

Judica

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St. John 8:42-59

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In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' words of judgment against these Jews who had purportedly believed in Him are perhaps some of the most pointed and uncomfortable things Jesus has ever said. This was not a polite conversation. The Jews were enraged. Their superficial belief was exposed and they were left seething in their hatred for Jesus and His doctrine. They had tried again and again to trap Jesus, to expose Him as a fraud. They had sought to trap Him in His words and lure Him into contradicting the Word of God spoken through Moses and the Prophets. They had tried...and they had failed. Miserably. Every attempt only left them with egg on their face looking more and more foolish and hypocritical themselves. One thing was clear, Jesus wasn't simply going to go away. The only way to be rid of Him and His teaching was for Him to die...or so they thought.

Jesus didn't set out to make them look like fools. The public humiliation of the sinner as an end in itself is never the will of God. Our Savior only ever has one purpose that drives every word and act of His ministry - the salvation of the sinner. Christ is deeply grieved at the vitriolic response of His beloved people. In this final conversation with the Jews, the words of St. John in chapter one are brought into clear relief: "He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him." And they weren't just indifferent or disinterested. They hated Jesus. They wanted Him dead and they had the stones in their hands to make it happen right then and there.

Why? How do you explain such blind rage against the one who healed diseases, drove out demons, raised the dead, and preached the mercy and forgiveness of God? There's really only one explanation. Jesus' doctrine, the doctrine which comes to us through the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, is the key. The Jews couldn't convict Jesus of sin. Not a single thing that Jesus ever thought or said or did was contrary to the divine Word. There isn't a single commandment that Jesus ever broke. Now, that might annoy us as sinners. We find it obnoxious when another sinner even appears to live a more upstanding and moral life. But I don't believe I've ever wanted to throw rocks at a goodie two shoes until they were bloodied and dead in front of me.

What enrages the Jews that day is the same thing that enrages all who hate and despise God's Word. They don't like what He says. They don't like what Jesus says about man and they don't like what He says about God. Their malice against the truth has been brewing ever since Satan rose up and tried to overthrow God in the beginning. Satan was not content with the way the divine Word had ordered all things in heaven and on earth. Adam and Eve were then convinced to follow suit. They wanted to be like God, knowing good and evil. And ever since, man has hated the Word of God, hated God Himself. Man hates that God is God rather than man. Man hates that God's will is contrary to his own, demanding a life of selfless love. Man hates that the divine Law, rather than praising man's goodness, instead exposes the truth that man is filled with all manner of vile and repugnant desires, that man, because of his corrupted nature, is incapable of true fear and trust of God, and is rather inclined toward all that is sinful. It isn't simply that man occasionally makes a bad decision. The holy will of God as it is revealed in the Ten Commandments makes it abundantly clear that, left to our own devices, our own "free" will, we are absolutely incapable of good at all before the throne of God. Our sinful flesh is always striving at every moment to do that which is evil. Even the "good" things that we do are tainted with evil because they aren't done out of pure love for God and neighbor. The fruit can't be good because the tree is rotted all the way down to the root.

Consequently, and the other thing that drives our sinful nature to utter insanity, we cannot do anything to save ourselves. We can't begin, carry on, or complete our salvation. All of our righteousness, no matter how shiny, no matter how hard we have striven to attain it, is utter garbage when it comes to our salvation. Even if we could manage to eek out the slightest good thing, that doesn't mean we should be rewarded for it. We are supposed to do good. It's our duty as those who are created by God in His image. It's utterly laughable to think that you deserve some kind of special award because you showed up to work and did the things you agreed to do! And Jesus had made doubly sure that we didn't get any wrong ideas about our ability to be good. If you have been angry, if you have looked inappropriately at a woman, if you have even desired to have what God has given to your neighbor, then you are worthy of the eternal fires of hell because it is all idolatry, it is all an attempt to unseat God from His throne and put yourself in His place.

Such things are the work of Satan and those who are his children. He was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing, not a single thing, to do with

the truth. When he lies, he is being perfectly in character. And this is what enraged the Jews. Jesus was exposing their evil. His teaching was true and theirs was not. They had never been able to refute a single teaching of Jesus with Scripture because Jesus' teaching was Scripture. Man is a sinner and can only be saved if God does the saving start to finish. Jesus' innocence of life was only a further demonstration that His doctrine was true and pure in every point. He lived perfectly according to His doctrine, something no other man can do because we are born of sinful flesh. He lived, as man, FOR man, a life of completely perfect faith in God. And when the life of any man born in the natural way is held up against the life of Jesus, even the nicest and most pious among us, is instantly not so nice or pious. The flaws and failings are immediately evident and even the good things are seen to be nothing more than filthy rags.

Why does anyone hate and reject Jesus' teachings? Because Jesus' doctrine has consequences. True doctrine reveals that there is absolutely nothing good in any man. No exceptions. The truth declares that fallen man is spiritually blind, dead, and an enemy of God, a child of wrath and eternal judgment. Jesus' doctrine demands that I say of myself "I am a wretched man. There isn't the least good of which I can boast. I deserve nothing from God but His eternal judgment because I my heart is filled with wicked desires, my mouth is filled with wicked words and lies, my eyes are filled with lust and covetousness, and my hands are busy carrying out all of it."

But this confession is a direct assault on our desire to think well of ourselves, to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. The teaching of Christ lays siege to the fortress of our self-righteousness and like the trumpets of Israel, brings its walls crashing to the ground, leaving only a pile of rubble and dust. If we or the Jews were only concerned about giving glory to God, each and every person would always and only love the words of Christ, because that is exactly what Christ's doctrine does - it gives to God all honor and glory by giving Him all credit for our salvation. Consequently, that means I get none of it. There is nothing I have or have done that I have any business boasting about, either in my heart or in the ears of others.

And this is what makes unbelief so horrifically tragic. While Christ's doctrine reveals with complete clarity the wretched condition of man, that's just the beginning of His doctrine. The beating heart and soul of Jesus' doctrine is the revelation that it has pleased God in His mercy to save such wretched sinners! How heartbroken Christ must have been to be face to face with

these Jews, His chosen people of old through whom He preserved the promise of salvation for all nations, people for whom He would soon gladly shed His precious Blood to save them from eternal death, and rather than receiving Him with shouts of joy and thanksgiving, they despised Him, called Him demonic, and soon would scream with satanic joy "Crucify Him!"

God's fervent, fervent desire is that all men be saved, all people be rescued from eternal death and judgment. But that only happens in Christ Jesus. He takes absolutely no pleasure in anyone's damnation. God was willing to offer up His Son for our salvation. The invitation of the Gospel is real and is for every last man, woman, and child that walks this earth, for everyone of you sitting here today. The Jews may have been incensed, but there was no anger in Jesus that day. He did not hate them or wish for their destruction even though He knew full well that they wished for and plotted His. He loved them and desperately wanted to save them, just as fervently as He desires to save you. As they mocked Him and taunted Him as He hung dying on the cross, Jesus prayed that His Father would not hold even this against them, against you, that you might not suffer damnation for crucifying the Son of God.

But to save you, He must first kill you. If you would live, you must die. Jesus must first show you your actual condition. He must help you see your slavery to sin and death which you are not only powerless to escape, but also which your Old Adam loves. This killing of sinners through the preaching of the Law is often referred to as God's alien work. It is alien because He takes no pleasure in it. It is not His joy to condemn. He does it only so that He may save you. He shows you your need so that you would desire His proper work, the work that He truly loves and takes pleasure in, taking away your sins, raising you from death to new and eternal life, making you His beloved child and an heir of His kingdom.

This is what God Almighty desires for you. And so He has sent His Son Jesus to bear the awful burden of your guilt and your rebellion and your hatred of God. The Father has provided on Mt. Golgotha the true substitutionary ram, His beloved Son, in your place, so that you would be restored to Him. It's why Jesus stands before you today even this very moment, exposing the darkness of your heart, the unbelief and rebellion that still dwell within, because He brings with Him the cure - the absolution, the Body and Blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. You don't need to try to throw up walls and defend yourself or deny that it's true.

If you say you have no sin, like the Jews in today's Gospel, you aren't deceiving anyone but yourself and you have no truth in you as the devil has no truth in him. If you would be righteous in yourself, if you would claim any goodness of your own, then you are of your father the devil. Trying to uphold your innocence or even just minimizing your guilt only keeps you from receiving the free gifts which Christ has died to win so that you might have them. "Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart", but with all boldness and confidence confess before all heaven and earth "I am a sinner. There is nothing good in my flesh. But the Son of God has taken my place and spared my life because He is merciful and full of compassion."

This is why the world does not want to see Jesus hanging on the cross. It is the most visceral and undeniable rejection of any righteousness in man. If the Son of God had to suffer such a wretched and humiliating death in order to make payment for our sin, then there can be no honest debate that our sin, not simply collectively, but individually, is incomprehensibly great because the cost was so incomprehensibly high. The Son of God in the flesh, on the cross is at once the fiercest preaching of the Law and the most beautiful and comforting preaching of the Gospel. The price was terrible. But Jesus paid it! All of it! The Lamb went uncomplaining forth with joy, suffering the lies and the blasphemy and the nails, despising their shame all for the joy of saving you. He didn't want the Father to forsake you as you deserved so He was forsaken instead. He suffered the fiery Baptism of God's wrath so that you could be washed clean and be received into God's favor in the Baptism of water and His Word. He gave up His Spirit in His death so that you might receive the Holy Spirit who gives life and resurrection. He submitted His innocent Flesh to the scourge and the rod, to the nail and the spear so that you might feast on His Flesh as true food that gives eternal salvation and the forgiveness of all your sins. He drank the bitter gall of God's judgment so that you could quench your thirst for righteousness by drinking deeply of the cup of His Blood.

And though the devil and the world and even your own flesh bitterly rage against this pure and beautiful doctrine of salvation, though they condemn it as demonic and blaspheme it, though they lay against you all kinds of charges as they did against your Lord, do not despair. God is no liar. His Word is true. Your faith and trust in Christ is not in vain. Do not be shocked when even those who wish to be called Christians rail against this heavenly teaching, insisting that your works must count for something before God. "You must decide", "You must give your life to God", "You must try harder

and make satisfaction". All lies. These are they who think of sin but lightly and cannot bear the Word of Jesus so they twist and pervert it to conform to their own foolishness and, sadly, to their own destruction. These are they who rob poor souls of the the means by which God has promised to give His grace, thereby making Christ a liar. They insist that Baptism doesn't actually save you, that Jesus was wrong when He said "This is my Body and Blood." They will promise you that they have the steps you must take, the program you must follow, and the works you must do if you wish to be saved. They will pander to your Old Adam by stroking your ego and saying, "There, there. You're not so bad." Flee from such false and pernicious teachers and do not let others fall into their trap. Don't let yourself or anyone else be deceived by how fun or comfortable or modern they may be. They aren't harmless. They are liars and they have nothing to do with the truth. They are doing the devil's work by leading sinners away from the atoning work of Christ and back to the death of self-righteousness. They would have been picking up stones with Jews.

On the Last Day Christ's pure doctrine and your faith in it will be vindicated. Those liars will be forced to cower and acknowledge their deceit and answer for all those they led away from Christ and back into judgment in Christ's Name. Cling always and only to Christ and His pure Word. All who cling to His Word will never see death. All who cling to the promise of salvation through Jesus' death, all who confront their guilt with the words "given and shed for you" will have no reason to fear death or the grave any more than they fear their own bed. You who trust in Christ, you are of God. You have been born of God in Holy Baptism. Your conscience has been purified by the Blood of Christ. And on the Last Day, though now you are despised and rejected by the world, afflicted and harassed on every side, you will shine with the glory of Christ and enter into His eternal rest.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.