

"What Do You See?"

Text: Romans 10:1-13

May the God of all grace fill you with hope in Christ Jesus our Savior. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians: You've hear it before, haven't you – the question that forms our sermon theme for this morning: "*What do you see?*" The context is pretty much always the same. Someone can see what the person asking the question cannot. One little boy boosts another up to bravely peer into the back yard of the spooky eccentric neighbor and breathlessly asks, "*What do you see?*" One of two lost hikers climbs up into the upper boughs of the tallest tree on the tallest hill and looks in all direction: "*What do you see?*" A diver, descending into a sunken treasure ship, is heard to gasp suddenly over the microphone in his dive suit, "*What do you see?*"

You get the picture. The question is typically asked of someone who can see what others cannot. This morning you are going to be the ones descending into the depths, and the question will be asked of you. In this case, however, the question is not going to be asked so that another might also know what you see, but so that you yourself might know. The depths into which you will be descending are the dark recesses of your own heart – a place where only you and your God can see – and you will answer the question, both to yourself and to your God: "*What do you see?*"

The text that will serve as our guide in this most necessary and beneficial exercise is found in Paul's Letter to the Romans, the 10th Chapter:

ESV Romans 10:1-13 *Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them (the Jews) is that they may be saved. ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. ⁵ ¶ For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. ⁶ But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ or "'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your*

mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

These are the verbally inspired words of our God – a precious, life-giving, heirloom treasure preserved for us down through the centuries by our Benevolent Creator. That you and I might still today gain the blessing that our God would make our own through the study of these sacred words – *that we would see what we are supposed to there see* - so we pray: "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

Every now and then I hear someone recommending that those with problems should "*look inside for the answers.*" While I'm not really sure what that is supposed to mean in every case, I'm afraid I *do* know what it means to the vast majority of those who use that expression. To them it means that truth is relative, and that whatever you find when you search your own heart must be both good and right. Even more than that, they mean that what you discover "within yourself" represents your own personal "truth."

While you and I know this to be mostly just horse feathers, the whole idea of "looking inside" brings up an interesting question: *Just what is a Christian supposed to find when he "looks inside"?* In other words, when one who trusts Jesus and his righteousness for his salvation looks inside, when he looks intently into his own heart, what is he supposed to there discover?

Certainly any honest and careful inspection will reveal sin, for sin truly and obviously taints our every thought, word, and action. God's Word tells us that "***the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.***" Sin will always be a part of us, but is that it? Is that all we are supposed to find when we "look inside"? Shouldn't we also find other stuff – good stuff – when we take an internal inventory? Shouldn't we also find things like faith in Jesus Christ and fruits of that faith, for example?

Be careful here, since this is one great big danger zone. Alarm bells should sound in our ears any time we wander into the area of introspection and self-analysis. Lots of bad things can happen if we aren't careful here. The greatest danger is that we can come to doubt our very faith if we look inside and find deficiencies. Satan loves to create despair when you come face-to-face with your own natural sin and depravity. He wants you to doubt your very salvation if you find that you are not passionate enough, as joyful as you ought to be, or as excited and eager as you would like to be. He seduces you into imagining that if you happen to lack the sort of zeal that you see in others, then maybe you are really not a true Christian after all.

Satan loves such instability and doubt in God's children. He loves it because it leaves us susceptible to play down Christ and to emphasize instead our own feelings, our own "contributions," our own goodness.

What about you? Have you ever "looked inside" only to be discouraged at the lack of zeal and passion and fruits of faith that you would expect to find there? The fact is things like energy and zeal are really not very reliable indicators of God's opinion of the condition of a human heart. Excitement and enthusiasm say nothing about the rightness of the thing that someone believes. In other words, just because I'm enthusiastic about something doesn't really say anything at all about what I am promoting, other than that I'm sold on it. Some of the most energetic and enthusiastic people you will ever meet are those that promote the most trivial things imaginable – and the most terrible.

Truth, remember, is an *objective* thing. That means that there is a universal standard, and God alone gets to determine what that standard is. God alone determines what does and does not represent reality, since he alone has created and established all things. If a man believes that he must earn his way to heaven (something that every single non-Christian religion teaches) of course such a man will be zealous and energetic. That zeal and energy are based not on any objective truth, but on the man's own personal convictions - and fears. Christianity does not find its motivation in selfishness or fear, since we know that *our* salvation has already been won for us by our Savior Jesus. Fear then is never supposed to be the driving force in our lives, since we know that we can add nothing to God's plan for our salvation and therefore stand un-condemned before him because of what Jesus Christ has already accomplished.

The problem that that leaves us with, unfortunately, is that the work-righteous folks (those who believe that they have to earn their salvation)

are generally more energetic and more zealous than those who realize that their salvation is already secure through faith in God's Son. Fear and greed are powerful motivators, though in the end such things bear no real and lasting fruit.

None of this is, of course, new. Work righteousness has been in existence since the Fall into sin, and those who try to earn their way to heaven have often demonstrated tremendous enthusiasm in the practice of their false and damning religion. The Jews were no exception, and Paul addresses this phenomenon in our text for this morning when he says, "**For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.**" The Jews did not lack for enthusiasm; they lacked knowledge. Knowledge of what? Jesus, of course, and his status as the World's only Savior. Their problem was that they chose the only other alternative to Jesus, which is work-righteousness, by whatever name they choose to give it.

That's why when the Jews looked inside, they looked for all the wrong things and were therefore completely fooled by what they found. They found enthusiasm, which gave them the illusion of being right. They found family history, which gave them the illusion of entitlement. They found a reverence for the Law of Moses, which gave them a firm but misguided sense of direction for their lives. The bottom line is that the Jews liked and admired what they saw in themselves, and absolutely *hated* Jesus and his followers for disturbing their illusion of grandeur and their confidence in their own plan for salvation. Paul put it this way in our text: "**For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God** (which is the gospel of faith) **and seeking to establish their own** (righteousness, by works) **they did not submit to God's righteousness.**" The key here is first of all that their *zeal* or *enthusiasm* did not make them right or wrong. They were condemned by God because of what they believed, not because of their lack of goodness or zeal. The root problem was that they placed their trust in a "righteousness" that they themselves must provide.

Paul clears all this nonsense away in our text with one magnificent statement of pure gospel: "**For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.**" One translation (Phillips) put it this way: "**For Christ means the end of the struggle for righteousness-by-the-law for everyone who believes in him.**" To put it yet another way, where Christ starts, the law stops. Those who look to Christ as the source of their salvation have no need for

any other salvation plan – certainly not one where man has to try to provide that which man has *never been able to provide*, which is perfect obedience to God's law. Jesus did that in our place, and he now credits his perfection to our sins, erasing them forever.

Again we return to the idea of looking inside and what the Christian should there find when he does so. The Jews hoped to find within themselves the means to achieve heaven. That's what our text referred to as **"the law for righteousness"** – which is exactly what Christ ended. Our text reminds us that we are to look inside only long enough to recognize how thoroughly sinful we are, but then to look *outside* of ourselves for righteousness. Hear this well, for this is critically important. Our hope and confidence cannot be based on that which is within us.

Our text further explains by adding this prohibition: **"Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down from above) ⁷ or, " 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)."** Isn't it interesting that our text points to the two things that are uniquely *Christian* and which form the very basis of the Christian faith. No man could ever go up into heaven to bring down the Savior. God himself arranged for that when Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. So also when Jesus was put to death, no man could ever descend into the place of the dead to raise Christ from the dead. God himself did that on Easter Sunday. The point is that God, not man, is the source for man's salvation. These things are therefore not the sort of things we should look for within ourselves. Such things must be provided for us by another, by Jesus the Messiah.

So then is the Christian faith always and only external? Of course not. While we look for the payment for our sins outside of ourselves, faith in Jesus becomes a part of us, residing in our hearts. The Holy Spirit operates through the Word, and that Word also resides within us. Therefore while Christianity points to an outside source for the solution to our sin problem, Christianity itself is anything but an external religion. The Holy Spirit intends for the good news of Jesus Christ to fill our world; to cause us to say with the Apostle Paul, **"To live is Christ and to die is gain."** The gospel brings to life the new man, the Holy Spirit takes up residence within us, and good works flow as a natural result.

Yet here, right at the end, Satan would add a *"Yes, but..."* Yes, *Jesus died for my sins – I truly believe that – but shouldn't I do better, do more, return more to the One who saved me? Am I really a Christian when I continue to sin and return so little for all that he has done for me?"* The

very question actually answers itself. It is Jesus Christ who has already provided every good thing I will ever need to enter heaven. Our hope, our confidence, is always and only supposed to rest in what he did, not how often we fail. So then while we expect to find good works in our lives, our level or degree of obedience and demonstrations of love are never supposed to be our source of confidence or comfort. That confidence, that comfort, is summed up perfectly by the final verse of our text: **"For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.'"** That is the faith that lives in your heart – a gift from God the Holy Spirit. That is what you are to find when you look inside. That is the answer to the question asked of you this morning: *"What do you see?"* *"Looking inside I see sin and failure. Looking to the cross I see perfect forgiveness from God the Father through faith in Jesus Christ that cancels every single thing I've ever done wrong and adds every single thing I've failed to do. This I believe."* Do you want to do better? Of course, but that's because you are already his. Jesus is *your* Savior. When such faith resides in your heart, your salvation is secure. Our text says so, for there we are left with this simple, powerful truth: **"Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."** So then we continue to struggle to do better, to return more, to be filled with greater excitement and energy, but all of these are just how we say "thank you" for what is already ours. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV (**Amos 8:4-7**) Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, ⁵ saying, "When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, ⁶ that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?" ⁷ The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: "Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

ESV (**Luke 16:10-15**) "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? 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." ¹⁴ The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. 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.

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The 15th Sunday after Pentecost – September 22, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 375 (Red Hymnal)

"If Thy Beloved Son, O God"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Amos 8:4-7) The religion of the Jews was never intended to be work righteousness. They were always saved by faith in the Promise, never by their own deeds. Yet they came to rely on their own works as their entrance to heaven, even though – as the Prophet Amos points out in our first lesson – their own deeds were thoroughly wicked. So also God here warns all who imagine that their wickedness is passing unnoticed that he does, in fact, see exactly what they are doing.

The Second Lesson: (Luke 16:10-15) Our Gospel reading follows the Parable of the Shrewd Business Manager, who won the hearts of his master's debtors by reducing their bill once his dishonesty was discovered. Jesus here goes on to teach us that earthly wealth is just supposed to be a means to a higher goal, which is kingdom work in his service. The Lord knows what is in the heart, and the love of money cannot coexist with saving faith in the human heart. We cannot serve both God and money.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 22. (Red Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 32 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Redeemed, Restored, Forgiven"

The Sermon – Text: Romans 10:1-13 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"What Do You See?"

The Offertory – page 22. (Red Hymnal)

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 323 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"With Broken Heart and Contrite Sigh"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 32 (Stanza 4) (Red Hymnal)

"Redeemed, Restored, Forgiven"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (40) Average (38)

This Week at St. Paul:

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| Today | -9:00 a.m. | – Sunday School and Bible Class |
| | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service w/communion |
| | -11:15 a.m. | – Fellowship and coffee time |
| Wednesday | -5:30 p.m. | – Women's Fellowship Meeting |
| | -6:00 p.m. | – Confirmation Class |
| | -7:00 p.m. | – Midweek Bible Class |
| Next Sunday | -9:00 a.m. | – Sunday School and Bible Class |
| | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service |
| | -11:00 a.m. | – Fellowship and coffee time |

CLC News – Pastor Em. John Klatt has accepted the call to serve as vacancy pastor for Bethel of Morris beginning in October. The Call Committee on Institutions called Pastor Wayne Eichstadt to the ILC faculty. The CLC Board of Missions called Pastor Rob Sauers to serve as our third foreign missionary. Both a summary and a full report of this week's CLC Board meetings will be made available in the coming weeks.

Church Council Meeting Notes – Five members of the Church Council, plus the Pastor, were present for the September 15 meeting. Mr. James Strunk was accepted by transfer into communicant membership. The Treasurer's report showed a \$331 surplus in August and a \$77 deficit year-to-date. The next Council meeting is scheduled for October 20th.

Women's Fellowship Meeting and Supper – The Women's Fellowship is scheduled to meet on Wednesday at 5:30pm. This is their annual Salad Supper, which will be followed by a business meeting. For more information please see Cindy Ollenburger.

Confirmation and Midweek Bible Class – Please note that both Confirmation and Midweek Bible Class return to their regular Wednesday schedules this week, at 6pm and 7pm respectively.