

What Jesus Practiced, That We Preach and Believe

We bow our hearts in prayer: Lord Jesus, You have carried our burden, and we rest in You. Keep us from *despising the preaching of Your pardoning Word and glad to hear and learn it.* Amen.

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The theme for this Sunday of the Christian Church Year is faith.

Job expressed it in the OT lesson: **“For I know that my Redeemer lives...**

And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God,”

St. John explained it in the Epistle Lesson saying,

the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God... has overcome the world.

You heard Jesus describe it in the Gospel lesson,

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

This faith, this belief that Jesus is the true Son of God and true man

and that He is your Savior, that He died for your sins and rose to life again, is not a product of your natural knowledge or of your reason or intellect.

As St. Paul says, **faith is a gift of God, not a result of works or our own doing**^{Ephesians2:8-10}

It's a gift He gives in specific ways, the primary of which is the preaching of God's Word, as St. Paul also tells us: **faith comes from hearing,**

and hearing through the word of Christ.^{Romans10:17}

And if faith comes through hearing God's Word, then someone is to preach it to you.

In Thomas' case, Jesus had authorized His Apostles to forgive and retain sins,

to preach in His name: of His death and resurrection for the salvation of man.

It is the Lord who properly puts men into the preaching office.

There are some, perhaps many, in this holy office who have **climbed in by another way,** who have not **entered the sheepfold by the Door. They are thieves and robbers.**^{John10:1}

And even those who are properly called and truly preach His Word are sinners and fallible.

And yet, even from such as these, God's sheep still hear their Shepherd's voice.

In our text for meditation, Jesus speaks of how we are to regard preachers of His Word.

Our text for meditation today is...

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to His disciples, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers.”^(ESV)

These are Your Words, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

When Jesus acknowledged that the scribes and Pharisees “s[**a**]t in Moses’ seat,” what He meant was that they occupied a holy office.
The scribes and Pharisees were, for many Jews, the rabbis, or teachers, of their day.
Today we would probably call them pastors/preachers.
As these ministers read from Scripture and correctly and faithfully expounded on it, Jesus exhorted the people to **do and observe whatever they** [told them].

But Jesus wasn’t oblivious to reality, either.

He knew, better than anyone, what errors, hypocrisy, and rank unbelief there was among the clergy, the rabbis and scribes and Pharisees.

They incorrectly handled God’s Word: While they read the Law to the people from Scripture, it was not reflected in lives by humble obedience to it, but they were proud & hypocritical.

The hard burdens they tied up on the people were the full force of God’s commands, which they were unwilling to move with their finger, as Jesus said,

they **rejected the commandment of God in order to establish [their] tradition!**^{Mark7:9}

And they left the people without true hope of the Messiah, the Redeemer/Forger of sins.

So here, Jesus Himself puts on His listeners a two-fold heavy burden to bear (at times heavier).

First, the burden of active listening and spiritual discernment.

You are to be distinguishing what is truly the Lord’s Word and what is the word of men.

And as you observe the lives of the clergy, you are to discern what is a godly example and what is contrary to God’s Word and will.

(And, where possible, flee from such communions where God’s Word is handled incorrectly, to those who preach the true Gospel of forgiveness through Christ.)

But the second burden is heavier than the first.

The second is to continue to listen, **do**, and **observe** what God’s Word says, not forsaking it, humbly respecting the Office of the Ministry, even while knowing sinners occupy it.

This, Dear Fellow Redeemed, is a burden that is not only heavy, but impossible to bear,

because Jesus is not telling you just to “be in Church,” but He’s including all of what is meant in the 3rd and 4th Commandments, namely that *we should fear and love God, so*

that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it, as well as, not despising those in proper spiritual authority over you,

but honoring, serving, obeying, loving, and esteeming them.

And yet, how hard is it for you not to *despise preaching* when you can’t stand the way your pastor stumbles over words, or uses odd inflections, or ... ?

How impossible is it for you to *gladly hear* the Word from a pastor whom you don’t esteem?

Whom you haven’t forgiven because you believe he has wronged you in some way?

But how much more impossible is this listening, **doing**, and **observing** when the pastor

preaches on a sin that hits really close to home, or needs to confront you regarding a sin?

We put up our defenses and say, “He’s being too literalistic, or too legalistic.”

You justify your defense because you have seen other parishioners do it, too.
You try to salve your conscience, calling him a hypocrite
because you've even seen that particular pastor do the same thing himself.

But you know, people find reasons to reject God's Word even from a perfect/righteous Pastor.
We know the scribes and Pharisees weren't too fond of Jesus,
and His confronting their hypocrisy and pride and legalism.
Even many of His disciples walked away from Him due to "hard sayings." (John 6)
Would you doubt that some people thought Jesus had annoying mannerisms?
Maybe some went home thinking that He would be more popular
if He wasn't so hard-nosed and confrontational.

But as Jesus points out, even the wicked, sinful, hypocritical life of a minister does not
nullify God's Word, and that is a great comfort to your preachers, and for you as well.
God's Word still remains true, even from the lips of sinful pastors.

But the burden Jesus places on you isn't one that He wasn't willing to move with His finger.
In fact, instead of tying it up on you, He loosens it for you and shouldered it Himself.
He Himself grew up through some poorly crafted sermons, yet did not despise preaching.
He saw the sins of the hypocritical rabbis, and noticed the pride and the show they put on,
but He still *honored, obeyed, loved, and esteemed* God's sinful ministers.
He had to bear with preachers who read God's Word, but utterly mishandled it,
and yet, continued in His study to discern what was truly God's Word and will.
Nor did such erroneous preaching deter Him from dutifully preaching the pure Word/God,
even when He knew it would bring adversity upon Him,
even when it would directly lead to His death, just a few short days after our text.

And meditate on this, the Good News of forgiveness won for you by Jesus dying on the cross,
was not "good news" for Him, at least in the selfish sense.
But what do we hear, that even as a 12 year-old boy, at the bloody festival of Passover,
He was *glad to hear and learn* what the Father said to Him about His work of redemption,
even knowing that it would someday be Him on the altar before God.
And He was pleased to do it all for you.

These Words and practices of Jesus', recorded in Scripture, are true.
Where you have failed to **do and observe** God's commands in *gladly hearing* His Word,
Where you have dishonored or held His ministers sent to you in low esteem,
Jesus has not only shouldered your burden of guilt and sin, but has carried it to the cross.
There He, the Passover Lamb, was sacrificed for you, willingly burdened to set you free.

This is the message that God's ministers are glad to preach and God's people glad to believe.
On the day of His resurrection, this was the message that Jesus sent His Apostles,
and subsequently all ministers to give: your sins are forgiven.

Blessed are they who hear this Word of God and keep it in their hearts. Amen.
Soli Deo Gloria