

“Thou Art More Righteous Than I”

I Samuel 24:17-20, August 16, 2015

Trinity Sunday XI

Sermon Text, I Samuel 24:17-24:

“And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. And thou hast shewed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me: forasmuch as when the LORD had delivered me into thine hand, thou killedst me not. For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away? wherefore the LORD reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day. And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand.”

Beloved of the Lord.....We have in our home a little pamphlet of passages called “Golden Thoughts.” It is a delightful collection of passages for the entire year, so that each day of the week of each month you can look up the date and read the passage. Yesterday’s passage was Proverbs 4:5, “Get wisdom, get understanding, forget it not.” Of course all true wisdom comes from God, likewise all true understanding. Only the Holy Spirit can reveal to fallen sinners that Jesus alone is “the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by Him.”

“Forget it not” the Bible says, but so often we do. Sometimes through the course of the day we forget entirely about God. Not once does He or His commandments cross our mind, nor does our heart utter one single little prayer. We forget God, we forget He is there, because we are so busy in this world doing this or that, or we are so busy thinking of ourselves we cannot think of Him who loved us before the world began. We forget God also because our flesh doesn’t want to think about Him, and we certainly don’t want to think about our sins. Second Corinthians 13 says, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”

Let us not forget about God dear Christian, but let us remember Him daily by thinking about God’s Word in our lives, God’s commandments and will during the day, and let us take our petitions to the Lord in prayer, for Jesus loves to answer. And thanks be to God though we often forget Him, He can never forget us, for “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of *my* hands.” The nail prints are still there, and Jesus has written His saving name upon our heart in baptism, whereby He regenerates AND RENEWS our faith. Thus “I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.” Our expected end, for Jesus’ sake is heaven. “Fear not, only believe.”

I. David spares Saul’s life. Today is it absolutely necessary that we review chapter 24. Remember in last week’s sermon, King Saul was very jealous of David for Saul had slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands. On several occasions likewise, Saul had tried to murder David, at least once by casting a javelin at David. Eventually David realized he had to flee and not return to Saul. Wherever David then travelled, men began to follow and support him knowing he would be the future king.

At the time of our lesson, David was hiding from Saul in the wilderness of Engedi [ane-gee’-dih]. There were certain caves made into sheepcotes, a place to keep the sheep. Saul went into one of these caves to ease himself, so that his skirt or garment was laid aside for the moment. But David and some of his men were deeper in the darkness of the cave which Saul could not see. This is when David’s men encouraged him to take vengeance upon Saul and slay him, but David answered, “The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.” By strong words David also restrained and kept his soldiers from murdering Saul. David did however at that time cut off a small portion of Saul’s skirt.

After Saul left the cave and was a certain distance away, David came out and called to him saying "My Lord the king!" David then bowed himself. David explained that though he had opportunity to take Saul's life, David refused. David also maintained his innocence saying, "I have not sinned against thee; Saul then answered, "Is this thy voice my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. And he said to David, Thou *art* more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil." Saul thus acknowledged his sin and also the goodness of David. Saul had broken God's commandments, but David kept them, but David didn't do so perfectly. Earlier when David had cut off a portion of Saul's robe, the Bible says "it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt." This means his conscience testified to his sin, for Saul was still a king and this injury, though small, was still an offense to Saul's holy office as ruler of God's people.

With that background, let us now turn and focus on the main words of our text, where Saul says of David, "Thou art more righteous than I". Righteous means holy. By all this Saul had to admit that David was holier than Saul, for normally in times of war, when a man finds his enemy and is given an opportunity to kill him, he does so. But David had not done so because Saul had been chosen by God to be king.

But why do we focus on these words today? "Thou art more righteous than I." Because our righteousness, our holiness, falls far short of that which the God's law requires, and only the righteousness of Jesus can save us! Thus regarding God's Ten Commandments we are entirely incapable of fulfilling them. The outward deed means nothing to God, if the deed does not come from a pure and holy love which is selfless and innocent in every way. Are the thoughts of your heart selfless and innocent in every way? Is your soul pure filled only with love toward your neighbor? For if you are righteous in that way, you will never experience within hatred or anger or dislike for any person. Nor will you inwardly complain about anything in life because you trust and love God perfectly, knowing He will always take care of you. Even David, in this one instance where He resisted temptation and did not slay his king, as fine and noble as that deed was,.....still sinned in the matter of that portion of the skirt, and his conscience smote him. Your own conscience dear Christian testifies to your own sin. Whenever you experience that tinge of conscience, or your heart is grieved because you did an evil thing, you have fallen short of what God commands you. His holy law is so high and perfect, it is simply impossible for sinners such as you and me to keep it. By way of sin then we are all condemned to eternal hell, and no matter how hard we might try to keep God's commandments we are never going to make it to heaven by our works. Our righteousness, our holiness falls far short of God's glory.

But now think again of those words "Thou art more righteous than I", and then think of Jesus. Is Jesus holier than us? Is Jesus more pure? Is there any impurity at all in that heart of Jesus? Is Jesus more righteous than I? or you? Now consider God's law and Romans chapter eight which says, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." Jesus came in the "likeness of sinful flesh", namely He came as True Man, except Jesus was holy and without sin. He came in His holiness to consume and take away our unholiness, nailing Himself to the cross, a ransom for our sins. And just as good, Jesus in His lifetime fulfilled God's law, kept all the commandments perfectly in every way as our Substitute for you and me. He has the righteousness and holiness which we need to make it to heaven and in the Gospel He gives it to us freely so we can call His righteousness our own. Through Jesus God can now look down upon each believer on earth and say "This is my own beloved son" or "This is my own beloved daughter for Jesus's sake, "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." All the good Jesus did, it is in God's sight as if we had done it ourselves. Everyone then who simply believes in Him is counted as holy in God's sight.

II. The applications in our own life. This righteousness and holiness of Jesus so converts and renews us, the Bible says we are new creatures and old things are passed away. The law no

longer holds dominion over us and we are free to serve God in gladness by faith, by love, praise and adoration. When we have bad rulers in government like Saul, or Pilate, by faith we can be like David remembering even they are the Lord's anointed, and "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay saith the Lord". Likewise we can pray "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over."

This righteousness and holiness of Christ also applies to our guilty conscience. When David's heart was smitten so that inwardly he repented of his sin, David knew and believed God had forgiveness for him, for God Himself tells us in the Bible "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out!" When your conscience thus smites you and plagues you dear believer, don't ignore it because it is telling you something you cannot deny, you are a sinner. But the way to deal with a guilty conscience is to confess your sin and ask Jesus to forgive by praying "God be merciful to me, a sinner." For Jesus' sake, God does forgive you, not because you asked to be forgiven, but because of the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross to take away your sins. And here today as your Pastor let me say this: whatever troubles your conscience even now, "Thy sins be forgiven thee, go in peace." You are forgiven for Jesus sake. Go in peace.

But now also because God is at peace with you, resist sin and do not give in to its temptations. Do as David did. David was tempted to slay Saul, but David did not yield with God's help. And just as God tested David's faith regarding Saul, the Lord's anointed, without a doubt God is going to put you in those situations where you are tempted and tested. God's intention then is not that we yield, but overcome. This is why we pray in the Lord's Prayer "Lead us not into temptation". God indeed tempts no one to sin, "but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us nor seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice." If David had given in to the words of his friends and murdered Saul, imagine the torment of his conscience and easily his faith would have been overthrown. So when God tests your loyalty to His Word and obedience, don't cast away God's Word to which your conscience is bound, lest the devil gain the advantage over you.

Finally, beloved of the Lord, if you keep God's commandments and obey God's words, even your enemies will be forced to admit "Thou art more righteous than I." Who can speak ill of you if you only do good? Then you will have a "good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ." So St. Paul writes in Romans 12 and with these words we conclude, "As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Amen.