

Lessons for Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 5, 2023

Psalm 112:1-9 ~ *A description of the blessings God grants a righteous man.*

Isaiah 58:3-9a ~ *God called His people to task for fasting at the expense of the poor.*

1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (-16) ~ *God's grace is discerned only through the work of the Spirit.*

Matthew 5:13-20 ~ *Jesus held His followers to the perfect law, which He Himself fulfilled.*

GATHERING THE TEXTS: What About Grace Don't You Understand?

There was something about Jesus' compassion that gave people the wrong idea about His message. The law is still the Law, and God's intent for us is perfection in all its details. In Isaiah's day, the people couldn't get away with shows of piety that added further burdens to their oppressed neighbors. The details of God's demands are spelled out: share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless into your house. Only the Spirit of God can teach us that grace is not a relaxing of God's demands, but, through the cross of Christ, a fulfilling of them even in our failures.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERVICE: Gracious God, do not let me mistake Your compassion for compromise. Keep me from being careless with Your demands, and keep me always caring for the needs of the oppressed. And when I see that my life has failed to fulfill Your purpose, give me grace to trust the fulfillment of my life in Jesus' death on the cross. Amen.

STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT: Every moment of our lives is given meaning because we have been rescued from waste and given worth through Jesus, the One who fulfilled God's righteous demands on us by His sacrificial death on the cross. As He is risen to life again, He gives us opportunities to live for Him and for others.

OFFERING PRAYER: Lord, You are the Salt of our lives and the Light of our soul.
You flavor our days, and Your love makes us whole.
With all of these gifts that we bring You this day,
In heart and in action, bring hope to the hurting, we pray. Amen.

CONVICTION AND COMFORT: Salt is for flavor and lamps are for lighting. When they no longer do what they are designed for, they are worthless. God's people are for living up to the demands of His law, including giving care and comfort to the poor, the oppressed, and the homeless. When we fail, we are worthless, like bland salt and burned out lamps. In a wisdom we cannot understand, but only perceive through the teaching of God's Spirit, Jesus has fulfilled our purpose and given us new life! Living in Christ's righteousness we are assured of entering the Kingdom of Heaven!

Questions to Consider: How can waste be given worth?

- What is more important than attitude in fasting?
- Why does the wisdom of God's grace remain a secret from human wisdom?
- How does our misunderstanding of God's grace relax God's commandments?
- If salt is for flavor and lamps are for lighting, what are God's people for?

Bonus on next page: a contrast between worldly wisdom and the wisdom of God

Getting Free

Look at that vindictive man
struggling out as best he can
but he cannot quite break free
from his own recriminy.

Pushing, pulling grief from shame
still he's trapped there all the same
underneath that messy pile
blaming others all the while.

If he sought a righteous rule
he would surely play the fool
for his grievances are less
than he himself has to confess.

Only One can set him free
from these burdens' tyranny
rescued by the Father's grace
in the Savior's loving face.

- Gilbert A Franke, 12/31/08