

The title of this morning's message is, "*Jesus Christ Our Righteousness.*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse, and we find ourselves at **Luke 16:14**.

Something frustrating happened to me on Thursday. I thought I had my sermon finished, but as I was going over it, I was dissatisfied because it was too long and felt like it was going in two different directions:

- The first half of the sermon was about the Pharisees justifying themselves
- The second half of the sermon was about the Pharisees loving money

It felt like two unrelated sermons to me, so I split them up.

This morning we'll talk about the dangers of justifying ourselves and next week we will talk about the dangers of loving money.

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Let's back up to verse thirteen for context...

Luke 16:13 No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

If you remember the end of our previous sermon when I talked about this verse, I told you that it is not an imperative or command. Jesus is not telling us not to do something: he is not telling us not to serve God AND money.

Instead, this is an indicative. Jesus is indicating or stating something: He is telling us we can't serve God and money. To serve God is to choose not to serve money, and to serve money is to choose not to serve God.

But there were people who served money, and they heard Jesus say this...

Luke 16:14 The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.

Based on verse one, we know Jesus was speaking to the disciples, but the Pharisees heard this and took serious issue with it. And this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson One: It is tempting to (Part One) reject God's word when it convicts us.

This is a great example of what it looks like to be confronted by God's Word:

- We can humble ourselves and repent
- Or we can be proud and stubborn

The Pharisees were convicted by Jesus's teaching. They knew it applied to them. They could have humbled themselves and repented. But instead, they gave themselves over to pride, and notice this, it says they **ridiculed him**.

The Greek word for **ridiculed** literally means "to turn up one's nose."

And believe it or not, this is exactly what they had to do:

- They either had to acknowledge the message that Jesus preached and repent
- Or they had to ridicule it as a means of self-defense to resist any conviction.

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This happens frequently with God's Word:

- We disagree with it because it disagrees with what we are doing.
- It hits too close to home, so we reject it.

Let me give you some examples of how this can happen today, but so we would be on guard against doing this ourselves:

- People want to marry an unbeliever, so instead of repenting they disagree with what God's Word says about being unequally yoked
- People don't want to attend church regularly, so instead of repenting they disagree with the verses about regularly assembling and worshiping corporately with other believers
- People don't want to embrace biblical marriage roles, so they disagree with verses that clearly outline husbands' and wives' responsibilities

And some people go much further than disagreeing. They do what the Pharisees did and **ridicule**:

- People want to engage in homosexuality, so they **ridicule** what God's Word says about homosexuality
- People want to deny eternal punishment, so they **ridicule** all the verses about hell
- People don't want to believe that there is only one way to heaven, so they **ridicule** all the verses about the exclusiveness of the gospel

The list could go on, but you get the point.

Now this is important...

When we read **verse 14**, we don't want to be too quick to start condemning the Pharisees. We want to be quick to examine our hearts and whether it is sensitive to God's Word, or whether we disagree with when we don't like what it says.

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When people ridicule Scripture, it is done for the same reason the Pharisees did it, and that is self-justification...as Jesus goes on to say...

Luke 16:15 And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

Justify means declared righteous. We normally use this word in the Gospel sense of being justified by grace through faith.

But there's another way Scripture uses this word, such as in this verse, justify ourselves, or declare our own righteousness.

And this is part of why I think this sermon is so important.

The most common lie unbelievers believe is they are good people, or righteous.

Typically, unbelievers do four things to justify themselves, or convince themselves of their righteousness, and I confess that I have done all of them:

1. First, they think about the good they've done
2. Second, they compare themselves to others and feel like they're good because they are better than the people around them...and when we do this, we never really think of good people. Instead, we generally think of the people we consider to be bad and pride ourselves on being better than them.
3. Third, they think about the bad they have NOT done:
 - a. *I've never murdered anyone*
 - b. *I've never committed adultery*
 - c. If the same people read the sermon on the Mount, they would see that they don't have to commit these sins physically. They can commit them spiritually in their heart.
4. Fourth, even if they've done bad things they can explain why they've done them:
 - a. *I lied, but it was for a good reason*
 - b. *I was mean to those people, but if I didn't stand up for myself they would've kept walking all over me*

- c. *I looked at things I shouldn't, but if God didn't want me to look at them, He wouldn't have given me these desires*
- d. *I left work early before I was supposed to, but there were those other days that I worked hard that make up for it*

These are all ways we justify ourselves or declare our righteousness, and we see Jesus condemned doing this.

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The Pharisees were able to **justify [themselves] before men** or convince people that they were righteous. They had the outward behavior that made them look righteous:

- They tithed faithfully even counting out one tenth of their spices
- They walked around in elaborate, religious clothing
- They attached parts of Scripture to their wrists and foreheads in little boxes called phylacteries

But Jesus pointed out the problem for them...

God [knew their] hearts.

God knew that regardless of how they looked outwardly, they were ugly inwardly:

- They loved money
- They served themselves versus serving God
- They despised repentant sinners
- They mistreated people, especially the poor and needy

They could justify themselves to the people around them, but not to God.

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The Pharisees aren't the only ones who can't justify themselves to God. We can't either because God also knows our hearts:

- **1 Chronicles 28:9 The Lord SEARCHES ALL HEARTS and understands every plan and thought.**
- **Proverbs 24:12 If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he WHO WEIGHS THE HEART perceive it?**

And God knows what comes out of our them...

Matthew 5:19 Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

Again, the best application is not found in reading this and then quickly looking down on the Pharisees.

The best application is found in reading this and then ensuring we don't justify ourselves.

And this brings us to the next part of Lesson One...

Lesson One: It is tempting to (Part Two) justify ourselves.

Because we are in Luke, briefly turn to the left a few chapters to **Luke 10**. This is the account with the lawyer that led to Jesus teaching the parable of the good Samaritan...

Luke 10:25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 27 And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

If you obey these two commands then you obey the whole Law, because every command hangs from them.

If you think of the Ten Commandments, if you love God perfectly, you'll obey commands one through four:

1. You won't have any other gods.
2. You won't make any idols.
3. You won't take God's name in vain.
4. You'll keep the Sabbath rest...which just as a note we keep through resting in Christ's finished work.

If you love your neighbor perfectly, you'll obey commands 5 through 10:

5. You'll honor your father and mother.
6. You won't murder.
7. You won't commit adultery.
8. You won't steal.
9. You won't give false testimony against your neighbor.
10. You won't covet.

BUT...

We know we can't inherit eternal life by obeying the Law – or keeping the Ten Commandments – and so that's why Jesus is going to tell Him that He can't keep these commands and be saved.

Prepare to be surprised...

Luke 10:28 And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

Wouldn't we expect Jesus to say, “You must repent and believe in Me to inherit eternal life”?

And this isn't the only place that Jesus responded this way. He said the same thing to the rich young ruler...

Matthew 19:16 [the rich young ruler said], “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”

We would expect Jesus to say, “Repent and believe.” Instead...

Matthew 19:17 [Jesus] said to him...“If you would enter life, KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS.”

So, why did Jesus respond this way to them?

He was simply answering their question!

- **Luke 10:25** The lawyer asked, “**Teacher, what SHALL I DO to inherit eternal life?**”
- **Mark 10:17** The Rich Young Ruler asked, “**What MUST I DO to inherit eternal life?**”

They thought they were saved by doing, so they wanted to know what exactly to do.

If they would've asked “**HOW can I inherit eternal life?**” versus “**What MUST I DO to inherit eternal life?**” maybe Jesus would've answered differently.

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Maybe you're uncomfortable with Jesus's response because it seems like He misled them. It looks like He was telling them they could keep the law to be saved.

But He was not misleading them, because if people keep the law perfectly, they can be saved.

It's just that none of us can keep the law perfectly.

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While you probably know the lawyer quoted the Law when he answered Jesus, you might not know that Jesus also quoted the Law when He answered the lawyer.

In other words:

- When the lawyer said, **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, mind, and your neighbor as yourself”** he quoted the Law.
- When Jesus said, **“Do this, and you will live”** He also quoted the Law.

The words, **“You will live,”** were frequently attached to Old Testament verses associated with obeying God’s commands. Here are three examples:

1. **Deuteronomy 4:1 O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, THAT YOU MAY LIVE.**
2. **Nehemiah 9:29 If a person [obeys your commandments], HE SHALL LIVE BY THEM.**
3. **Ezekiel 18:9 [Whoever] walks in my statutes, and keeps My rules by acting faithfully—he is righteous; HE SHALL SURELY LIVE.**

So the Law stated that if people obeyed it perfectly they would live, or inherit eternal life, so that’s how Jesus responded.

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What’s really going on here is Jesus was trying to get the lawyer and the rich young ruler to see that they could not keep the law perfectly and so they needed to become righteous another way...which is by grace through faith.

And this introduces us to the two categories that develop when people look at the law...

One category is reasonable, humble people who say, *“Whoa, I’m not even close to doing that. I can’t keep the Law to be saved.”*

- Then they fall on their face and call out to the Lord for mercy and forgiveness.
- They seek to be justified – or declared righteous – by grace through faith.

The second category of people are unreasonable and proud. They look at the Law and seek to justify themselves. They say, *“Okay, I can do that. I can be righteous by obeying it.”*

Do you want to see someone in this category?

Look at the next verse...

Luke 10:29 But he, DESIRING TO JUSTIFY HIMSELF, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

What an incredible example of trying to justify yourself. It actually says that’s what he was doing!

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To be fair, I think the lawyer knew he couldn’t keep the standard the Law set...which makes him look humble.

But then, instead of submitting to that standard, he became argumentative...which reveals his pride. He tried to lower the bar and make it more manageable by limiting who his neighbor might be.

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Let me show you one of the best examples in Scripture of two things that are both so perfect for this sermon:

- What it looks like to try to justify ourselves
- And how we can be justified

Go ahead and turn a few chapters to the right to **Luke 18**.

The parable is familiar to us, so I will go through it quickly...

Luke 18:9 He also told this parable to some who TRUSTED IN THEMSELVES THAT THEY WERE RIGHTEOUS, and treated others with contempt:

The phrase **trusted in themselves that they were righteous** is exactly what we are talking about. This is self-justification.

Luke 18:10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

Get ready for probably the best example in Scripture of what it looks like to justify yourself...

Luke 18:11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’

Talk about justifying yourself or declaring your own righteousness!

We almost can't help but be annoyed by this man's pride, but for me I can tell you that before I became a Christian, when I was still in the Catholic Church, if you would've asked me why I would go to heaven, it would have sounded something like this:

- I have been baptized
- I had my first communion
- I served as an altar boy
- I had my confirmation
- I went to confession
- I attend church regularly
- I observe most of the holy days

Now to see how we can be justified or declared righteous by grace through faith...

Luke 18:13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’

This is how to be justified, or declared righteous, by God. Confess your sin and cry out for mercy.

Luke 18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The words **exalts himself** are synonymous with self-justifying. In fact, if you write in your Bible, you can circle the words **exalts himself** and write **Luke 16:15** which is where Jesus condemned the religious leaders for being those **who justify themselves**.

This captures the great paradox...

- People who justify themselves and declare their righteousness will not be declared righteous.
- People who declare their unrighteousness will be justified or declared righteous.

We want Christ's perfect righteousness, which is available by faith...and this brings us to Lesson Two...

Lesson Two: Because of Jesus Christ Our Righteousness, we don't have to justify ourselves.

Let me explain righteousness versus innocence...

If people never did anything wrong, they would be innocent, but they wouldn't be righteous. For people to be righteous, they must DO righteous things.

For example, Adam and Eve were innocent when they were created - because they hadn't done anything wrong - but they weren't righteous, because they hadn't done anything good.

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If Jesus was going to have a perfect righteousness to give us, He couldn't just be innocent. He also had to be righteous, which required doing righteous things.

And if He was going to have a PERFECT, COMPLETE righteousness to give us, He had to do EVERYTHING a righteous person would do.

Let me show you some of those things.

Turn to **Luke 2**.

Luke 2:21 And at the end of eight days, when HE WAS CIRCUMCISED, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Why was Jesus circumcised?

Because that's what the law commanded. This is what righteous people did, so it's what Jesus did.

Look at **verse 22** and notice the repetition of the word **law**...

Luke 2:22 And when the time came for their purification according to the LAW of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the LAW of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the LAW of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

Every male who wasn't from the tribe of Levi had to be redeemed from temple service. Because Jesus was from Judah, He was redeemed as well.

Three times the law is mentioned to emphasize Jesus doing this to perfectly keep the law and do everything righteous people would do.

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Turn to **Matthew 3**.

Matthew 3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

There are two reasons John tried to prevent Jesus...

First, if you look at **verse 11**, John said...

Matthew 3:11 "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John didn't expect to baptize Jesus with water. Instead, He expected Jesus to baptize him with the Holy Spirit.

Second, John was performing a baptism of repentance, and He knew Jesus didn't need to repent of anything.

Matthew 3:15 But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.

Just like that: with this one sentence, Jesus convinced John to baptize Him, and in doing so He also lets us know why He had to be baptized: **to fulfill all righteousness.**

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Let me show you another example. Turn to **Matthew 17.**

Matthew 17:24 When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, “Does your teacher not pay the tax?”

This is the Jewish IRS and they’re like, “Does your Master pay the temple tax?”

Matthew 17:25 He said, “Yes.” And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?”

Peter knew Jesus paid the temple tax, so he said yes.

Then Jesus asked a simple question: do kings collect taxes from their sons or others?

Matthew 17:26 And when he said, “From others,” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are free.

Peter knew kings collect taxes their sons. The sons are free from being taxed.

Jesus is making the simple point that He didn’t have to pay the temple tax because He’s the King’s Son, and the King’s Son is free.

But listen to this...

Matthew 17:27 However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself.”

God required righteous people to pay the temple tax. Even though Jesus was exempt, He still paid it, because that’s what righteous people do.

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Let me tell you a few things I find very interesting, and then I want to ask you a question:

- Circumcision pictured the need for spiritual cleansing of the heart. Jesus was circumcised, even though He didn’t need any spiritual cleansing of the heart.
- Jesus was redeemed. Think about that: the Redeemer was redeemed.
- He was redeemed from priestly service, because He was from the tribe of Judah and not the tribe of Levi. But HE IS our Great High Priest. The Great High Priest was redeemed from priestly service.
- He experienced a baptism of repentance when He had nothing to repent of.
- He paid the temple tax that He didn’t need to pay.

Whatever God established as righteous behavior, Jesus did it, even when He didn’t have to. He perfectly fulfilled the law, but He did more than that, He also fulfilled all righteousness that wasn’t even part of the law, like being baptized and paying temple taxes.

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Now here’s the question...

Why did He do all this?

For you...and me!

Jesus Christ became our righteousness to have a perfect, complete righteousness to give us by grace through faith.

It's part of the classic double imputation that takes place at every conversion when people put their faith in Christ:

- Our unrighteousness is imputed to Him
- His perfect and complete righteousness is imputed to us

2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Christ our righteousness offers us His righteousness by faith and receives our sin from us.

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And I'll close with this...

- This is only available for people who are not like the Pharisees who – as Jesus said – justify themselves.
- It is available for those who recognize their unrighteousness, repent, and look to Christ in faith to be saved.

If you have any questions about anything I've shared this morning, I will be up for after service and out consider it a privilege to build a speak with you.

Let's pray.