

## Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 58:3-9a

<sup>3</sup> ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ “Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. <sup>4</sup> Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. <sup>5</sup> Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? <sup>6</sup> “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? <sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? <sup>8</sup> Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. <sup>9</sup> Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. “If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

**58:3** *fasted ... fasting.* See v. 6; a time of self-denial and repentance for sin. After the fall of Jerusalem, the number of fast days increased (see Lev 16:29 and NIV text note; see also Zec 7:5). (CSB)

*humbled ourselves.* Cf. 2Ch 7:14; 1Ki 21:29. (CSB)

*you have not noticed.* Note the same attitude in Mal 3:14; cf. Lk 18:12. (CSB)

ON THE DAY OF YOUR FASTING – Here you see hypocrisy and gross sins simultaneously joined together. Here He defines what a true fast is, and He appears so harsh as if He were condemning external fasting. But He rejects fasting because it wants to become a cover to blind our eyes so that we may not see our sins. (Luther)

*exploit all your workers.* See 3:14–15; 10:2. (CSB)

While they are publicly engaged in holy exercises, at home the laborer who is working for them is slaving under heavy burdens and is being oppressed. Heavy social wrongdoings are being tolerated. (Leupold)

*your own pleasure.* What was to be an occasion for self-denial became an opportunity for self-advancement at the expense of others. (TLSB)

**58:4** FASTING...QUARRELING..STRIFE – Fasting only put them in an ugly mood. (TLSB)

Here He says that sins and external morals call for no love and mercy; they only tyrannize. Thus every hypocrite, most zealous for his own works, is the worst kind of tyrant and the most poisonous snake, and so they can hide their poison under an appearance of godliness, but meanwhile they are burning with zeal for revenge and for doing evil. There is nothing but to pass judgment, to disparage, and to do injury even in the best things. Meanwhile they say, "I am not fighting with the brothers, since I am not doing this in the abstract and in an ungodly manner, but I desire to offer obedience to God, and I do this for the sake of righteousness and with a proper zeal and concern for peace." Thus in all estates, in business, government, or religion, they can cover up their sins either by a show of fasting or at least by counterfeit words. (Luther)

*to be heard on high.* Hypocritical religious activity is a hindrance to prayer (see 1:15; 59:2). (CSB)

**58:5** *bow down.* Cf Mt 6:1, 16–18. (TLSB)

*like a reed.* A sign of weakness and humility (see 42:3 and note). (CSB)

Bent by wind and weight, not sincerity. (TLSB)

*sackcloth and ashes.* Cf. 1Ki 21:27; Jnh 3:5–8. (CSB)

*Sackcloth* denotes worthless clothing, while *ashes* refers to vile places and a reclining in an inferior place which is not furnished with carpets. (Luther)

*acceptable.* A term often applied to sacrifices (see 56:7; 60:7; Lev 1:3). (CSB)

**58:6** The Lord calls for acts of justice and righteousness, rather than lip service. Religious observances cannot substitute for moral integrity (cf Ps 15; Mi 6:6–8). Apart from a love toward neighbor, worship and fasting deadens people to the weightier matters of justice (cf Mt 23:23). (TLSB)

*of injustice.* During the siege of Jerusalem, Hebrew slaves were rightly released—only to be reclaimed by their masters (see Jer 34:8–11). (CSB)

*yoke.* See v. 9; 9:4; 10:27, where the yoke imposed by Assyria is mentioned. (CSB)

*oppressed.* See 1:17. (CSB)

The rules of enslavement of fellow Israelites and their lands (Ex 21:2-11; Lv 25:39-55; Dt 15:12-18) were often abused in order to retain people as slaves and hold their lands. (TLSB)

**58:7** *share your food ... provide ... shelter ... clothe.*† The outward evidence of genuine faith. See Job 31:17–20; Eze 18:7, 16 and Jesus' identification with the hungry and naked in Mt 25:35–36. (CSB)

Good works of a sincere heart. (TLSB)

*flesh and blood.* Probably refers to close relatives (Ge 37:27), but see 2Sa 5:1. (CSB)

People having the same parents or ancestors (cf Gn 29:14; 37:27; 2Sm 5:1). (TLSB)

**58:8-14** “The preaching of rewards and punishments is necessary. God’s wrath is set forth in the preaching of punishments. This applies to the preaching of repentance. Grace is set forth in the preaching of rewards. Just as Scripture, in the mention of good works, often embraces faith—for it wishes righteousness of the heart to be included with the fruit—so sometimes it offers grace together with other rewards” (Ap V 244). (TLSB)

**58:8** *Then.* Repeated in vv 9–10. Let them show the sincerity of their allegiance to God by not mistreating their fellowmen. Then He will lead and protect them. (TLSB)

*light.*† The joy and glory of the salvation brought by the Lord (see 9:2; 60:1–3). (CSB)

Light comes from doing the work of the Lord, rather than darkness of one’s own works (cf 5:20; 8:20; 47:5; 60:2). (TLSB)

*healing.* See 57:18 and note. (CSB)

*Healing* means progress, increase, and your growth in this life and the next. A generous hand never suffered want. God’s mercy is wider than ours. If we have given ourselves, it will be given us a hundredfold, as Matt. 19:29 tells us. “You may cheerfully give to your neighbor; I will give you much more in all material things, and you shall quickly grow rich.” (Luther)

*go before you ... be your rear guard.* See 52:12 and note. The Lord will protect them and guide them. (CSB)

Cf Is 52:11–12. Luther: “These are excellent and golden consolations for the conscience [2Pt 1:10; 2Co 1:12].... Although we must not rely on this [evidence of good works], yet, since we are justified, it puts my conscience at peace, that I do evil to no one, and thus I walk safely in God. This is what it means for righteousness to go before, when we boast before the world and against Satan that because the fruits of faith are there, I have not lived in vain” (AE 17:288). (TLSB)

*glory of the LORD.* Probably a reference to the pillar of cloud and fire in the desert (see 4:5–6; Ex 13:21; 14:20 and notes). (CSB)

**58:9** *Here am I.* See 65:1. (CSB)

Indicating the Lord is “a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). (TLSB)

*pointing finger.* A gesture of either contempt (see Pr 6:13) or accusation. (CSB)

Accusing others to protect one’s self. (TLSB)

*malicious talk.* See Pr 6:12–14. (CSB)

Slander rather than curses and wicked charms appear to be under consideration. (Leupold)

#### EPISTLE – 1 Corinthians 2:1-12

**When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. <sup>2</sup> For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup> I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. <sup>4</sup> My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.**

**2:1** *When I came to you.* On his initial trip to Corinth c. A.D. 51 (Ac 18). (CSB)

Cf Ac 18:1–17; Paul’s second missionary journey. (TLSB)

God’s decision to save the world through the lowly message of the cross (1:18–25) had been illustrated by his calling so many lowly people to form the Corinthian church (1:26–31). With the words “and I” (καὶ γώ), Paul now introduces a second illustration: himself. The “weak” and “foolish” nature of the Gospel had also been illustrated by the lack of showiness in his own preaching (2:1–2) and personal bearing (2:3) in the early days of his ministry among the Corinthians. (CC p. 83)

*with eloquence or superior wisdom.* See note on 1:17. Perhaps Apollos (Ac 18:24–28) had influenced the Corinthians in such a way that they were placing undue emphasis on eloquence and intellectual ability. (CSB)

καθ’ ὑπεροχὴν—Literally, “according to superiority” of speech or wisdom. κατά here means “in accordance with.” In nonbiblical Greek, the verb ὑπερέχω does not mean merely to excel, but “to rise above,” “to tower [over],” “to surpass.” The LXX uses the verb for Daniel “surpassing” all the wise men of Babylon (Dan 5:11). In the NT both the noun and the verb are applied to the superior position of rulers (participles of ὑπερέχω in 1 Pet 2:13 and Rom 13:1; ὑπεροχή in 1 Tim 2:2) Aristotle applied ὑπεροχή to the sense of superiority felt by the eloquent speaker. (CC p. 81)

Paul spent 18 months in Corinth testifying that the Christ was Jesus (Ac 18:5, 11). (TLSB)

**2:2** The heart of the Gospel is Jesus' atoning sacrifice, "the power of God" (1:18). Paul contrasted his simpler, focused missionary message with the more complex ideas of other teachers (e.g., Apollos, Cephas). (TLSB)

**I RESOLVE – ἔκρινα**—This does not necessarily mean that in coming to Corinth from his disappointing visit to Athens Paul "resolved" to adopt a new approach which did not rely so much on rhetoric and philosophy. Fee explains that "to say 'I resolved' means nothing more than that he purposed to continue his regular practice (cf. Gal. 3:1)." His resolve may have been sharpened by recent experiences with "flatterers" and "man pleasers" in Thessalonica (1 Thess 2:1–10). It may have been sharpened even more by his determination to distance himself from the sophists. Upon arrival in a city, a sophist would sometimes declaim on a topic suggested by the audience in order to show off his eloquence and win their approval. Paul's topic had long been predetermined by his commission to preach only Christ crucified. (CC p. 82)

*know nothing ... except Jesus Christ.* Paul resolved to make Christ the sole subject of his teaching and preaching while he was with them. (CSB)

This does not mean that Paul was totally lacking in rhetorical and debating ability. As a writer, he was a stylist of note. It would seem, however, that this was not matched by his ability as a speaker, a deficiency which seemed all the greater in comparison with the eloquence of Apollos. Paul's critics, at least, considered him a poor speaker, claiming that while "his letters are weighty and strong, ... his bodily presence is *weak* and his speech *contemptible*" (2 Cor 10:10; cf. 2 Cor 11:6). (CC p. 84)

*Jesus Christ.* See 1:30. (CSB)

*him crucified.* See 1:17–18, 23. (CSB)

**2:3 IN WEAKNESS** – Paul's weakness and that of his hearers emphasized God's power. (TLSB)

**FEAR... TREMBLING** – There was violent opposition to his message from the Jews in Corinth (Ac 18:12–17). Paul was meek, perhaps also recalling the beating, rioting, and indifference he experienced on the mission trip (Ac 16:16–17:34). (TLSB)

Jesus Christ had been crucified "in weakness" (2 Cor 13:4). In solidarity with his Lord, Paul too had carried out his ministry in suffering and weakness (1 Cor 2:3; Phil 3:10). Not only was Paul's presence as a public speaker unimpressive (2 Cor 10:10), but he suffered recurrent attacks of a debilitating malady (Gal 4:13; cf. 2 Cor 12:7). (CC p. 85)

**2:4 not with wise and persuasive words.** This does not give preachers a license to neglect study and preparation. Paul's letters reveal a great deal of knowledge in many areas of learning, and his eloquence is apparent in his address before the Areopagus (see Ac 17:22–31 and notes). Paul's point is that unless the Holy Spirit works in a

listener's heart, the wisdom and eloquence of a preacher are ineffective. Paul's confidence as a preacher did not rest on intellectual and oratorical ability, as did that of the Greek orators (see note on 1:17). (CSB)

*demonstration.* The Greek word is used of producing proofs in an argument in court. Paul's preaching was marked by the convincing demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit. (CSB)

Miracles. The Spirit creates faith through Jesus' miraculous death, resurrection, and His gift. (TLSB)

**2:1–5** The Good News is conveyed not through eloquence, but through humble messengers testifying about the cross. We look there for God's power and rest in His wisdom. • Dear Lord, thank You for revealing Yourself to me by Your cross. Receive this weak sinner and strengthen me for service. Amen. (TLSB)

### *Wisdom From the Spirit*

**<sup>6</sup> We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. <sup>7</sup> No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. <sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. <sup>9</sup> However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" – <sup>10</sup> but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. <sup>11</sup> For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.**

**2:6** Up to this point, Paul has been warning the Corinthians that to rely on human wisdom is incompatible with preaching the "foolish" message of Christ crucified (see 1:18–25). But now, to ward off the possible misunderstanding that he is opposed to wisdom in any form, as if Christianity had *no* wisdom to offer, he adds this: "*Wisdom*, however, is what we speak" (2:6). In the Greek text, "wisdom" (σοφία) is placed first for emphasis. Wisdom, true wisdom, was indeed to be found in the preaching of Paul and his associates. Christ himself is the wisdom from God, wisdom that brings righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1:30). (CC p. 89)

*mature.* Wise, developed Christians; contrast the "infants" mentioned in 3:1 (see Heb 5:13–6:3). (CSB)

Well-grounded in the faith, benefiting from a deeper understanding (cf 14:20). (TLSB)

ν τοῖς τελείοις—Hays notes that the term "the mature" (οἱ τέλειοι) "appears frequently in the writings of Philo of Alexandria to describe those who have arrived at an advanced

stage of spiritual insight and perfection. Presumably, the Corinthian wisdom-enthusiasts described themselves in this way, in contrast to the [νήπιοι], the ‘infants’ or novices of lesser spiritual attainment.” (CC p. 87)

**2:7** *secret*. Cf. Ro 16:25–26; Eph 3:4–5; 1Ti 3:16. The secret, or mystery, was once hidden but is now known because God has revealed it to his people (v. 10). To unbelievers it is still hidden. (CSB)

Paul’s message is hidden only from a sinful and unreceptive world. (TLSB)

HAS BEEN HIDDEN – ESV has BEFORE THE AGES – Before creation. (TLSB)

In contrast to the wisdom of this age (2:6), the apostolic message has permanent value. For unlike the wisdom of this age and of its rulers, the apostolic message conveys *God’s* wisdom. In the Greek of 2:7, “God’s” is placed before “wisdom” for emphasis. The apostolic preaching is not a human message and cannot be evaluated by human criteria. It is “God’s wisdom in [the form of] a mystery, the hidden [wisdom] which God foreordained before the ages for our glory” (2:7). Jesus had praised the Father for concealing the mystery of the Gospel from the wise and understanding, and revealing it to babies (Mt 11:25; Lk 10:21). In Romans, Paul too breaks out in doxology for the proclamation of the Gospel, “according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed” (Rom 16:25–26). Foreshadowed in the OT from Gen 3:15 on, the full light of the Gospel, eagerly anticipated by many prophets and righteous people (1 Pet 1:10–12), had burst on the world in the incarnation and ministry of Jesus (Mt 13:16–17; cf. also Col 1:26) and was being revealed in the apostolic preaching. (CC pp . 90-91)

*for our glory*. God’s wisdom will cause every believer to share eventually in Christ’s glory (Ro 8:17). (CSB)

Realized in the world to come. (TLSB)

ἰς δόξαν ἡμῶν—“Glory” (δόξα) has an eschatological ring. The Christian looks forward to the day when “the body of our humiliation will be changed into conformity with the body of his [Christ’s] glory” (Phil 3:21). “The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed” (Rom 8:18; cf. 8:17, 21; 9:23). Believers have, indeed, already been glorified in hope (Rom 8:30). Kittel notes: (CC p. 88)

**2:8** *rulers of this age*. Such as the chief priests (Lk 24:20), Pilate and Herod Antipas (cf. Ac 4:27). (CSB)

The leaders at Jerusalem or the spiritual rulers and authorities against which we contend (Eph 6:12). (TLSB)

“None of the rulers of this age recognized” the wisdom of the Gospel (2:8). During the crucifixion, Jesus had prayed for them, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”

(Lk 23:34). According to Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch, it was because the residents of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize him or understand the words of the prophets that they fulfilled those words by condemning him (Acts 13:27; cf. Peter's words in Acts 3:17). Thus Jesus, Peter, and Paul all acknowledge that the rulers acted in ignorance. (CC p. 91)

**UNDERSTOOD – ἔγνωκεν**—This verb does not denote merely intellectual knowledge, but spiritual recognition “of the divine plan of salvation ... a knowledge which penetrates the βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ because it rests on the divinely given πνεῦμα [1 Cor 2:10].” (CC p. 88)

*crucified the Lord of glory.* The cross is here contrasted with the majesty of the victim. (CSB)

Jesus is the embodiment of glory and the source of our glory (cf v 7). “God’s Son truly suffered for us. However, He did so according to the attributes of the human nature, which He received into the unity of His divine person and made His own. He did this so that He might be able to suffer and be our High Priest for our reconciliation with God” (FC Ep VIII 14). (TLSB)

**2:9** *what God has prepared.* Probably not to be limited to either present or future blessing; both are involved (cf. vv. 7, 12). (CSB)

Miraculous acts of salvation in the OT, now surpassed by the mystery and miracles of Jesus’ works. *prepared.* God has already provided these great things. (TLSB)

It is significant that Paul adds that these are plans God has prepared “for those who *love him*” (1 Cor 2:9). We do not please him by displaying our knowledge and wisdom, but by showing him our love (cf. Rom 8:28). (CC p. 93)

**2:10 REVEALED IT TO US BY HIS SPIRIT** – The Spirit reveals God’s mysteries through the Gospel, even through the words Paul writes. (TLSB)

What the human eye, ear, and heart failed to discern (2:9) God has revealed to us through the Spirit (2:10). The Greek word ἡμῖν (“to us”) is placed first in 2:10 for emphasis. Rack their brains as they might, the worldly wise could not understand God and his mysterious wisdom. To these people everything remained a closed book. But “to us” as Christian people, however lowly our status, God has bared his heart, granting us the high privilege of being made privy to his glorious plan of salvation. (CC pp. 100-101)

*Spirit searches all things.* Not in order to know them, for he knows all things. Instead he comprehends the depth of God’s nature and his plans of grace; so he is fully competent to make the revelation claimed here. (CSB)

There will always be mystery about God’s person and nature, but we are given a glimpse of His ways through the cross. (TLSB)



**2:11 SPIRIT** – The immaterial aspect of a person: mind, soul, and personality. (TLSB)

**KNOWS THE THOUGHTS** – By comparison, only God’s Spirit can understand God’s mind. (TLSB)

Paul illustrates the Spirit’s deep knowledge of God by an analogy from human experience. No one knows precisely what is going on inside another person’s heart except the spirit of the person himself (2:11). In the same way, no one understands the mind of God except the Spirit of God himself. (CC p. 101)

**2:12 *spirit of the world.*** Cf. v. 6 (“wisdom of this age”); the spirit of human wisdom as alienated from God—the attitude of the sinful nature (Ro 8:6–7). (CSB)

The fashionable ideology of this fallen world. (TLSB)

τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ κόσμου—Compare the German expression “die Zeitgeist” (“the spirit of the time”). This secular “spirit” characterizes this finite age and stands in contrast to the divine “Spirit” given to Christians. The source of this worldly spirit is “the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2–3). (CC p. 97)

But when we became Christians through “the hearing of faith” (Gal 3:2) and through Baptism (Gal 3:27), what we received was not “the spirit of the world” (1 Cor 2:12), which is estranged from God and totally blind and deaf to the things of the Spirit. Puffed up with pride in its own cultural and philosophical accomplishments, its own religiosity and “spirituality”—indeed, its own popular personalities—this secular spirit is always trying to make the church conform to its own agenda rather than letting the church be conformed to the mind of Christ (2:16; cf. Rom 12:1–2). This spirit of secularism seeks to negate special revelation which has been graciously bestowed by God. (CC p. 101)

**SPIRIT WHO IS FROM GOD** – In contrast, “the Spirit which is from God” (1 Cor 2:12) gives God’s children a childlike appreciation of his rich grace and profound wisdom freely given us in the word of the cross. God’s purpose was that we might be aware of “the things graciously given to us by God” (2:12). In the words “the things graciously given” (τὰ ... χαρισθέντα) we hear the word “grace” (χάρις). These things graciously given include grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:3), together with all the gifts of grace, the miraculous gifts bestowed on the congregation (1:4–7) and, in Paul’s case, the grace which had called him to be an apostle and enabled him to labor so fruitfully (3:10; 15:10). As Lightfoot expresses it, the expression extends to all spiritual blessings and hopes conferred by the Gospel. (CC p. 102)

**FREELY GIVEN** – Provided by His grace. Only by the Spirit can we begin to understand His grace. “Through the Word He reveals and preaches, He illumines and enkindles hearts, so that they understand, accept, cling to, and persevere in the Word” (LC II 42). TLBSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 5:13-20

**13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. 14 “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.**

**5:13-16** Matthew’s readers/hearers have come to 5:13–16 and the teaching that follows it by a particular route: the Beatitudes (5:3–12). Taught, blessed, and strengthened by Good News from the Son of God and Servant of the Lord, Jesus’ disciples now receive their calling and identity as he continues to teach with authority (see 7:29). As was suggested in the discussion of the structure of the Sermon on the Mount, 5:13–16 serves as a general heading for the main body of the Sermon’s teaching (5:17–7:12). This little paragraph consists of two metaphors: “You are that which salts the earth” and “You are that which gives light to the world.” Precisely because these verses serve as a *general* heading for more specific teaching to come, the metaphorical language should not be pressed so hard that the imagery begins to limp. (CC)

Jesus commands His disciples to be salt and light. In the rest of the sermon, He will spell out specific ways in which they fulfill this calling. (TLSB)

**5:13** YOU ARE – The first thing to note about Jesus’ words is that they begin in the indicative mood: “You are ...” Though exhortation will follow in 5:16, the connection between blessing (5:3–12) and calling (5:13–16) is absolutely unbreakable. It is a question of the disciples’ identity. To be the disciples of Jesus and to receive his present and future blessing is at the same time to have become the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This relates to that fact that it is *Jesus* who calls them with authority and it is *Jesus* who decides the nature and character of his calling to them. Jesus’ disciples, then, are by definition the people who salt the earth and who light the world; no one else has this calling. This reality need not cause the disciples to fear, however. Their identity is not created or preserved by how well they acknowledge and live out their identity as salt and light. Their identity is created and preserved by the word of Jesus: “The poor in spirit are blessed, because the reign of heaven is theirs” (5:3, the first and programmatic Beatitude). (CC)

*salt.* Used for flavoring and preserving. (CSB)

By their way of life, Jesus’ disciples are to be as useful as salt is. (TLSB)

Salt was produced by drying seawater from mineral deposits near the Salt Sea preserves, so it reminded the Israelites that God would preserve His covenant with Abraham, including the messianic promise that through Abraham “all the families of the earth” would be blessed (Gn. 12:1-3). Ultimately, this was fulfilled in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. (TLSB note of Lev. 2:13)

ὕμεῖς ἐστε τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς—The explicit pronoun ὕμεῖς lends a note of emphasis: “You, my disciples—and no others—are ...” The same is true in 5:14. I take the genitive construction “salt of the earth” as objective (“that which salts the earth”) for two reasons: (1) the verb “to salt” (ἀλίζω) is close at hand (ἀλισθήσεται two clauses later), lending a verbal force to the noun “salt,” and (2) the parallel genitive construction in 5:14, “light of the world” also seems to be an objective genitive, “that which gives light to/enlightens the world.” (CC)

We should not try to narrow the meaning of “salt” too precisely. The image is parallel with “light,” and salt served many useful functions in the ancient world. What is clear is that the earth is evil, corrupt, deficient. The earth needs to be salted; people need to be called to “repent” and believe the Good News that in Jesus “the reign of heaven stands near” (4:17). Moreover, only Jesus himself, and then Jesus’ disciples by virtue of their relationship with him, can do for the world what it needs. If his disciples were to turn away from and reject his calling, they would “become tasteless” (5:13), and then no means would remain for the earth to receive the necessary blessing. (CC)

Jesus speaks to “his disciples” (5:1)—to Christians. There is no need, as Luther does, to limit the function of “salting” and “lighting” to teachers in the church. Each Christian will live out this calling according to his or her vocation. Jesus does not threaten his disciples with his words “It is still good for nothing except, after [it] has been thrown out, to be trampled underfoot by men.” He does teach them, however, that their calling is part and parcel of their life in him. A person who utterly refuses this calling is a person who has never entered through the doorway of the Beatitudes. A disciple who deserts the Lord who called him can no longer salt the earth and will be “thrown out” and “trampled” on the Last Day. (CC)

#### LOSES ITS SALTINESS – Becoming useless. (TLSB)

ἐὰν δὲ τὸ ἅλας μωρανθῇ, ἐν τίνι ἀλισθήσεται;—This second use of “salt” also has the definite article (τὸ ἅλας). The article is anaphoric, referring back to the first mention of the noun: “that salt already mentioned” in the first clause. The phrase ἐν τίνι illustrates that in the NT the preposition ἐν with the dative is patient of the whole range of translational options available to the simple dative case. Here it expresses means (“by what means will it be salted?”). (CC)

The impact of the salt and light metaphors has to do with the beneficial effect Jesus’ disciples have on the *world* in which they live as disciples. The real tragedy, then, should the salt become tasteless, is that the *earth* will not “be salted.” I have translated the future passive verb ἀλισθήσεται with true passive force (“will be salted”). The fully expressed equivalent here in 5:13 would be ἡ γῆ ἐν τίνι ἀλισθήσεται; “With what will the earth be salted?” The unexpressed subject (“it”) must be “the earth” and not “the salt.” The passive voice of ἀλίζω means “to be salted” (LSJ B, I), not “to become salty.” BDAG lists the meaning “to be made salty” only for this verse, and one suspects that the traditional understanding of this clause (that “salt” is the subject and that the verb

means “to become salty”) has become a somewhat circular proof for the existence of this derived meaning for the passive voice of the verb ἀλίζω. The only other NT use of the verb occurs in Mk 9:49 (also in the passive voice), where too it is modified by a dative of means and has a true passive force: “Everything will be salted with fire.” Lk 14:34 is a distinct (though clearly related) saying and cannot be used to “amend” the meaning of ἀλισθήσεται here from “be salted” to “become salty.” Lk 14:34–35 reads: “Therefore salt is good. But if even the salt has become tasteless, by what means will it [the salt] be seasoned [ἀρτυθήσεται]? It is fit for neither the ground [γῆ] nor the manure pile; they throw it out.” An important parallel in support of the translation “By what means will it [the earth] be salted?” occurs in LXX Lev 2:13. There one reads καὶ πᾶν δῶρον θυσίας ὑμῶν ἀλι ἀλισθήσεται, “And every gift of your sacrifice will be salted with salt,” that is, salt will be added to the sacrifice. (CC)

The verb *moraine* in the passive voice means “become tasteless or insipid.” Arndt observes that the salt used in Palestine can become tasteless when exposed to the weather for a long period of time. When that happens, there is no way to restore it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

*saltiness be restored?* Lit, “How shall it [humankind] be salted?” Humanity will not benefit if salt—or disciples—become useless. One might as well throw it out to be trampled underfoot. (TLSB)

NO LONGER GOOD...THROWN OUT – εἰς οὐδὲν ἰσχύει ἔτι εἰ μὴ βληθὲν ἔξω καταπατεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων—The syntax in this construction is a little obscure. Greek’s love of economy and ellipsis is not naturally shared by English readers and speakers! The implied subject of ἰσχύει is the neuter singular nominative τὸ ἅλας (“the salt”) earlier in the verse, which is also the referent of the neuter singular nominative aorist passive participle βληθὲν (from βάλλω). The verb ἰσχύει, “it is still good,” should be understood to be repeated after εἰ μὴ, “except,” and this implied verb then governs the infinitive καταπατεῖσθαι (the salt “is still good for nothing except [it is still good], after having been thrown out, to be trampled underfoot by men”). The predicate position participle βληθὲν has a temporal force: “after having been thrown out.” (CC)

**5:14** LIGHT OF THE WORLD – ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου—The genitive construction “light of the world” is objective: “that which gives light to the world.” See also the first textual note on 5:13 (“salt of the earth,” that is, “that which salts the earth”). (CC)

“That which gives light to the world” (5:14) is a similarly general image. Light casts out darkness. Darkness is associated with evil, with danger, with the condition of being lost and unable to find one’s way. Jesus’ disciples—because they have become his disciples—are the world’s light, for in Jesus, light has begun to shine in Galilee (4:16). Just as salt that loses its saltiness is an utter contradiction in terms, so is an “invisible” city set on a mountain or a “covered” lamp. Those images just do not make sense. A city that has been set on a mountain is meant to be seen by those pilgrims traveling to it. A lamp is lit in order to spread light to everyone who is in the house. Jesus’ argument

is irrefutable; to contradict him is to descend into absurdity. To seek to escape this calling means rejecting Jesus himself. He teaches with authority, and all his disciples, both ancient and modern, believe that in him they *are* God's means of blessing the world around them. The key, of course, is "in him." (CC)

John 8:12, "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Ephesians 5:8, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light."

Light is a universal symbol for what is beneficial to people. Jesus, the light of the world, called His followers to fulfill that function for the world. Augustine: "By the world must be understood not the heavens and the earth, but rather the men who are in the world or love the world" (NPNF 1 6:9). (TLSB)

CITY ON A HILL...HIDDEN – Just as there is no hiding the light of a city on a hill, the light of a true disciple cannot be hidden. (TLSB)

οὐ δύναται πόλις κρυβῆναι ἐπάνω ὄρους κειμένη—Although the participle κειμένη could be taken as adverbial ("not able to be hidden *while it is set on a mountain*"), it is better to take it as an attributive position adjectival participle directly modifying πόλις: "A city *set on a mountain* is not able to be hidden." (CC)

**5:15 lamp.** In Jesus' day people used small clay lamps that burned olive oil drawn up by a wick (see note on Ex 25:37 – The ancient lamp was a small clay saucer with part of its rim pinched together to form a spout from which protruded the top of a wick fed by oil contained in the saucer.) (CSB)

The light of a lamp is meant to illuminate a dark house. (TLSB)

οὐδὲ καίουσιν λύχνον—This is the indefinite use of a third personal plural verb (καίουσιν, "*they light*"), analogous to the English usage "I understand that *they* have discovered a cure for cancer." (CC)

*bowl.* A peck-sized bowl that held ground meal or flour. (CSB)

τὸν μόδιον—According to BDAG, μόδιος refers to "a peck-measure" of about 8.75 liters. "Two-gallon basket" is about the right size, and because most modern American readers (myself included) have no real idea about the size of a bushel, I have chosen this dynamic equivalent translation for the noun. (CC)

It was a measure for grain, holding about 2 gallons. The idea of lighting a lamp, burning precious oil, only to cover it with a bowl that conceals its light, is patently absurd. So, says Jesus, is a Christian who conceals his or her faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

**5:16 LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE** – λαμπάτω τὸ φῶς ὑμῶν—The familiar English translation “Let your light shine” might mask the presence of the third person *imperative* λαμπάτω, addressed to “your light” (τὸ φῶς ὑμῶν). It does not mean “allow” your light to shine. Jesus’ words actively exhort the disciples’ light to shine. The force of the imperative amounts to “I command that your light shine.” (CC)

**GOOD DEEDS...PRAISE YOUR FATHER** – The exhortation of 5:16 describes how that blessing will take place, namely, through the good works of Jesus’ disciples. These works are “your light,” which Jesus exhorts his disciples to shine in the presence of other people. Jesus will specify in the remainder of his teaching in the Sermon (5:17–7:12) what some of those important good works are. By nature those good works are public and visible and done with one purpose in mind: that others may glorify the disciples’ heavenly Father (5:16). In the first place, this must refer to the conversion of the world to faith and discipleship. In the second place, the purpose of the disciples’ good works is the edification of fellow believers. To glorify the heavenly Father, one must know him rightly. One can know that heavenly Father rightly only through the right knowledge of his Son (11:25–27). (CC)

The good works of Jesus’ disciples will be carried out in their “ordinary” vocations. Those works and those lives, however, are to be *extraordinary*, as Jesus’ later teaching makes clear (especially in 5:21–7:12). Jesus’ disciples are called to lives of *remarkable* purity, faithfulness, piety, love, and generosity. (CC)

There is a particular trap waiting here, I believe, for modern Lutherans. The Reformation rightly rejected the notion that monastic vocations held any spiritual superiority to the “ordinary” callings of Christians. Luther’s proverbial “servant girl” was just as pleasing to God in her calling as was any other Christian of any other station. In Luther’s context and time, the crucial truth to establish was that “ordinary” callings were ordained by God and that Christians who lived in them were pleasing to God. (CC)

This does not mean, however, that Christians are to live in their vocations *in ordinary ways*, that is, in the same ways that non-Christians do. I suspect that the malaise of our day presents a different error that must be rejected. Jesus’ disciples are called to be *extraordinary* husbands and wives, *remarkable* neighbors and employees, *powerful* friends and citizens. Their deeds and their words, in the power of faith and the Spirit, will be like salt, like light in the darkness. (CC)

Both words and deeds are necessary. Words without deeds will not be heard. Deeds without words will bring no one to praise the Father in heaven. Each believing man or woman, layperson or pastor, stands as a disciple because of Jesus’ forgiveness and blessing, and receives Jesus’ calling to be salt and light. In the brightness of *his* light, our light will shine for the blessing and salvation of the world. For he teaches as one who claims authority and not as the scribes of his day (7:29). (CC)

Jesus urged His disciples to good works for the people of this world to see. Luther: “What {Jesus} calls ‘good works’ here is the exercise, expression, and confession of the teaching about Christ and faith...Shining is the real job of believing or teaching, by which we also help others believe” (AE 21:65; see FC Ep IV 18). (TLSB)

*Father in heaven.* Matthew uses the term “Father in heaven” or “heavenly Father” 17 times, whereas Mark and Luke use the term only once each, and John does not use it at all. (CSB)

τὸν πατέρα ὑμῶν—This is the first of sixteen references in the Sermon on the Mount to God as the “Father” of Jesus’ disciples. It is as his disciples that they may call God “Father.” The Sermon is not addressed to humanity at large, but only to those who have believed in Jesus as the manifestation of God’s reign in history. (CC)

Good works are meant to lead others to glorify our heavenly Father, not to bring praise to the one who does them. Leading people to worship the true God is the whole purpose of doing good deeds. (TLSB)

**5:13–16** Words without deeds are like salt that has become useless or like a light put under a basket. The words we speak in praise of our heavenly Father need the support of our deeds. Jesus wants us to witness by both words and deeds, even as God bears witness that He is our Father when He calls us His children. • Lord Jesus, help me to be good salt and a shining light wherever I am. Amen. (TLSB)

### ***The Fulfillment of the Law***

**17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

**5:17** *the Law.* The first five books of the Jewish Scriptures (our OT). (CSB)

*the Prophets.* Not only the Latter Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which we call Major Prophets, and the 12 Minor Prophets (lumped together by the Jews as “the Book of the Twelve”)—but also the so-called Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings). Taken together, “the Law” and “the Prophets” designated the entire OT, including the Writings, the third section of the Hebrew Bible. See 13:35, where Matthew introduces a quotation from the Writings (Ps 78:2) with “what was spoken through the prophet.” *fulfill.* Jesus fulfilled the Law in the sense that he gave it its full

meaning. He emphasized its deep, underlying principles and total commitment to it rather than mere external acknowledgment and obedience. (CSB)

**5:17** NOT...ABOLISH THE LAW – οὐκ ἤλθον καταλῦσαι ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι—The translation of πληρῶσαι as “to fulfill” is of some importance. In Matthew’s Gospel, once the verb πληρόω has the physical meaning “to fill up”: the passive in 13:48 refers to a net that is “filled” with fish. One time the metaphorical meaning “fill up” refers to the climactic unbelief of Jesus’ opponents (“fill up the measure of your fathers,” 23:32). Every other use of the verb in Matthew is linked to the OT Scriptures, which Jesus’ ministry fulfills, that is, his ministry enacts God’s scriptural plan to save. The aorist infinitive πληρῶσαι here thus expresses a strong continuity between Jesus’ purpose and the OT, as well as introducing a note of newness and completion and thus discontinuity. The sense of “fulfill” in 5:17 has occasioned an extensive discussion in the literature. Some seem to limit the meaning to Jesus’ teaching, almost as if Jesus had only said, “I have come to fulfill the Law” (and not “the Prophets”). But 5:17 is a programmatic statement about Jesus’ relationship to the entire OT, and “fulfill” in such a statement must have the sense “that he enacts or manifests God’s purposes” in a broad sense. (CC)

In this sentence, the meaning of καταλῦσαι is determined by its use as an antonym of the more contextually certain meaning of πληρῶσαι, “to fulfill.” If the forward-looking nature of the OT and Christ’s enactment of its promises are in view in the verb “fulfill,” then the antonym of such meaning would entail “ending, abolishing, doing away with.” (CC)

Jesus abrogated the OT civil and ceremonial laws, but not before He fulfilled them personally as our King (civil) and as our great high Priest (ceremonial). What remains binding for all time is the moral law, the unalterable will of God with regard to right and wrong (which, of course, Christ fulfilled perfectly too on our behalf. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Jesus came to fulfill God’s Law, but not all the human accretions added by the Jews – the so-called Oral Torah, which they claimed was passed down by word of mouth from Moses. This verse refers to both the active and the passive obedience of Jesus, which has satisfied completely all that God will in the Law and which provides the perfect righteousness needed for us to stand before God. It is the basis upon which we are declared righteous through faith. Christ’s fulfillment included all the prophecies of the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. The entire vicarious atonement of Christ is included here. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Jesus’ opening statement in 5:17 fronts for his disciples the important question mentioned above: What is Jesus’ own relationship to God’s prior revelation in the OT, the Law and the Prophets? Jesus teaches an important middle road between two extremes. He has not come to abolish, do away with, or negate the revelation found in the Law and the Prophets. Left unexpressed is the other extreme view: neither has Jesus come into the world merely to repeat or to underscore God’s OT revelation. No,



he has come “to fulfill” the OT Scriptures (5:17). As the evangelist has repeatedly narrated, the OT story of God’s dealing with Israel and the world was incomplete, forward-looking, waiting for God’s decisive in-breaking and rule. The deeds of Jesus’ life, even from his earliest years, are that in-breaking, that fulfillment of the OT; he came so that “what was spoken” in the OT “might be fulfilled” (1:22–23; 2:14–15, 16–18, 23; 3:15; 4:12–16). Now Jesus announces the same thing directly. He comes in continuity with and as predicted by the Law and the Prophets; he comes “to fulfill” them (5:17). (CC)

This notion of fulfillment, however, also contains a nuance of discontinuity. For the one who fulfills what was promised inevitably brings a *new* situation into the world. He stands in line with the Law and the Prophets. Yet he also, once he has accomplished his work of fulfillment, alters the relationship that God’s people will have with that OT revelation. (CC)

Jesus fulfilled all that was written of Him in the Law and the Prophets. Likewise, He kept the commands of the Law perfectly (cf Heb 4:15). (TLSB)

**5:18–20** Jesus is not speaking against observing all the requirements of the Law, but against hypocritical, Pharisaical legalism. Such legalism was not the keeping of all details of the Law but the hollow sham of keeping laws externally, to gain merit before God, while breaking them inwardly. It was following the letter of the Law while ignoring its spirit. Jesus repudiates the Pharisees’ interpretation of the Law and their view of righteousness by works. He preaches a righteousness that comes only through faith in him and his work. In the verses that follow, he gives six examples of Pharisaical externalism.

**5:18** I TELL YOU THE TRUTH – ἀμὴν γάρ—This is the first of Jesus’ thirty-one “amen” statements in Matthew’s Gospel, each of which carries a certain solemnity and emphasis. (ἀμὴν is translated “truly” in the translation above.) These statements relate to the material that precedes them in a variety of ways. Here used with γάρ (as also in 10:23; 13:17; 17:20), Jesus’ firm and sure “amen” explains *why* he did not come to abolish, but to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. The commentary will attempt to highlight how important it is to let the *logic* of Jesus’ words in 5:17–20 lead the way in understanding his meaning. That *logic* is revealed, in significant measure, through the conjunctions that Matthew gives to us: “for” (γάρ, 5:18, 20) and “therefore” (οὖν, 5:19). (CC)

Greek *amen*; used 31 times by Jesus in Mt. (TLSB)

*pass away*. At the last judgment. (TLSB)

*smallest letter*. One word in Greek (*iota*), which we use when we say, “It doesn’t make one iota of difference.” It is the nearest Greek equivalent to the Hebrew *yodh*, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet (see Ps 119:73 title). (CSB)

*least stroke of a pen.* The Greek word for this phrase means “horn” and was used to designate the slight embellishment or extension of certain letters of the Hebrew alphabet (somewhat like the bottom of a “j”). (CSB)

Refers to the smallest Hbr letter (*yod*) and even smaller markings in the sacred text. (TLSB)

ἰῶτα ... κεραία—The ἰῶτα is the little Greek letter I (later written ι). This Greek letter could refer to י, the smallest Hebrew letter (see LXX Ps 118:73 [MT/ET 119:73]). The κεραία, “horn, projection, hook,” seems to refer to a small part of a letter, such as the serif on Hebrew and Aramaic letters. Therefore, the sense of Jesus’ statement about it is “not even the smallest part of a letter.” (CC)

With the death and resurrection of the Lord, then, *all things have taken place, and the new heavens and new earth have begun to manifest themselves in Jesus.* And with the accomplishing of all things in Jesus’ ministry, which culminates in his death and resurrection, now the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled. The time when God’s Torah commandments had unchanging significance for Jesus’ disciples has passed. To be sure, even after Jesus’ resurrection there is *continuity* between Jesus’ teaching and calling to his disciples and God’s teaching and calling to his people Israel in the Torah. Jesus fulfilled the Law and Prophets; he did not abolish them. Nevertheless, a change has taken place. Now the disciple of Jesus must hold fast to what Jesus has revealed and commanded. (CC)

Why is it that Jesus has come not to abolish (5:17a–b), but to fulfill (5:17c) the OT? Mt 5:18 gives the answer and, in giving it, raises questions of interpretation. Let me suggest at the outset of the discussion of 5:18 that Jesus’ words in this verse correspond quite closely to the negative and positive declarations found in 5:17. In the first place, Jesus’ words in 5:17a–b find a correspondence in 5:18b–c. That is to say, Jesus has not come to abolish the OT (5:17a–b) precisely because of the firmness, the importance, the unchanging and unswerving nature of God’s commandments: until heaven and earth pass away, no detail will pass away from the Law (5:18b–c). God’s Torah revelation was not given merely in order that it might be abolished! In the second place, 5:17c is matched and explained by 5:18d. That is, because Jesus has come to fulfill the OT (5:17c), nothing will pass away from the commandments “until all things take place” (5:18d). (CC)

*accomplished.* The Messiah’s work, esp His death and resurrection. (TLSB)

**5:19** *relaxes.* By teaching that the commandments were no longer applicable in their fullness. This was the error of the scribes and Pharisees (vv 21–48). (TLSB)

LEAST OF THESE COMMANDMENTS – ὃς ἐάν οὖν λύσῃ μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων ...—In the NT ἐάν can stand in the place of ἄν, as it does here (BDF, § 107). Note that later in 5:19 the more typical construction ὃς δ᾿άν occurs. There is an important difference between “loosen” here (λύσῃ) and “do away with” (καταλύσαι) in 5:17. Here Jesus is not talking about a person who seeks to abolish God’s

commandments, but merely to lessen their force or downplay their importance. This is precisely the error of the scribes and Pharisees. See also the commentary on 5:21-48. (CC)

The presence of the inferential conjunction οὖν, “therefore,” shows the central importance of 5:19. The commentary will argue specifically that, in the logic of 5:17–20, the most prominent declaration in these verses is not 5:20, as is often asserted, but the conclusion found in 5:19. (CC)

It is grammatically possible for the near demonstrative pronoun “these” (τούτων) to be prospective, that is, to refer to some reality that is about to be mentioned (see Lk 18:11; 1 Cor 11:17). However, most often in the NT, and always in Matthew, it refers retrospectively to something that has already been mentioned. When this fact is matched with the logic, wherein the conclusion in 5:19 depends on the ground of what has just been said in 5:17–18, it is certain the “these commandments” that Jesus refers to in 5:19 are the commandments in the Law. This view is further supported by the content of 5:21–48, in which Jesus contrasts the scribal and Pharisaic interpretation of God’s Torah with the Torah’s true authoritative meaning, which Jesus himself proclaims. (CC)

James 2:10, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”

LEAST IN KINGDOM – Such a false teacher will not be excluded from God’s kingdom but will have a lesser status, something we will understand only in heaven. (TLSB)

ἐλάχιστος κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν—There is a very strong parallel to this clause in 11:11, where the comparative form μικρότερος is functioning in the place of the true superlative form ἐλάχιστος here: “The one who is least in the reign of heaven is greater than he” (ὁ δὲ μικρότερος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐστίν, 11:11). The parallel shows that here in 5:19, the person who is “called the least in the reign of heaven” does not refer to someone who, on the Last Day, is *excluded* from that reign, but rather to a person who is *included* under its blessing and activity. So, Jesus’ words here in 5:19 about those who will be called “least” and “great” in the reign of heaven in both instances refer to persons who will enter eschatological life at the consummation of the age. (CC)

Now, however, Jesus is sitting on the mountain and revealing to his disciples what it means for them to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (5:13–16). What inference may be drawn for their calling from what he has just revealed about himself as fulfiller of the OT? I paraphrase Jesus’ answer (5:19):

*Therefore* [οὖν], do and teach the holy commandments of the Torah as God intended them to be kept! Everyone who so strives to live and to teach to other disciples will on the Last Day be called great among the company of the saved! But everyone who falters in his grasp of the importance of this holy obedience to the Torah’s intent will be called the least among the company of the saved. (CC)

Four aspects of 5:19 require comment. First, Jesus' words "the least of *these commandments*" almost surely refer to God's will as expressed in the Torah, the Law. The fact that 5:19 follows logically (οὖν, "therefore") from 5:18 points in that direction. In addition, the demonstrative pronoun "these" is almost certainly retrospective (see the first textual note on 5:19). Moreover, Jesus is about to begin his explication of the true meaning of the Torah in 5:21–48. Jesus' original disciples, during his earthly ministry, must regard God's true intent in the Torah as God's calling and claim upon their lives. Even we who are Jesus' disciples on the other side of his death and resurrection will carefully and Christocentrically discover God's ongoing will for our lives in the OT. Again, Jesus does not abolish the OT. He fulfills it (5:17). (CC)

Second, those who inquire about the relative importance of God's different commands—seeking to know which commands they may safely ignore, since Jesus called them "the *least*" of the commandments—are barking up the wrong tree. The rhetorical force of the implied command "do not loose the *least*" is surely "hold fast to *all!*" (CC)

Third, it should be emphasized that here in 5:19, a person who "loosens" God's commandments and teaches others to do the same, but who nevertheless still believes in Jesus, will be "called the least in the reign of heaven," but will still receive eschatological salvation; he or she is still "in." The parallel in 11:11 supports this (see the second textual note on 5:19). However, disregard for God's Word can lead to a loss of faith in Christ, and so to a loss of salvation. Moreover, the person who "loosens" God's commands (5:19) is in that way failing to be "salt" and "light" in the world, and thus is failing to bring others to "glorify" the "Father who is in heaven" (5:13–16). (CC)

Fourth, we must address those who will not be comfortable with talk of being "least" or "great" (5:19) in the eschatological consummation of all things. Jesus elsewhere is quite willing both to define spiritual greatness among the company of his disciples and to summon his followers to such greatness. The clearest example occurs in 20:20–28 in the incident that is sparked by the question of the sons of Zebedee, extended to Jesus through their mother. To speak briefly and to the point, all of the disciples present in chapter 20 seem to be operating with a particular definition of "greatness" or "prominence" in regard to the reign of heaven. Jesus does not dismiss the question out of hand; he *redefines the terms of the question*. Seats of exaltation are for those who drink of the same cup Jesus drinks and who are baptized with the same baptism he receives—entailing his passion (20:21–23). The status of being "great" (μέγας, 20:26, the same term used here in 5:19) is reflected in the role of servanthood, just as the place of "first" is equated with the status of being a slave to one's fellows (20:26–27; see also 23:11). Jesus does not reject the notion of spiritual greatness. Rather, he redefines the "great" as those who serve. (CC)

Here in 5:19, then, Jesus also defines for his disciples a kind of spiritual greatness. In so doing, he orients his disciples' priorities toward the holy will of God, which is expressed in his written Word. The extent to which any believer manifests those priorities does not determine his entrance into the reign of heaven, for on the Last Day

both greatest and least are “in.” After all, Jesus’ disciples only arrive at this teaching by passing through the doorway: “The poor in spirit are blessed, because the reign of heaven is *theirs*” (5:3). Nevertheless, Jesus teaches with authority also here in 5:19. His disciples will receive this teaching. In faith, they will seek to conform to God’s will (as Jesus the Fulfiller will explicate that divine will) in their words and deeds, and they will teach others so to believe and live. (CC)

Mt 5:19, then, is the inference that follows from 5:17–18, and *it is the major proposition of 5:17–20*. Mt 5:19 is, properly speaking, the introduction to Jesus’ teaching in 5:21–48, wherein the Son of God offers with divine authority a sample of teaching that unfolds the true meaning of God’s Torah. Jesus offers his teaching in 5:21–48, then, to his disciples who trust in his Gospel blessing (5:3–12) and who desire to manifest their calling as salt and light (5:13–16) in accordance with God’s will. (CC)

**5:20 FOR I TELL YOU** – ἐγὼ γὰρ ὑμῖν—This sentence, like 5:18, begins with the postpositive γὰρ, a causal or explanatory “for, because.” Explicitly, then, 5:20 supports 5:19. That simple but important observation suggests that 5:20 should not be regarded as the theme or introduction to what follows in 5:21–48. Rather, 5:20 stands in closest relation to 5:19. Moreover, 5:19, in its character as the primary conclusion drawn from the complex of ideas in 5:17–18, is the real “punch” of 5:17–20 and the introduction to 5:21–48. The commentary will try to show more fully how 5:19 is the most important part of 5:17–20 and how this affects the way we should read 5:21–48. To anticipate that discussion, if 5:20 were the most significant introduction to 5:21–48, then Jesus’ commands in 5:21–48 would describe the greater righteousness that, according to the natural force of Jesus’ words, *would be necessary for a person to gain entrance* into the reign of heaven on the Last Day. If, however, 5:19 (along with 5:17–18 and 5:20 as a supporting truth) is the most important “bridge” into 5:21–48, then Jesus’ words in the six “antitheses” in 5:21–48 describe the path to spiritual greatness *among those who will enter the reign of heaven* and who then may be called either “least” or “great.” (CC)

To repeat: the interpreter should *not* use 5:20 as a basis for concluding that 5:21–48 is a prescription for how a person may attain the righteousness that will allow him to gain entrance into the reign of heaven. Rather, the interpreter should use 5:19 as the basis for concluding that 5:21–48 displays standards of spiritual greatness for all those *who will, by grace*, enter the reign of heaven on the Last Day (when they may be called “least” or “great,” but in either case they will be “in the reign of heaven,” 5:19). (CC)

**YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS** – The phrase “your righteousness” most likely refers to the disciples’ good deeds that flow from their relationship with Christ himself. Now, it is true that “righteousness” occurs in the near context (5:6, 10) with a meaning of “God’s saving action in Jesus.” It is also true that whatever good works disciples perform are preceded and enabled by the prior gracious blessing of Jesus (5:3–12). Nevertheless, three factors militate against “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη) in 5:20 having the same “Gospel” meaning as it does in 5:6, 10. First, Jesus has been speaking about doing and teaching the commandments (5:19); this refers to the disciples’ obedience and “good works” (5:16). Second, Jesus does not speak of “God’s righteousness” or merely

“righteousness,” but of “*your* righteousness.” Consequently, the “righteousness” here is an attribute or product of the disciples; it is good fruit from a good tree (7:17). Third, later in the Sermon (6:1), Jesus says, “Pay attention not to do your righteousness before men in order that you may be visible to them.” The phrase “your righteousness” there clearly refers to the good works of Jesus’ disciples. So here in 5:20, “your righteousness” also refers to the good works of Jesus’ disciples. (CC)

SURPASSES THAT OF THE PHARISEES – ἐὰν μὴ περισσεύσῃ ὑμῶν ἡ δικαιοσύνη πλεῖον τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων—This involves an ellipsis of a repetition of δικαιοσύνη, “Unless your righteousness abounds more greatly than [namely, τῆς δικαιοσύνης, ‘the righteousness’] of the scribes and Pharisees ...” The neuter singular adjective πλεῖον is the comparative of πολύς, “much, many.” The neuter singular form, as is typical also of other adjectives, functions as an adverb (see BDAG, s.v. πολύς, 2 b β). The adverbial phrase “more greatly than [the righteousness] of the scribes and Pharisees” describes in what way or how the disciples’ righteousness must and will abound. It is, I will argue in the commentary, primarily a *qualitative* distinction, rather than a *quantitative* one. (CC)

True righteousness is the result of a right relationship with Jesus. Good works are a fruit of faith in Him (Eph. 2:8-10), something that most scribes and Pharisees did not possess. (TLSB)

The single article τῶν governing the two plural nouns, γραμματέων and Φαρισαίων, does not illustrate Granville Sharp’s Rule and does not indicate that “the scribes” and “the Pharisees” are identical groups. Wallace suggests that this is an example of the first group constituting a subset of the second group. The sense of the phrase would then be “the scribes and other Pharisees,” all the while acknowledging that other scribes (of various degrees of learning and influence) existed who were not Pharisees. (CC)

What can Jesus mean, however, when he seems to place a condition (“unless”) on eschatological salvation that involves the disciples’ good works abounding more greatly than those of the scribes and Pharisees? First things first. Unless one is willing to posit a stark contradiction in the teaching of Jesus in Matthew, we may dismiss any thought of good works as *causing* salvation in any way. The Beatitudes have taught better than that, and other clear Gospel promises in Matthew (not to speak of the NT as a whole!) guard against such a *causative* reading of 5:20 (see, e.g., 19:23–26; 20:28; 26:28). (CC)

The key to understanding lies in the second important question regarding 5:20, namely, the force of the words “abounds more greatly than that of the scribes and Pharisees.” The most important thing to know about the scribes and Pharisees is simply this: they are not Jesus’ disciples. As the narrative progresses, they appear as Jesus’ opponents, who reject his claim that the reign of God is present in his ministry. The scribes and Pharisees do possess a certain kind of “righteousness,” and they manifest it in their behavior. It is, however, a “righteousness” that is entirely cut off from Jesus<sup>32</sup> and so is not “true” righteousness, not truly “good works” at all. (CC)

Jesus' disciples, by contrast, receive a blessing (5:3–12) and a calling (5:13–16) from Jesus, who fills them with the “righteousness” for which they hunger (5:6). Out of that relationship of grace and present promise and future blessing, Jesus' disciples do their righteousness, seeking to let their light shine (however imperfectly) in the presence of other people (5:16). Because their righteous good works flow out of their relationship with Jesus, the disciples' righteousness abounds. The disciples' righteousness is not something that can be determined or measured quantitatively, but *qualitatively and relationally*. For to a disciple, who already has something (righteousness), more will be given, and “*he will be caused to abound*” (περισσευθήσεται, 13:12; 25:29, a different form of the same verb used in 5:20, περισσεύση, “abounds”). Conversely, as for an unbeliever, “who has nothing” (no true righteousness), “even what he has will be taken away from him” (13:12; 25:29). Since unbelievers are “diseased” trees that can bear only “bad fruit,” their fruit/righteousness does not please God (7:17–19). (CC)

Such “righteousness” of a disciple of Jesus does not *cause* his entrance into the reign of heaven. Nor is it helpful to say that it is *necessary* for *entrance* into the reign of heaven, though it is proper to say that for the Christian, good works indeed are necessary, and they are done “out of the love of righteousness.” We might state it this way: this “righteousness” of good works is an inevitable fruit of one's union with Jesus (see 7:16–20). All who enter into eternal life will be accompanied by such abounding righteousness. (CC)

The following summary can articulate the connection between 5:20 and 5:19 and express the logic and message of 5:17–20 as a whole. Good works are a part of every disciple's existence, being caused by Jesus' call to belonging, blessing, and discipleship. Because of this place that good works play in the life of *all* who are saved (5:20), it follows that doing and teaching even the least of God's commandments are the priority and goal for all disciples (5:19). This view of God's commandments in the Torah is grounded in the relationship of the Law and the Prophets to Jesus; he came into the world to fulfill the OT Scriptures (5:17–18), and he now calls his disciples to be salt and light for the world (5:13–16). (CC)

As indicated above, the climactic statement in 5:17–20 is 5:19. There Jesus sets the priorities for his disciples and calls them to such a life. In the teaching that follows in 5:21–48, then, Jesus focuses on some of God's commandments in the Torah and declares their true meaning and intent, in contrast to the interpretations of those same commandments that his disciples had heard from other sources, such as the scribes and the Pharisees. (CC)

Jesus teaches with authority (7:29); his disciples acknowledge and trust his authority. As they heed his call to do and teach, at times Jesus' disciples will succeed, by means of the power that he provides to them; the church lives out her life in the power of her baptismal union with Christ (cf. Rom 6:1–11). Often, however, Jesus' disciples will fail. In that failure they will experience again their poverty of spirit (5:3), and they will mourn (5:4). They will also hear and receive again the gracious promises of Jesus that the

poor in spirit are blessed because the reign of heaven and its everlasting blessings already belong to them (5:3). (CC)

NOT ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN – οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν—In Matthew the phrase “*enter* into the reign of heaven” seems always to refer specifically to the Last Day (7:21; 18:3; 19:23–24). The one possible exception is 23:13, but I shall argue in the textual notes there that 23:13 also refers to final salvation at the consummation of the age. Once again, the horizon for the disciples’ existence is eschatological, corporate, and creational. (CC)

**5:17–20** The scribes and Pharisees read and study the Law and the Prophets. They accept the fact that “Scripture cannot be broken” (Jn 10:35), but they do not believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Scriptures (cf Jn 5:39). They seek to achieve righteousness by keeping the Law, for which they have a high regard. But Jesus goes on to point out just how defective their righteousness really is (vv 21–48). “Christ takes the Law into His hands and explains it spiritually” (FC SD V 10). When judged by the true intent of God’s Law, our righteousness is likewise defective. Only in Christ do we have true righteousness. • Jesus, when I read and study the Scriptures, help me to see my sin and to see You, my Savior. Amen. (TLSB)