and have lost the last part of the sentence. What do I mean?

Listen carefully, – Jesus tells that you don't have to do anything to merit your salvation. Many churches and many Christians have lost the last four words in this sentence.

Now for them it sounds like this, – Jesus tells that you don't have to do anything... period. Do you see the difference and the problem? Jesus said that you don't have to do anything to merit your salvation.

This modern shorter version, this different gospel, as Paul called it, says, – you don't have to do anything... Is this what Jesus is teaching? Is this what the apostles are teaching? Is this what we believe? Of course, not!

When Christians are left with this different gospel, it means that God expects from His children, – nothing. Nothing! It means that Jesus Christ suffered and died so that we could continue our sinful lives. That we can continue to live the way this world lives.

That Christians can embrace whatever the world embraces, – contempt towards the Church and the Sabbath day, disrespect to those in authority, be it parents, teachers, government, employers or pastors. Indifference to human life, sexual immorality, greed, lying, coveting, etc.

If Jesus says that we don't have to do anything, then it means that we can do anything we desire. This sounds good! There is no need for repentance, no need to live those holy lives, no need to turn away for our beloved sins.

Finally, we are free to ignore these Ten Commandment, from the 1st till the last. We don't need to worry about keeping them. For we don't need to do anything.

This is what too many these days have believed. How many even in our small Barossa community have believed these evil lies?! Churches who have believed these lies are no different from the world. Their light doesn't shine and others can't see them.

But, this is not what Jesus expects. We heard what He said: "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. 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."

What does Jesus expect from us? That His true followers will be different from this world. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Mat 16:24)

That His followers will chose to live according the will of their heavenly Father, not according the way of the world. "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. [For they don't need to do anything.] But the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." (Mat 7:13-14) Be these few! Choose the way of life!

Fine, but how can we be the salt of the earth and the light of the world? It's very simple. This is what Jesus said on the last night: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." And "whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me." (John 14:15, 21) Also: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." (1John 5:3)

That simple? Yes, that simple! How do you live as a Christian? How can you be the salt and the light? By keeping God's Commandments. That simple! But we just said that we don't need to do anything to merit our salvation, right?

It still holds true, we don't need to do anything to merit it, God makes you His child by grace alone. But when He has made you His child by grace alone, without any merit, He expects that you will begin to live as His child.

So that you light would shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. The problem is that too many have forgotten this basic truth and their light has faded.

Do you know what the Large Catechism is? It is one of our official confessions. It says what we believe. Now this is what is written in the Large Catechism.

"We have the Ten Commandments, a summary of divine teaching, as to what we are to do in order that our whole life may be pleasing to God..." and "outside of the Ten Commandments no work or thing can be good or pleasing to God, however great or precious it be in the eyes of the world."

It means that the Commandments teach us how to live God pleasing life. You, as a person, have been already made God pleasing through faith, and now Jesus teaches you how to live your life in God pleasing way.

Also from the Large Catechism: “The Creed sets forth to us everything that we must expect and receive from God... And this is intended to help us to do that which according the Ten Commandments we ought to do.”

Again, it means that God does everything for our salvation in Christ, with the purpose that we could again begin to live according His Commandments. This is what it means to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

It is a joyful, joyful thing. Imagine, here is Jesus, He has done everything to have you with Him in Paradise. How can you thank Him? It's simple. By keeping the Commandments. This is what makes Jesus happy.

When you trust Him more than anything, when you call upon His name in praise and prayer, when you keep the Sabbath day holy attending the Divine Service together with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

When you honour those in authority, when you care for your neighbor's wellbeing, when you honour marriage and lead a chaste life, when you use your possessions for the benefit of your neighbor and the Gospel, when you are honest, content and grateful. This is how you love your God.

We spent too little time considering – how can I do better all these things. How can I be better a Christian and greater a support to my congregation? How can I be better spouse, parent, sibling, child, employer, employee, neighbor and so on.

The beauty of Christian life is that you don't have to do anything to merit your salvation. It is yours already. You strive to live according God's Commandments to express your gratitude to Him and to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world and to be a blessing to all people in your life.

Christian life is indeed a joyful, joyful life. Full of joy, every day. For there are so many things that we can do knowing that this is how I can please my God. Some may still doubt: “But what if we are not too good with keeping God's Commandments, what then?” Then hear once more what Jesus said.

You are, meaning, you already are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. God has already made you His children. This is your new identity in Christ. Your heavenly, everlasting identity.

This is who you are. By God's grace. Without any merit. And this will not change. What is left for us, – let's try to live as God's children, so that our light shine before others, and they may see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven. This is, why we are here. And it is a joyful thing.

And the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep your mind and soul in Jesus Christ. Amen.