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Winter 2024
A Name Like No Other

Sermon Title: Self-Righteous?

To be used with Session 5: The Righteousness of God's Name

Scripture: Philippians 3:7-10

Connection to the Study: To complement the Bible Study "The Salvation Expressed in God's Name," this sermon will battle the temptation to depend upon one's own righteousness as a means of salvation. It discusses Paul's argument that, despite his impeccable pedigree, he realized that nothing short of Jesus's righteousness is sufficient. The sermon challenges believers to avoid legalism and encourages non-believers to abandon self-righteousness. Furthermore, it points toward Christ as the source of righteousness and emphasizes identification with Christ as the only possible hope for eternal life. There are no righteous people. There is no other way to heaven except through Christ and Him crucified.

Introduction: A businessman well known for his ruthlessness once announced to writer Mark Twain, "Before I die, I mean to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I will climb Mount Sinai and read the Ten Commandments aloud at the top." "I have a better idea," replied Twain. "You could stay in Boston and keep them."¹

While we may agree and chuckle at this story, we all battle the desire to do great things and be recognized for great things. Perhaps that is what this businessman desired to do. Conversely, Mark Twain jovially chastised the man, encouraging him to practice following what he claimed to value. Hopefully, though, we realize that keeping the Ten Commandments is impossible without the power of the Holy Spirit, and we fail, even then. We are sinful, unrighteous people who cannot keep the Commandments. Our attempts to do great things or right things are futile when it comes to eternal matters. We are not righteous.

We must not claim self-righteousness (Phil. 3:7-8)

Examine the Apostle Paul. (Reference Philippians 3:3-6 for background.) Paul was a superstar among the Jews. His background, his pedigree, and his zeal gave him the right to brag among religious circles. He was at the top of his game. If anyone had a right to consider himself worthy, it was Paul. He knew his lineage and achievements were absolute rubbish because none of them compared to the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which he received when Paul came to know Him. He recognized the superiority and worth of Jesus's righteousness despite any earthly personal loss or cost he incurred due to his alignment with Jesus.

There is not a thing we can do to earn, purchase, or enact righteousness. No matter how great we may be seen in man's eyes, there is no righteousness within us. Many people earn advanced

¹ Moody Bible Institute's *Today in the Word*, September 1991, p. 32, in http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/s/self_righteous.htm, accessed September 28, 2023.

degrees, gain great financial success, and have amazing influence over others, but despite their greatest efforts, they cannot gain righteousness. Humanity has lived with the misconception of self-righteousness since the Fall and has sought to enter eternal life by our own merit ever since that moment.

We must embrace righteousness in Christ, alone (Phil. 3:9)

Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees. He was full of zeal for the Law. He had kept the Jewish law and all its permutations only to meet Jesus on the Damascus Road and find out that rather than doing God's work, he was persecuting Jesus. This experience humbled, enlightened, and saved Paul from himself and eternal damnation. He had to come to an understanding that righteousness is found only through faith in Christ. He did. Paul went from persecuting Christians to spreading the gospel. His life was dramatically changed.

Believers are those who have come to embrace the truth that righteousness is only available through Jesus. After attempting to earn their way to heaven, they relinquish the struggle and depend on Him and His victory for their salvation. Without this realization and relinquishment, without faith, it is impossible to please God, and righteousness remains unobtained. Only when a person realizes the ineffectiveness and impotence of his own abilities and surrenders to Christ, does he receive righteousness.

Our identity in Christ will be our only hope (Phil. 3:10)

Instead of pursuing his own goals by his own power, Paul began to pursue a closeness with Jesus; he made complete identification with Christ his passion. He realized that the only possibility to reach eternal life was found in Jesus. A lifetime of attempting to be the best rule-follower and rule-enforcer led to nothing. Paul changed his pursuit.

Many people mistakenly believe they can earn their way to heaven by doing good things or doing the "right" thing. They believe when they die God will find them to be good enough to inherit eternal life. They may not openly state this or even realize it, but they are depending upon their own righteousness, while their righteousness is non-existent. Following rules and enforcing rules is called legalism. While there are boundaries for safety and boundaries of acceptable behaviors, they will not lead to eternal life and righteousness. God demands perfection, but no amount of rule-following eliminates sin, which is found in our hearts. A perfect God in a perfect heaven will not allow imperfection to enter. He does, however, offer His perfection in exchange for our imperfection. What a mighty God!

Conclusion: Without Jesus's righteousness given to us through a relationship with Him, we are doomed. Righteousness only comes from God. We may strive to do the right thing and strive to insist that others do the right thing, but we will fail to do the right thing. If we find ourselves claiming self-righteousness, we are wrong.

God's Word clearly teaches that all our attempts are in vain. The law, including the Ten Commandments, teach us our inability to save ourselves. The Old Testament points us toward the need for a Savior. The New Testament introduces us to Jesus Christ, in whom we finally find righteousness, forgiveness, and salvation.

Do you find yourself being self-righteous or imposing legalism upon others? Do you mistakenly think or act as if good deeds and proper behaviors will somehow deliver you into eternal life? Ask God to reveal any tendencies you may have in this area. Commit to leaning solely upon Christ for eternal life.

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