

# Sermon Theme: Jesus Stays within the Lines

Read Zechariah 7:4-10, Galatians 3:15-23, and Luke 10:25-37

“Mom! Mom! Come check out what I made!” The little boy tugged at his mother’s arm, for he was so excited to show his mother his artistic masterpiece. Though tired from a long, hard day of chores; the boy’s mother complied. She followed her son, expecting to find a Lego structure or playdoh creation of some kind. She followed him to the living room only to find that her expectations were mistaken. What did she find? She found that her son had drawn stick figures with crayons all over the white walls of the living room. “Do you like it?” her son asked with full sincerity...As you can imagine, the boy’s mother disciplined the boy to teach him that that wasn’t the right thing to do. Crayon colorings don’t belong on the walls. They belong on paper. She then printed some coloring sheets for her son and showed him how to use them.

Perhaps it isn’t strange though that the little boy had no idea that what he was doing was not proper. He needed to be shown what is good and what is bad as regards his use of crayons. He doesn’t know what a “good job” is unless it is rewarded or punished as such, as is often the case with children. But when it comes to grown men, Jews from the days of Zechariah the prophet, they should know what a good job is. The context of our sermon text this morning (Zechariah 7:4-10) is that men from Bethel came to ask the prophets and priests of Israel, the representatives of God,

whether it was okay to stop observing particular fasts, which were meant to work as a warning reminder of Israel's fall to Babylon nearly eight decades prior to the day of Zechariah.

Now that Israel had been returned from exile and was rebuilding the city including the temple, the people perhaps thought, "we don't need these fasts I'm pretty sure, but let's ask God just to make sure." They then did so by asking God's representative, the prophet Zechariah, and Zechariah brings to them what God says. As regards whether they should keep fasting or not, God is indifferent. This, on the other hand, is what God's response was, "when you practiced this fast, did you do it for me or yourselves? Does this make me happy or you happy?"

The people practiced this fast, thinking that it would please God. That's far worse than the kid drawing on the wall, for the kid didn't know better in a sense. Here, they knew better, for they had God's Word proclaimed by ancient prophets; and yet They didn't check God's Word, for if they did, they would have learned that, "writing on the walls" with fasting was not going to please God. If they checked God's Word, they would have learned that showing justice and grace to one another, and therefore love to God, is what God wants. They would have found the "coloring pages" that they were supposed to use; and they would be rendered guilty, for they failed to color within the lines of those coloring pages, let alone on the pages at all.

Coloring on the pages, following God's law of love towards Him and our neighbor, that's what God wants. He doesn't want our made-up attempts to please Him. He doesn't want our stick figures on the wall. Alas, we have failed to do this. How is

God's anger with us going to go down? It isn't...well, at least not with us. It would be taken on by His Son, Jesus Christ, the one who did exactly what God wanted, coloring perfectly within the lines of His Law. This perfect coloring, this perfect life of Christ, would then be given to us to reflect upon us the perfect record of Christ's love. This love of Christ was then put in us by the Holy Ghost through the Word to work in us a new walk of life. By this grace then the Spirit teaches us to color within the lines knowing that Jesus' perfect life and innocent death have spared us of God's wrath and have given us rather God's delight.

So then, yes, there are lines to color in. There are specific morals that God desires, and we've failed to meet them and have rather colored all over the walls. Yet, that's what Jesus came to fix. Jesus stays within the lines, and He did it for us. He took our punishment, and now He gives us newness of life that inevitably teaches us to color within the lines of God's good will. Seeing this our theme we pray...

So, if there are lines to color in, what do they look like? Well, in the drawing world, depending on how difficult, they typically are black lines printed on white paper which intersect and weave to indicate the spaces that should be colored. It is quite clear from the coloring sheet where one should color. When it comes to God's will, what do the lines look like? They are spelled out in His Word, and from that Word we see that He and He alone determines what they are.

Mankind throughout the ages though has tried to determine these lines for themselves. Some are way off based, drawing on

the walls of the living room rather than between the lines of coloring sheets, or even on the sheet itself. They make things up completely, like the people of Zechariah's day who thought that the act of fasting—a fast that God was indifferent towards—was going to make Him happy, doing it to please Him when in reality it the misplaced attempt only angers Him. It's like some in our day who think that saying the same prayer eighty times, messaging beads, picking fish over beef on Friday, or reading your "dirty laundry list" to a magically ordained man is going to please God. These things though are just mere drawings on the walls. God may say to these things, "are you doing that for me or yourself? Is my Word not clear on what I think is good? Is not my Word clear on what you ought to do? Check it out. It hasn't changed...for 2,000 years!

Still there are others who have a grasp that they need to color on the coloring sheet, and so they do...but definitely not completely within the lines. They would rather pick and choose what space they want to color in. Take our Gospel reading for instance. The Lawyer wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus how to get to Heaven. After conversing with Jesus, the lawyer realizes that he is supposed to love God and neighbor perfectly. The Lawyer thinks, "oh...well I didn't color there (meaning that he failed to love fully)...but I did color there, let's see if that works" "Who is my neighbor?" he asks. If Jesus were to say his fellow Jewish man, then he would be fine, for he allegedly colored it in. Yet this is the truth: "Everyone is your neighbor..." Well that's not colored in...The lawyer colored only where he wanted too, but

not where God wanted him too. The lawyer in the end is still making things up regarding how he is to please God.

Now what about us? We have been taught time and time again about the coloring lines--the Law of God. We have been taught that He has a standard, which is summarized in this way: Love God and Love your neighbor as yourself. And in reflecting on how well we've done that, we fall guilty of coloring on the walls by making up things that we think make God happy; we fall guilty of coloring only what we want by picking only certain people to love and respect, and respecting and loving God only on certain days or at certain, convenient times; we fall guilty of coloring all over by looking back at random "good deeds" hoping that that's enough, but it isn't. God has made lines for us to color in, and we haven't done it. It's that simple. That's His Law. And what does this Law effectively do now that we realize we failed our coloring assignment? Galatians 3, our Epistle reading, puts it this way: "Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions" and, "the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin." That's what it does. It reveals our failures in order to show us our desperate need for something outside of us, a Savior, one who can make take away the record of our failures, one who perfectly colored in the lines, who kept the law perfectly.

Who then is this? Jesus Christ! He is the promised one! He is the offspring of Abraham. He is the one who would bring us the promise of a clean record, salvation, and eternal favor from our Heavenly Father. Though the Law shows us our need, the Gospel, or Good News, shows us our Savior Jesus. He gives to

us God's blessings of grace in accordance with Galatians 3, "so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." Now how could this be? How can we just have a clean record, salvation, and eternal favor with God? It's because of what Jesus did on our behalf. Let's look at those three blessings of grace and see how Jesus gave those to us.

The first given to us is a clean record, a coloring sheet that is perfectly and neatly colored within the lines--the Law of God perfectly kept. How did Jesus give this to us? Well, He kept it perfectly when He lived for us here on earth. And what did He perfectly keep? The Law of God as it is presented in our text and elsewhere in Scripture. When God told Zechariah to speak His will to the Jews, this is what He said, "Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, <sup>10</sup> do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart." Here is the coloring sheet, and Jesus filled it in. He showed true judgments first of all, not letting sinners off the hook. For every time we dismissed or enabled our neighbors' sinful ways, failing to color it in, Jesus did color it in by rebuking the self-righteous, condemning the ways of the sinful, and reproofing false teaching all according to the true judgment of God's Word. Jesus also showed kindness and mercy. For every time we failed to show undeserved love and the withholding of what seems to be deserved hatred, coloring something furiously rather than gracefully, Jesus obeyed these portions perfectly for us. He forgave the sins of many and fed thousands. He healed people of diseases that they rightfully deserved. For every time we

oppressed anyone--perhaps even the helpless—poking holes in the coloring sheet, Jesus did not. He blessed all with His presence, not oppressing, but only blessing people from poor leper up to rich tax collector. For every time we've harbored evil in our hearts, refusing to color at all, Jesus kept a pure heart for us. He kept the purest heart for us all. Jesus kept a clean record, loving our neighbor and His Heavenly Father, and He kept it for you to give to you as your own, so that your coloring page looks like a stunning Van Gough rather than a miscolored and torn up coloring sheet with crayon skirting off the page and onto the walls.

So then that is how we have a clean record, and yet how did He give us the next blessing: salvation? For coloring all over the walls and failing to do what God asked, how can we be spared from the punishment of everlasting fire? This is how: Jesus took the punishment for you. Why would He do that? Remember our Gospel reading for this morning? Remember how a Samaritan raised up his half-dead, mortal enemy--a Jew--to strength? Jesus, holy God separate from us sinners who are dead wretches that were doomed to hell, raised us back to life. He died instead of us and He rose again on high to show you the life that He has given you. He, out of His gracious love for you, died for you even though you didn't deserve it. He was the Good Samaritan for you in highest sense. By dying for you then, and rising on high to show He did it, Christ Jesus forgave your sin, washing your crayon writing off the walls. He took away every record of your evil and its guilt. He saved you.

And finally, with a clean record and freedom from punishment, how does Jesus give us the third blessing: favor of God? Well, along with a good coloring sheet and writing on the wall, God our Father is well pleased with the work of Christ given to us as our own. We have been reconciled to God as His adopted children now. We are children who please God by our faith in our Savior Jesus. And so, with Jesus' blood and righteousness as our beauty and glorious dress, our beautiful coloring sheet and clean record; with these things firmly grasped by the gift of saving faith, let's look at that coloring sheet of God's will one more time. When it comes to loving God and our neighbor, after all that has been said involving Jesus coloring within the lines for us, there is something different now when we approach God's coloring page: We now have faith in Christ. This faith produces fruits of faith, for that is what it does. Like a tree is just going to produce fruit whether you say so or not, so will your faith with fruit. It will color in the lines of God's will out of thankfulness. That's just what it does. It may look like courageous justice applied as a loving rebuke to your neighbor. It may look like undeserved love to someone. It may look like mercy towards someone. It may look like assistance to the helpless. It may look like a loving heart. It may look like an indiscriminating attitude. It may look like a gift used to God's glory alone. Whatever it may be, this then, my fellow Christian's, is just another blessing of Jesus love: the favor of God to help us in our walk of faith, which is a new coloring sheet of thankfulness.



Aren't you glad that Jesus colored in the lines for you? Jesus was the best at it. He knew what God wanted, and He fulfilled it; and He did it for you. This spells out your perfect record in God's eyes, your salvation, and His favor to your life.