

## Christ Sets the High Bar on Holiness

✝ Where we fail...

✝ He must prevail !

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Master Teacher, dearly redeemed disciples of our Lord:

Near Cincinnati OH, the freeway curving high to the left suddenly disappears. The road and guard rail seem to be gone. Heart attack? Almost. Hang on. The family minivan is safe in a few seconds.

We need those guard rails on a bridge or railing on a balcony to sooth our nerves by boundaries. That's one blessing of God's law in Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*. God's laws are like the bright lines on a dark freeway to keep you out of the ditch. And if you stray a little, the modern bumper strips wake you – like the mirror in the morning that shows you have some work to do. Neither the mirror nor the highway lines can get you anywhere. We'll discover that answer together in a few minutes. For now, just look how **Christ Sets The High Bar on Holiness**. Does gentle Jesus really want us to see...?

✝ Where we fail...

One of the reasons so many people today hate the Bible is because of stories like King David in our FIRST READING (2 Samuel 11:1-17, 26-27) This is the "Sweet Psalmist of Israel"? "*A man after my own heart*" (Acts 13:22), God called him? King David used the sword of the enemy to murder the husband of the wife he violated by adultery! David broke every oath and tried to cover up his sin! That's a hero in your Bible? The narcissistic, self-righteous Pharisee in all of us says, "A least I never did that!"

So, Jesus turns up the light of God's law to expose these sins that start in our hearts. He's teaching from the premise so clearly stated in James: "*Whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles in one point has become guilty of breaking all of it.*" (James 2:10 EHV) God's law is like a window; break a part and you've broken all of it.

Bitterness and anger, hateful words in God's judgment are just as evil as murder. **We fail** under the Fifth Commandment. Lust in the heart is already adultery in God's view. And that's the only view that counts, come the Judgment Day. Sixth Commandment? **We fail**. None of Jesus' disciples ever cut off body parts or put out an eye. They got Jesus' lesson to *amputate sin from your life*, but how? God's gift of marriage only works for one man and one woman committed to each other for life. Divorce is allowed only for infidelity or malicious desertion. (1 Corinthians 7:15) In oaths too is **Where we fail...**

At the end of last Sunday's sermon, we looked closely at the last verse of the text, Matthew 5:20: "*Indeed I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and experts in the law, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*" Jesus is using these verses of today's text to show us that the super self-righteous highly religious Pharisees were not keeping God's law either. That's one of the biggest problems in Christianity today. So many Christians are taught that they've reached some high level of holiness, but it only exists in their own mind. If you read some of the stories in *Forward in Christ*, people coming out of the holiness church bodies flatly tell you that their churches were full of hypocrites. If we rely on our own good works and outward performance, then it's true of our church too. Pastor and people need to confess their sins in honest repentance. Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount* shows that under God's commandments **We fail**. This stern preachment of the law tears down to the depths of our hearts and bottoms out in our sin-sick soul. God's law demands eternal punishment for every sin. **Where we fail...** what can we do but cry out, "Lord, save us. We perish!"

## ✠ He must prevail !

That's why Jesus came to this sin cursed earth. Christ alone could live the holy life that God demands. Christ alone could die the innocent death we deserve. Christ alone could pay for the sins of all. Christ alone shed the only holy precious blood that washes away all guilt and sin. Christ alone rose from the dead and left His tomb empty to shout that God is fully and completely satisfied with the price Jesus paid for your soul. God bought your mortgage on your heavenly mansion and paid for it with his holy precious blood. He made a gift of your guilt with an eternal inheritance that can never perish spoil or fade. This is God's glory. In Christ and Christ alone, **He must prevail!** Let me illustrate how **He must prevail!**

Every religion tries to solve the problem of guilt but only ends up with something like a shiny new car. Get in, but all you can do is sit in the driver's seat like little kid making engine noises because there is no engine. Bright lines and guardrails get you nowhere. You're stuck with your guilt.

But then God comes along and puts the engine in the car. It's the Good News that lights up Jesus Christ saving you from your sin, forgiving you now and forever. That good news Gospel is the only engine that can get you home to heaven for an eternity of bliss with God. That was God's promise from the very beginning, and it's still God's proclamation in the death and resurrection of His own Son.

Problem is, we are all born spiritually blind and deaf and dead in our sins. We can't find the car with the engine, much less get into it. So, God gave us the key that gets us *into* His Kingdom by the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. He says, ***"The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off for all whom the Lord our God will call."*** (Acts 2:38) Baptism opens the door and starts the engine. Eternal life begins as soon as you're baptized and continues as long as you live in repentance to God. Jesus came to free us *from* sin. Jesus did not come to free us *to* sin.

With the engine purring with baptismal peace, how long before the storms of life and high hills of responsibility exhaust your fuel? God has free refills each time He gives us that celebration supper of remembrance in his death, ***"Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."*** Christ alone can fuel your faith. **He must prevail!** in the fuel of His Holy Supper. The Holy Spirit's Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and sacrament, carry us over the **High Bar** of God's **Holiness** safe home to heaven. That ***"righteousness from God [that] comes through faith"*** (Romans 1:17; 3:21f; 10:3) is the only righteousness that ***surpasses the righteousness of the Pharisees and experts in the law.*** Here Christ alone **prevails!**

As the saying goes, *If God is your copilot, trade places.* Jesus creates your heart new to eagerly forgive and forget. Any memory of past wrongs is another opportunity to pray with Jesus, ***"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."*** Surrounded by beautiful people? Instead of being envious, pray for them to give glory to God and find fulfilling relationships based on love and respect. Substitute swearing like "OMG" – no way! That's done. Lord, let my "Yes" be "Yes" and my "No" be "No" – to say what I mean and to mean what I say. In my heart and lips be glorified, gracious God.

Now you can stay busy in a good way, not like King David who stayed at home in the spring instead of going off to fight the Lord's battles. "Idleness is the devil's workshop." With your Gospel-created new heart, power and riches and maybe even your good looks can serve the Savior and His saints.

Every day's a new song: "Jesus, take the wheel." You drive. Amen.