

INI

Entering into the kingdom of heaven,
Is the goal of Christianity.
It's what your Creator wants.
Because in His kingdom, life is spent in His eternal care.
God has been working
to bring humanity back into a right relationship with Him in the kingdom
of heaven,
Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden.

It's often assumed that since we Christians believe that we can't earn
salvation through works,
Then our actions don't really carry any eternal weight.
Or we carry the mentality that we can do whatever WE want,
Because God's forgiveness is my back-up plan after all my sinning is done.
And as a good Lutheran, I know,
"We are justified by grace through faith." And not by anything I do.

For some, it's almost as if faith is an excuse to follow the works of the flesh,
Rather than the works of God.

Listen to words of the Son of God as He
Shares how we enter into the kingdom of heaven -
**"Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,
You will never enter into the kingdom of heaven."**

We need a righteousness greater than the greatest Law-keepers of Jesus'
day.

Well, what is righteousness?

Righteousness means following the will of God.

God's will is expressed in the 10 commandments from the Old Testament
reading -

"You shall have no other gods

You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.

Remember the Sabbath Day.

Honor your father and mother.

You shall not murder

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet.”

To keep these is to be righteous in the sight of God,

Because your conduct is lived perfectly in love toward God and neighbor.

But, we just need to keep it better than the Pharisees,

Easy competition, right?

The Pharisees strictly kept the Mosaic Law.

They would be very careful not to break any of these commandments,

Lest they lose favor with God.

And it's not like they would forget any of the 613 moral, ritual, and ceremonial laws in the first five books of the Bible.

Because since they were religious leaders,

They most likely have the first five books memorized.

So, to outperform their righteousness seems like a tall task.

We're already fighting a losing battle.

But then, Jesus ups the stakes –

He reinterprets the Mosaic law to His disciples,

Giving new meaning to how they shall live,

Jesus says, “You've heard it said, ‘You shall not murder’

But I say to you, everyone who is angry with his brother is liable to judgment, whoever insults his brother will be liable to council, and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”

This convicts and kills all of us.

If you've been angry with someone,

it could show up again on judgment day.

If you've ever insulted someone in anger or hate,

You're liable to judgment for it.

Worst of all, if you call someone a fool,

Because you're bitter about something they've done,

Then the fire of hell may be your judgment sentence.

Our righteousness is hopeless.

There's NO WAY our conduct and right behavior could possibly exceed the Pharisees,
Much less Jesus' reinterpretation of the fifth commandment –
We can't even keep the one commandment that we all think would be easy to check off the list – to not kill anyone!
But Jesus has given an even stricter interpretation of the law!

How could Jesus do this?
WHY WOULD Jesus do this?
Why would Jesus demand a righteousness that He knew we couldn't keep?

The only righteousness that exceeds the Scribes and Pharisees,
That is able to fulfill these incredible fifth commandment standards,
Is the righteousness of Christ –
The fulfiller and upholder of the law,
The only one whose conduct and behavior is truly God pleasing,
The only one who has perfect, sinless, untainted righteousness.

The key to understanding this is Jesus' words in verse 17,
“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.”
In Jesus' life and death, in his ministry and preaching,
Jesus upholds His Father's will perfectly
And fulfills it!
He willingly went to the cross to die for the sins of the world,
And through the cross,
Jesus has completed and satisfied the will of God,
Thus securing true righteousness,
Which exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees.

Only through this heavenly righteousness lived by Jesus can we be saved.
And it's given to you freely, as a gift.
Jesus himself underwent baptism to **“fulfill all righteousness”** (Matt 3:15),
And since He's cleansed the baptismal waters with His holiness and righteousness,
We receive the gift of holiness and righteousness that He's left for us in those holy, cleansing waters –

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? [...] We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. [...] For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So, you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 6:1-11)

Since we’ve been connected to Jesus through baptism,
Our sin, unrighteousness, anger, insults, and hatred toward our neighbor is drowned.

It’s been put to death with Jesus on the cross.

It no longer enslaves you,

And you are free to live apart from your anger.

You’re free to live apart from hatred and insults towards others.

You’re free from the state of depravity you constantly find yourself in.

You’re free to **“Seek first the kingdom of God and HIS righteousness”**,

Not your own man-made righteousness.

God has made you righteous before God through faith,

Because Christ alone is our righteousness,

Who is the object of faith.

Said another way,

Christ and His perfect righteousness is the gift our faith receives

Unfortunately, some people never unwrap the wrapping paper

From this wonderful gift.

They’ve been given the gift, but never open it.

Or, they open it, use it for a while,

But would rather play with poison, than put their perfect gift to good use.

Faith isn’t merely a knowledge of history,

That yeah, sure I know Christ died for me.

But faith believes and receives Christ’s perfect righteousness.

And that when confessed, our unrighteousness is forgiven (1 John 1:9).

That’s called the blessed exchange,

When God takes away your unrighteousness,

and gives you His own righteousness.

When we receive this righteousness, life changes.

God's law is a gift, not a burden.

Because Christ fulfills the law, not abolishes it!

Christ didn't fulfill the law to get rid of it and say it has no value anymore,
But rather the law remains because godly righteousness wants to live in
that law!

Those transformed by Christ's righteousness shouldn't want to continue in
sin that grace may abound!

By no means!

How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Your righteousness which saves you, comes from God.

It's a gift.

And this righteousness isn't measured quantitatively,
But qualitatively and relationally.

Because Christ gifts you His righteousness,

And has a relationship with you through the forgiveness of sins here.

Your righteousness exceeds the Scribes and Pharisees,

Because of the source of your righteousness -

Which is your sinless, crucified and Risen Savior.

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