

## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

### *The Righteousness of Christ*



**Background:** Last week depicted God asking the children of Israel what it takes for them to trust in Him. What greater signs than safely bringing them out of 400 years of slavery in Egypt could they ask for? Gaining God's favor does not require massive offerings like sacrificing 1000 rams or offering \$10,000 gifts but rather that we "show love and friendship to all mankind" and "walk humbly with your God". So this Sunday we will focus on achieving righteousness. Whether you are spiritually wise or worldly wise, all people know sin is evil and must be redeemed. Such redemption is covered with a sacrifice and the shedding of blood to seal the deal. Where the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of the Lord differs is that worldly wisdom would result in defining an adequate payment of what constitutes enough to rectify the crime. But God is perfect, and has no provision to allow for any sin in His sight. So it is obvious that no human or animal sacrifice is adequate to pay

**Charity relieving Distress Thomas Gainsborough 1784** the price of our sins. Thus God in His wisdom sent His Son to earth to live a perfect life and to be the sacrificial lamb that pays for all our sins. Can you accept this gift of God? Probably not on your own, but God sends His Holy Spirit to work faith in us so that we can accept the wisdom of God for making us righteous by trusting in His Son for paying the full price of all our sins. For some, it's hard to do. We simply have to swallow our pride and recognize Christ's sacrifice on the cross was the only means for me to become righteous. May we always trust in the Lord, who has made us righteous.

**The Lessons: Isaiah 58:3–9a, 1 Corinthians 2:1–12 (13–16), & Matthew 5:13–20** Jesus warns that *"unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 5:20), but He also calls His imperfect people *"the salt of the earth"* and *"the light of the world"* (Matt. 5:13, 14). That's because the Lord Jesus came not to abolish the Law or the prophets, *"but to fulfill them"* (Matt. 5:17) in perfect faith and love. Since He does and teaches all of God's commandments, He is *"called great in the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 5:19). God manifests His *"demonstration of the Spirit and of power"* in *"Jesus Christ and him crucified"* (1 Cor. 2:2–4), and through the preaching of the Gospel He gives His *"secret and hidden wisdom"* (1 Cor. 2:7). Christ gives this perfect righteousness to His people, and it leads them to true fasting, which is *"to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free"* (Is. 58:6) and *"to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house"* (Is. 58:7).