**Law Or Gospel**

 **Luke 14:1-11**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Look at your bulletin, on the right hand side is the title of the sermon and the text it is based upon. Today’s sermon is entitled, Law or Gospel. Some might think that a strange title for a sermon. As good Lutherans, we know that it is not an either or proposition. It should be Law ***AND*** Gospel. Law and Gospel must both be present, and yet must be kept distinct.

In the expanded explanation portion of your Catechism as you learned from the introduction, there are some questions and answers: *What basic distinction must we keep in mind in order to understand the Bible?* Answer: **We must sharply distinguish between the Law and the Gospel in the Bible.**

*What does God teach and do in the law?* **In the law God command good works of thought, word, and deed and condemns and punishes sin.**

*What does God teach and do in the Gospel?* **In the Gospel, the good news of our salvation in Jesus Christ, God gives forgiveness, faith, life, and the power to please Him with good works.**

When we come to the end of the section on the Ten Commandments, there are two questions that conclude that Chief Part of the Catechism. The first asks: *Where alone does God offer the forgiveness of sin?* **God offers the forgiveness of sins only in the Gospel, the good news that we are freed from the guilt, the punishment, and the power of sin, and are saved eternally because of Christ’s keeping the Law and His suffering and death for us.**

The second asks: *What is the difference between the Law and the Gospel?*

**A) The Law teaches what we are to do and not to do; the Gospel teaches what God has done, and still does, for our salvation.**

**B) The Law shows us our sin and the wrath of God; the Gospel shows us our Savior and the grace of God.**

**C) The Law must be proclaimed to all people, but especially to impenitent sinners; the Gospel must be proclaimed to sinners who are troubled in their minds because of their sins.**

Why do I bring all this up? Because that is the first lesson Jesus is teaching in today’s Gospel lesson. *One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. And he said to them, "Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" And they could not reply to these things.*

Jesus deals with keeping the Sabbath on a number of occasions, including today’s Gospel. The Pharisees wanted to catch Jesus breaking the Sabbath in order to discredit Him and hence silence him. Many man-made rules regarding what might be considered work on the Sabbath had been enacted in the church, and it was difficult not to break one of them. There was even a rule which stated how many steps you could take on the Sabbath - and if you took even one more than that, you had broken the Sabbath and were unclean.

To be fair, Pharisees were trying to respect God’s Law. But they were also trying to justify themselves before God, trying to show how holy they were by what they did – according to the Law. Often, it was because they outwardly kept it better than others.

In today’s text, Jesus shows them that they are lacking something. They may have the Law, and they may physically keep the Sabbath, but there is no love in them. Love is the fulfillment of the Law. We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love our neighbors as ourselves. So, Jesus asks them, "Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?"

Is it working on the Sabbath to save a life on the Sabbath? What does it mean to keep the law?

Some like to use this text to downplay God’s Laws, especially those Laws which they do not want applied to them. They claim that the Gospel is more important, asserting it has to do with how loving we are to one another. Of course, they define love by whether or not we accept their immoral behavior. Some use this text to claim that love is more important than adhering to God’s Law.

There are two laws pitted against one another – Sabbath law and the law of love. Neither of them is the Gospel. The Gospel is not some generic love. The Gospel is ***not*** about how well ***we*** love others, nor is it about how well ***we*** love God. How well we love God and our neighbor are aspects of the Law, the Law requires that we love both God and others.

In our text, Jesus’ heals the man’s dropsy to teach the Pharisees. It boldly proclaims to them that they are hypocrites, and calls them to repent of their self-righteousness.

Some love to point out things in God’s Law and proclaim to others how ***they*** should keep it. Such people often add to God’s Law, often adding things which have nothing to do with God’s Law. Do you remember when it was a sin to dance or have life insurance?

Others like to subtract from God’s Law, claiming that portions of God’s law no longer apply today. Others claim we have moved beyond superstition, and learned that what was sin, is not truly sin. In either of these cases, people are attempting to justify themselves before God.

What is true is this. There is not a single person who is not a sinner. God’s Law condemns us all. In fact, being a mirror is one of the main purposes of God’s Law.

God’s Law must be preached, taught, proclaimed, in order to show each and every person their total helplessness before God. In the Law, our own sins stare us in the face. As a mirror, the Law shows us our failures to ***do*** as God commands – ***and*** our flagrant disregard for His Law by doing what He has commanded us ***not*** to do.

When confronted with our sin, God’s wrath is a terrible thing to behold. Hell is a very real place of eternal torment to be endured in resurrected flesh. Those who remain impenitent unto their death will spend eternity there. God’s Law must not be proclaimed subtly or timidly, but boldly. It must drive sinners to their knees in repentance, for the impenitent have no need for what Christ purchased with His perfect life and His innocent suffering and death.

It is unfortunate that some like to tune out the pastor if he hits too close to home with the Law. If he hits the mark, some simply get angry and quit listening. It is sad when this happens, for they miss the best part of the message.

Dear friends, the Gospel is the very saving work of Christ delivered to sinners in Word and Sacrament. By healing the man in our text, the physical evidence of his sin is removed. Christ’s act of healing the man with dropsy, declares His power over sin. Christ came to free all from sin – and the eternal effects of sin – with His blessed sacrifice upon the cross.

To those who acknowledge their sinfulness in repentance, God’s Gospel is to be proclaimed. In fact, to retain forgiveness from those who repent would itself be a grievous sin.

The goal of the Law is tolead people to see their need for the Gospel, to get them to see their helplessness without Christ. The goal of the Gospel is to free people from their sins that they might rejoice in God their Savior.

Law and Gospel are often called the edges of the two edged sword, the Word of God. With one it cuts one way and with the other it cuts the other way, both to get to the heart of the matter. Each is necessary.

It is not just in the sermon that we see God’s Law and God’s Gospel at work. When there is obvious sin in the life of an individual, and they refuse to repent – God’s Law is needed to bring them to an awareness and understanding of that sin. Sometimes only a light nudge is needed to get them to recognize their sin and repent. Sometimes it takes much more, as Matthew 18 informs us, it may come to the point where excommunication is necessary.

Even when excommunication is enacted, it’s purpose is to lead the excommunicated to recognize, acknowledge, and repent of their sins. Doing so, the healing medicine of the Gospel is to be applied. They are to be freely forgiven and welcomed back into the fold.

There are times when it is not necessary to apply the Law. Sometimes souls have been beaten and battered to the point of despair, they are only too aware of their sinfulness. In these cases, they need the Gospel. They need to hear and receive God’s healing medicine of the forgiveness of their sins. To them, nothing is more necessary than that the love of God in Christ Jesus be applied to them.

Dearly beloved of God, today’s sermon is more of a didactic sermon than normal. What I mean, is that this is a sermon which has as it’s primary focus, the teaching of the faith. In fact, it is the goal of this sermon, that you might understand other sermons more easily.

Each week, God’s Law is proclaimed to you that you might be made aware of your sinfulness and repent, hungering and thirsting for the precious Gospel. And then, the sweet Gospel is also proclaimed, that in Jesus Christ, you may bask in that forgiveness as a renewed and beloved child of God.

It is the Gospel which is most precious. That is why it is given to you in more than just the weekly proclamation of Gods’ Word. The Gospel is the absolution, where Christ’s forgiveness is spoken into your ear. The Gospel is the Holy Meal which is set before you, in which Christ’s body once pierced and His blood once shed, is given to you to eat and drink for the forgiveness of your sins and the strengthening of your faith.

The Gospel is God’s work in Christ Jesus for you, and delivered to you. Let us rejoice and be glad in it, living each day in God’s grace to us in Christ Jesus. Amen.