

**Rev Shawn Arndt**  
**Sunday, February 12, 2023**  
**Be What Jesus Says You Are**

*Praise be to Jesus, who brought life and immortality  
to light through the gospel. Amen.*

*Dear Friends in Christ,*

I want to start today with a true or false statement. Don't worry, you won't be graded!

Here it is: (Talking about a person God has brought to faith in Jesus Christ), "Good works are necessary." So true or false: Good works are necessary.

Now at first we might want to say false. After all, the Bible makes it unmistakably clear that we are not saved by what we do, but by what God has done for us. The Apostle writes: **it is by grace (a gift) you have been saved, through faith—and this (including faith) is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

So we are saved 100% by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even our faith that believes that comes as a gift from God the Holy Spirit!

So clearly it is false to say: **good works are necessary to save us**. But *that's not* the statement we began with. I did not say: Good works save us. All I said was: Good works are necessary.

And that statement, good works are necessary is totally true. In fact that phrase: "**good works are necessary**" comes straight out of our Lutheran Confessions which state what the Bible says. *The Formula of Concord* says: "**good works are indeed necessary**"—and then immediately adds: "**not for salvation, however, but for other reasons...**"

So good works do not save us, but believers will do them for *other reasons*. And one of those reasons is taught by a picture used throughout the pages of the Bible: a tree. Just as a living tree produces fruit, so living faith in Jesus produces fruits of faith: good works. Or to use the picture in today's Gospel: just as salt makes things salty and just as light shines, so believers in Christ will produce good works.

And that's simply because that is what believers do, just as trees produce fruit, just as light shines and salt makes things salty.

And this what Jesus says to you as one of His own: **You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world... In the same way let your light shine in people's presence, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**

Salt makes things salty, light shines, and Jesus' disciples do **good works**.

But why? To earn points before God?

Certainly Not! Not when Jesus says this: **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.**"

The Pharisees were a religious group that believed they could earn their way to life with God by keeping his laws. They thought, as many people still do, you've got to do something to be saved.

And the truth is, the Pharisees put their money where their mouth was when it came to God's commands! They didn't only give a tenth of their money to church as God commanded for the Old Testament believers, but they went above and beyond, even being sure to give a tenth of whatever grew in their small herb gardens outside their kitchens! **The Pharisees** counted up 613 specific commandments they made a point to live by each day.

So for Jesus to say you need to have righteousness greater than **the Pharisees**, means you'd have to be absolutely perfect to be saved! Indeed, if you read the rest of Matthew 5-7, you'll hear how God's Word even condemns sinful thoughts, vengeance in the heart, worry and so on.

Here's the point. If the **Pharisees** weren't good enough to earn heaven by what they did, then none of us can, because we are all sinful by nature and so imperfect!

The only way to be saved is Jesus, who did not come **to destroy the Law or the Prophets... but to fulfill them**. Only Jesus, the Holy Son of God, who became man and took our place under God's law, only Christ kept every commandment perfectly. All Jesus did and said and thought was holy and perfect all the time! He **fulfilled** God's **Law** and earned heaven.

But He did not do it for himself, but for us, to give us the credit as though we were the ones who kept the commandments. Through God's gift of faith in Jesus, you now have a **righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees**, and so only by what Jesus has done you have a place in **the kingdom of heaven!**

So we don't do good works to be saved, because only Jesus' works save us! So then what purpose do our works have? Well, certainly they are a way we express our thanks and love to the Lord for saving us. But Jesus points to something else when He calls us **salt** and **light**, he points to an important purpose.

You don't put **salt** on your **salt**. **Salt** doesn't need **salt**. Other food needs **salt**, especially in Jesus' day. Back then, the main use of salt was to preserve food. Before refrigerators, **salt** kept your food from rotting.

The Bible tells us our world is rotting, it is dying because of sin and so are all those who live in it. Therefore the people of this world need the **salt** that Christians can provide – the only thing that can save and preserve lives eternally: the "**salt**" of the good news of Jesus who died and rose to save us from the eternal rot in hell sin deserves.

The same is true when Jesus says **you are the light of the world**. **Light** doesn't shine for its own good, but for the good of others, just as Jesus says about a **lamp: They put (the lamp) on a stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house... in the same way, let your light shine... so that (people) may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven**.

Our world is steeped in the darkness of sin and unbelief. Only the bright light of God's Word with the message of forgiveness and life in Jesus rescues from the darkness of sin.

Yes, we do good works by following God's Word because we love Jesus and want to thank Him, but our purpose in doing so is to serve the people around us. We are to love our neighbors in such a way the love of Jesus, our reason for doing such things shines through. The goal is that through our words and actions others might hear and learn about Jesus so that brought to faith, they would **glorify God**.

That means our purpose is more than just being nice (now don't get me wrong, God's Word does teach us to be nice), but just being nice won't bring people to faith in Jesus. Only the Holy Spirit working through the good news of Jesus, the Gospel changes hearts and creates faith. So letting our **light shine** includes telling people about Jesus, **the true Light**, or inviting them to hear about Jesus.

Let me give you one concrete example: there is a woman in New Orleans who saw a group of WELS members who gave up vacation time to travel there to help rebuild her neighborhood after hurricane Katrina. She said she had to know more about why these people from 'way up North' would freely come to help. And so she asked, and she heard about Jesus, and the Holy Spirit did what He does and soon she was baptized and confirmed in our Church there.

Those believers **let their light shine** in their kindness, love and speaking of the Savior and God used it to lead that woman to **glorify the Father in heaven!**

What a glorious purpose Jesus gives us to be **salt and light** for our **world!**

There's just one problem though --- and it's us. It's how our old sinful selfishness can take away from our acting like salt and light, even leading people who know us to think poorly of the Church and Christ. Or the Lord moves time and space to bring an unbeliever into our life, into our neighborhood, and we let fear get in the way of telling them about Jesus or inviting them to hear His Word or are too preoccupied with ourselves to act as neighbors to them with love and kindness.

And so the darkness of our sin means we shouldn't even be saved, let alone be Jesus' **salt and light**.

Which makes it so amazing that the Son of God should speak these words: **You are the salt of the world... you are the light of the world.** Notice Jesus doesn't say: if you're good enough, then I'll make you my **light**. He doesn't you might be or someday will be.

No Jesus says **you are**. Not a conditional, but a fact! This is who you are dear Christian. Not because you and I did anything, but because the Son of God saved us. Because Jesus took our sin and our darkness on Himself on the cross in the dark hours of Good Friday, because Jesus makes His perfect shining life count for ours, **you are the salt... you are the light... you are** His rescued people with this awesome purpose.

Remember who it is that says this about you. It is the God who spoke and the universe came to be. It is the Jesus who spoke a word and a man dead for four days came alive again!

So when Jesus says something, that's what it is. When He said in your baptism that you are 'God's child,' then **you are...** when Jesus says through the lips of the pastor in the worship service or you hear from a fellow Christian: 'you are forgiven' then **you are!**

When Jesus says **you are salt and light** then **you are** what He **says you are** by His own powerful Word, with His power working to equip you to **let your light shine!**

Now understand, letting our light shine doesn't mean pretending be perfect when we're not, but is all about putting the spotlight on Jesus, the true light, something we can do by being honest and admitting to friends and family and neighbors our own flaws, how we struggle with sin too and how it is Jesus alone who saves us the darkness and will bring us to endless light and life with Him forever, the very thing He wants for them too!

Dear friends in Jesus. **You are salt and light...** listen to what Jesus says. See what He gives you freely through His Word, believe what He says He has made you: **salt and light** and simply *be what Jesus says you are!* Amen.

*You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. Amen.*