

O Lord Jesus Christ, who sat lowly in the midst of the doctors *of the Law*, both hearing them and asking them questions: Give unto Your servants that humility of heart, and willingness to learn, without which no man can find wisdom; to the glory of Your holy name. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 44)

So the Jews grumbled about [Jesus], because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life.

In Christ Jesus, our perfect substitutionary Student of God's Word who has come down from heaven, dear fellow redeemed:

When we talk about the work of Jesus in our behalf we often focus on the last two days of His humiliation leading up to His death on the cross. Perhaps we would include the last three years of His public ministry in which He preached, taught, performed miracles while being rejected often even threatened with stoning and being thrown off a cliff. But it is His entire life lived under the holy Law of God for us that makes up a large portion of His work in our behalf.

We needed a perfect substitute that could sacrifice a holy life in our place. The Third Commandment requires holy living in regard to the Word of God. Jesus fulfilled this commandment perfectly for us just as He did for all the commandments. In our text for today in regard to his exchange with a home territory crowd, let us observe for our blessing and comfort that **Even the Christ, the Son of God, Was Taught by God for Us.**

I

When it comes to school we think of Substitutes only for the teacher, not the students, but this is what you and I need – a substitute student who can perfectly fulfill all righteousness of gladly hearing and learning the Word of God. Our hearing as sinners is often very selective and our questions and answers are self-serving. But the power of God's Word is

able to break through our uncircumcised hearts and ears and give us of the Father's grace.

Prior to falling into sin Adam and Eve had a perfect knowledge of God and obeyed God perfectly. They did not need the revealed Word of God to enlighten and give them knowledge of God and His love for the entire human race. But now the sinner needs to be drawn to God by God the Father Himself through the work of the Spirit. What at first was a given, now appears to be foolishness to the sinful mind.

The Jews who had approached Jesus in our text were operating with such sinful hearts and minds. They had witnessed the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 the day before. So excited by this miracle they followed Jesus to make Him their earthly king who they hoped could outdo Moses of old. But Jesus was not interested in such a temporary worthless crown of human glory. He came from the Father as the King of kings who would bestow eternal life through the bread of life, Himself, the God-Man Savior of the entire human race, wearing only the crown of great humiliation made of thorns.

They played the familiarity card to discredit any such bold claims by Jesus. They said: "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" What they so easily dismissed, Mary had been pondering in her heart for the past 30 some years. Yes, Jesus was her firstborn son, but He was also the eternal only-begotten Son of God!

Imagine raising such a Son as your child, this holy Child come down from heaven! Joseph and Mary witnessed the most peculiar sight in the temple when their 12 year old son was sitting among the teachers respectfully listening to them teach Him the Word of God, asking deep insightful questions as one who sincerely wanted to learn. Those gathered around expressed their delighted amazement at this young boy's understanding and answers given to the teachers' questions.

Their son, their holy Son sent down to them by God, was being taught by God through sinfully fallible parents and teachers. With what humility this holy Son of God fulfilled all righteousness for us sinners by holding God's Word sacred, gladly hearing and learning it.

II

Jesus in part answered the grumbling crowd in our text by observing this: "It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.'

Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.” He was saying to these doubters that they must be taught by God to understand the deep things of God. As they hear and learn the Word of the Father, they would come to know Him, the Son who was sent to save them and all sinners.

You and I are among those who must be taught by God, so our Substitute had to be taught as well, even though He is God Himself! So instead of the crowd objecting that Jesus was raised by Joseph and Mary, they should have come to know He was about doing this for them. And as Jesus would go on to declare: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life.”

Believing in Jesus as the Christ sent from heaven to be our holy and perfect Substitute for our needed righteousness and the holy Sacrifice for all our unrighteousness gives life. This is the bread of life, the holy son born of Mary and the only begotten Son of God conceived by the Holy Spirit. Believing is the spiritual eating of Christ, which gives life to us here and now in the midst of this world shrouded in the darkness of death.

Faith in Christ as Savior is dependent upon the working of the Spirit through the Word of God. This is the power source for your faith, without the Word of God active in your lives, faith dies. So when you have selective hearing of it, choosing only to hear what you want to hear, you change it into the word of sinful man. When you approach the Word of God with your self-serving considerations, thinking that you can find your righteousness in your own doing, you change it into the word of sinful man.

Now of course we have all sinned against the Third Commandment in regard to keeping God’s Word sacred. But even if there are other acts of unrighteousness over which you have been especially struggling lately, you can and should know that this Holy Child fulfilled all righteousness for you. Your disrespect of others, hatred, lust, covetousness were temptations not unknown to our Lord from His youth on to adulthood. But even though He was likewise tempted, He remained perfect for you.

Because His blood was holy and precious to God the Father it was able to atone for all your acts of unrighteousness. So it was not just some side comment at the end of our Gospel lesson for today when we are told that our Lord returned to Nazareth with His parents and “increased in

wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man." God was about obeying His own Law for you my fellow sinners, so that the blood that would be shed would make sufficient payment for your sins and for all sinners of all time.

The Father has drawn you to Himself through His perfect and holy Son born of the blessed Virgin Mary. And as promised He who took that life into the shadow of death for you and rose again, will raise you to life. You who believe, that is, who eat of Jesus' flesh and drink of His blood in Word and Sacrament possess life. Through this constant feasting upon the Bread of Life sent down from heaven you have God's power at work in you forgiving you all your sins against all the holy commands of God. Praise our Lord that you have been taught by God to know and trust in the holy Substitute He sent down from heaven for you. Truly Jesus was about doing His Father's business for you, preparing for you the crown of everlasting glory. Amen.