

When someone speaks to you, you have basically three options:

- a. You can ignore the person and walk away
- b. You can insult or dismiss the person face to face
- c. Or you can converse with the person face to face.

(we'll consider calling to someone from the kitchen to the basement in the last category)

When Jesus speaks to us, then

- whether it is through the Scriptures,
- through the sermon,
- the hymns or prayers
- – or through another person –

Jesus is always inviting us into conversation.

**And when Jesus, the Son of God, our Savior,
invites us into conversation,
it is God's saving grace at work.**

When Jesus speaks to us, it is an act of God's love toward us.

So when *Jesus* speaks to us saying that **not one bit** of the Law,
the Torah, God's commandments of the Holy Covenant,
will be abolished until all is accomplished,

He is not laying down a set of conditions by which God will love us, but rather he is describing the **result of God's love** for us in the first place.

He is describing our part of the conversation.

When Jesus says that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees,

it is not in order for us to *qualify* to be claimed for the kingdom of heaven,

But rather as the visible evidence that we already have a place there.

So, in plain terms, Jesus is saying here

that the deeds of obedience to God's Law done by his followers must be **more abundant** than the demands made by those who think they are the best at it.

Jesus is not talking about perfection here – he is not saying that only perfect people enter the kingdom of heaven.

Not at all.

He's not even talking about being better or holier
or more spiritual than others.

He is saying that **those who follow him will be so eager to be doing what God wants**

that their actions will be more frequent,

more visible,

more cheerfully done,

more impactful

– **simply because they are done from faith and gratitude**

and love for God instead of demand and fear.

The Scribes and Pharisees were all about demand and fear

– if you don't pay that \$5 debt, you'll be thrown into prison.

 If you fail to pay the temple tax – you will face punishment

 If you commit adultery or steal your neighbor's property, off with your head.

 And if you deny God –or worse, claim to be God – to the cross you go – your life is forfeit.

But to be fair, the Scribes and Pharisees also set an example

– they kept every letter of the law.

When it came to righteousness,

 to being obedient to the law, they were perfect.

– But only for show.

– Only to the extent that they had to.

– Not because they loved God,

– but because they loved their own reputation and the feeling of superiority over others it gave them.

Jesus turns their smugness upside-down

 when he invites the diverse crowd of his followers to be even more bountiful in their deeds of obedience

 because of his love for them. And their love for him.

 Because they don't have to fear.

 Because they are free to act in gratitude to God

 for the healing and life Jesus is bringing them.

To exceed the righteousness of those who measure according to their own standard is not to be better on *their* terms,

But to be more plentiful in the deeds that make *God's* love visible.

To be more lavish with love according to *God's* standard of measurement.

And that measure is Jesus himself.

...

So now we can hear Jesus more clearly when he says

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt becomes impure, it is good for nothing and is thrown out and trampled underfoot.”

Salt is important to us – but even more so in Jesus' world.

Salt came from the evaporation of salt water, such as the Dead Sea, also known as the salt sea.

It was used for healing wounds, stoking fire, and preserving food.

It was a kind of currency to barter with and was transported over long distances to places that did not have it naturally.

Our English translations get us off the track somewhat by implying that Jesus is speaking of flavor.

In the Greek, The word he uses is *moronic*.

If the salt becomes moronic, it is good for nothing.

You know what moronic is? When we use it to describe a person, it is very insulting.

To be moronic is to be foolish, idiotic, useless.

So how does salt become moronic? This only makes sense if we understand Jesus' salt as the residue of evaporated water.

That residue was often mixed with other substances in the water and rendered impure and unfit for use;

or in the process of collecting and storing this salt it would get moist again and mold or its saltiness would fade.

So, with this image, Jesus is calling his followers –that is you and me -- to be

- *pure*, not corrupted by the world around us
- *useful*, as bearers of the good news of Jesus, come to save from evil and eternal death.
- *active in healing and mercy* in his name
- *making life better for others* as we live our lives in him.
- **We make Christ known by who we are and what we do**
- ...

Jesus also said, You are **the light of the world**

- our deeds of obedience and love are for the sake of others
- to show them Jesus.

And **our lives are to be visible** – as a city on a hill or a lamp on a lampstand.

Now I know this goes against our Pennsylvania Dutch grain.

We were taught not to make a show of our goodness,

not to appear holy – to do good privately.

But this is not what Jesus calls us to.

He calls us to be visible,

active in the world,

noticeable to everybody.

But not for our sake

– not to call attention to ourselves

or to boast

or to compare ourselves to others.

That's what the Scribes and Pharisees do.

We are to be visible making Jesus visible.

Those who follow Jesus appear to the world

like a swarm of bees busily pollinating the world

and making delicious honey of love

**simply because that's what the grace of God we
experience makes us be.**

Our righteous and thankful buzzing is our part of the conversation
with Jesus.

Because The love of God that sent Jesus to the cross to bleed

- for our sins,
- our failures,
- our refusal to love our enemies,
- our lack of mercy,

- our pride and envy,
- our murderous thoughts,
- our adulterous hearts and gossiping lips –

This wonderful love of God for each of us

–so undeserved, so freely given in Jesus

-- is what moves us to respond thankfully with abundant deeds of lavish love toward others.

Our righteousness is not about us – it’s about Jesus.

Everything we do in response to the forgiveness we receive at the hands of Jesus

is to face him as he speaks to us and say (repeat after me)

“Thank you, Jesus!

I love you, Jesus!

I follow you wherever you lead, Jesus!

I trust you with my life, Jesus!”

And others will see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven – **because they, too, see Jesus – in you.**

You are the salt of the earth – you are the light of the world

Jesus – who died for you,

who lives for you,

and who calls you and me to live with him here and now.

– ***Jesus the Savior has said so.***

And he eagerly looks for your answer in word and deed – today,
tomorrow, every day.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen