

## The Salt, the Light, a City Set on a Hill

Matthew 5:11-16, Trinity Sunday IV

June 23, 2013

Beloved of the Lord.....We all know there are many beautiful apple orchards in Minnesota. In the Spring there are wonderful blossoms and in the fall the harvest of fruit. But can you imagine going to an orchard, walking through the midst of it, and finding apples floating in the air without tree or branches! Can you imagine such a sight?....fruit without a tree? In this world there are many false Christians who live their life just this way. They believe themselves quiet capable of producing good fruit on their own, good works, and they do not believe they are justified by the works of Christ alone. Such is the picture of these apples just floating in the air not being attached to any tree. It just doesn't happen in real life, neither does it happen in God's Church, the Holy Christian Church on earth.

This is why Jesus said in John 15, "I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." When a person inwardly believes that they must do at least something good to inherit heaven, such is like a dead branch upon the ground with rotten apples attached. Man born in sin, simply cannot do anything good in the sight of God because good works done with no faith in Christ equals only an evil work in God's sight. This is why the Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him." No unbeliever can do even one good work. Yet when the Holy Ghost calls us by the Gospel so that we believe in the saving merits of Christ, this is much like Jesus walking through an orchard where there are many beautiful trees, and He picks us dead branches off the ground and He grafts us into that green and living tree, so we have a beginning in producing good fruit.

Good works then can only be good when faith in Christ has begun, for "love is the fulfilling of the law." His death gave us life. His life gave us resurrection. While sincere Christians are often very discouraged by their lack of good works in life, "Here in Jesus is the good work which justifies me", the believer confesses! All those good works that we failed to do, Jesus our Substitute did on our behalf, and all those evil works we did do, Jesus our Substitute paid on our behalf. "By His stripes we are healed." Hence Ephesians two says, "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." Wherever then there is faith in Christ, not only are we branches grafted into the tree of life, but this tree feeds and sustains us so we have a beginning of good works.

I. The blessing of persecution. You could say then faith in Christ, or faith alone, is the good fruit of the call of the Gospel, and the good works we do thereafter, are the

secondary fruit of the Gospel. Wherever the hearts of men are converted so that we in faith cry out "Abba Father", there is a true child of God that loves Jesus, rejoicing in our redemption. But O how the world hates and persecutes such believing children of light. For our comfort Jesus therefore gives us words to cling to in time of persecution. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." To revile you is to verbally abuse you or assault you with evil words as if you have done evil when you only have done good. If you condemn their wicked way of life, or if you urge them to repent of their sins, or if you say Jesus alone can save us from all we've done, or if you confess "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son"....if you do or say anything by faith and they hate you for it, "rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven." By this faithful confession and willingness to suffer for it, equal to the prophets of the Old Testament. The world's hatred of you is a genuine proof that you are on the right side, the side of God and His Word, for the children of darkness will always hate the children of light.

Persecution then is a high honor which God gives to His children who faithfully confess Christ in the face of an angry world. We must not fear their hatred or strength, nor value the life of our body more than the blood bought redemption of our soul. Throughout history believers have been reviled, mocked, beaten, thrown in prison, tortured and murdered, yet by God's grace they confessed Christ to the end. Therefore remember what Jesus said in Matthew 10, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." "Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for GREAT is your reward in heaven."

II. The salt of the earth. After giving His blessing to those who endure persecution, Christ now reminds His disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men." If salt is exposed to the weather for a certain amount of time, a chemical change takes place so that it actually ceases to be salt. This is what sometimes happens when Christians living in the world cease to reprove and condemn the world for her sins. If you as a Christian then no longer rebuke or reprove the sins of this world, you cease to be a true Christian and the world will tread you under foot.

Haven't we all experienced from time to time, how the world is never ashamed about what they do or say? They curse and they swear and they take God's name in vain. They brag about getting drunk, or who they slept with, or

how they took advantage of their neighbor. They are not ashamed of their sins, nor do they pray "God be merciful to me a sinner." Here's a question: do we rebuke their sins as loudly as they proclaim them? Do we rejoice in Christ as loudly as they rejoice in their sin? Are we salt, or have we lost our flavor? I know we all complain about how wicked the world has become, but its our own fault. We haven't rebuked sin as we ought. We've been timid rather than bold. We have fallen asleep while the souls of men are dying. We would rather blend in with the world than stand out. By our sins of commission and omission, this salt often loses its flavor. Hence the warning...."If the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing."

In all truth that is who we are by our sins, good for nothing. We have done nothing good to cause God to come down from heaven to save us. This is why Jesus said, "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is in heaven." When we picture that which is good, we must picture our dearest Jesus, for God alone is good. And when we see or picture His willingness to come down from heaven to save us, we must see in Christ a most holy zeal, a most gracious and fervent spirit, absolutely bent upon the mission of redeeming this entire world from sin. It is then as if Christ from heaven saw Adam's fall into sin, and the countless generations of sinners born thereafter, and Christ said within Himself, "I just cannot let all these souls perish in damnation! I must, I absolutely must come and rescue them! I will not....I WILL NOT let Satan claim them, but rather I will lay my life a ransom for them all, that not one soul perish!" Can't we then see from all this how all our works are nothing compared to His? Wouldn't you rather be saved by His good works rather than your own? Jesus is the highest and ONLY GOOD! He is the tree of life and we are the branches! Hence the Bible says, "much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." This is why God earnestly desires every man to put their faith in Christ alone, for Christ alone is the one and only good work acceptable to God the Father. Thus when certain proud men who trusted in their works proudly asked Jesus, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

III. The Light and the City. Knowing all this dear believer, do not forget your calling as the salt of the earth, and the light of this world, "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Eph 5 As Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid." Consider that today's sermon text is again a part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. As Jesus preached to His disciples, they sat upon a mountain side, and from this

higher elevation they could see at least a couple of cities set on a hill.

The Kingdom of God then is indeed a city set on a hill. Wherever there is saving faith in any man's heart, that faith cannot be hidden for it will express itself by word and deed. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." When we keep our mouths from filthy or corrupt communication, when we praise God for our salvation, when we rebuke the sins of our day, when we keep our hands from evil and do that which is good, such works of love help teach this world of the highest love above, "our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come!" God does not want us to hide our candle under a bushel, but such is to give light to all who are in the house. There is no such thing as a camouflage Christian who diligently works hard to blend in with the world. Our works and our deeds ought to make us stick out like a sore thumb.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." This does not mean we get in the face of our neighbor and do a bunch of good works for them to see. Far from it!...for "charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,...seeketh not her own." Rather, the Light we wish to shine in this world is the Light of Christ Himself who said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Good works, truly good works, flow from faith and love toward God. Equating our good works with light, our light is a lesser light on earth, which is a mere reflection of that far greater Light who gave His life for the world. As the moon and stars thus reflect the greater light of the sun, so whatever we do in the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us, is a reflection or fruit of His first holy love. Rejoice then dear believer, throughout your life, from the moment you wake up in the morning, till your last thought before you fall asleep at night, your first love has saved you by the tree of the cross, and Jesus is your TREE OF LIFE. God by His infinite mercies has grafted you, that once dead branch, into this Tree of Life, and this Tree of Life will surely cause you to bear fruit. Do good works, not for your salvation, but because of your salvation, "that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." To God alone be glory, forever and ever! Amen!