

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

The Fifth Sunday in Lent (Judica) (2021)

The Scripture Loving Christian

Rev. Toby Byrd

“Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.” (John 8:47, ESV)

The season of Lent is rapidly drawing to a close, and throughout this season we have focused on our Lord Jesus, His Baptism and His Passion. Most importantly, our focus was not drawn from our imagination, but from the only true source of knowledge on these subjects, God’s holy Word. Thus, we pray:

O heavenly Father, who has given us Your Holy Scripture to make us wise unto salvation, create and sustain within us a true desire to hear Your Word, to diligently search it as did the Bereans, to be in Your house each Lord’s Days knowing, this is where Your Word, Your whole Word and nothing but Your Word is preached in all its truth and purity. We pray also that You would add Your blessing to the Word we hear; that it would not return to You void but bring us to saving faith in Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, filling us with Your Holy Spirit that we may walk everyday with Jesus our Savior and Redeemer. We pray for this and all things in the name of Your beloved Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the Gospel Reading today we find our Lord Jesus once again in the Temple being confronted by the Jews who not only deny His Messiahship but call Him a liar and a Samaritan having a demon. Filled with their sanctimonious piety, they castigate Jesus because He preaches a message contrary to the one, they preach. Our Lord Jesus preaches forgiveness, compassion, mercy, and love while the Pharisees and scribes, preach righteousness, righteousness that comes from fulfilling the Law of God. Our Lord Jesus preaches and teaches faith, and the Jews preach and teach segregation, bigotry, and hate. These temple leaders, filled with their own righteousness, looked down upon all who did not measure up to their standards of holiness, their standards of piety. How quickly they forgot or dismissed the Word of God through Ezekiel, who said, ***“Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die.” (Ezekiel 33:13, ESV)*** How sad that these Jews, filled with their own righteousness could not see that they were committing an injustice on the Son of God.

How easy it is to forget or to be ignorant of the efficacy of God’s Word. We are reminded of the emptiness of man without the Word of God when Hilkiah the high priest found the Book of the Law in the Temple which, through man’s negligence had fallen into disrepair. When king Josiah’s secretary read him the Book of the Law, Josiah tore his clothing in shame because the people had been deprived of God’s Word for many years. But overjoyed at finding the Book of the Law, Josiah called all the people together, big, and small to hear the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found (2 Kings 22-23).

Without Holy Scripture God is hidden from man, but through the prophets and the apostles, God reveals Himself in Holy Scripture. In those blessed pages He also reveals Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ and this revelation shows us a merciful, loving God who desires to forgive all

men their sins, restoring them once again to the original righteousness with which man was created, the righteousness of God. It is in those very Scriptures, that our Lord Jesus reminds us to, ***“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:36, ESV)***

Jesus affirms in our text this morning, ***“Whoever . . . hears the words of God”*** is of God. Here, He is speaking of far more than a casual hearing or a cursory, outward reading of God’s Word. Rather, Jesus is speaking of relying on the Word of God as revealed in Holy Scripture. He says that you can be assured that when ***“You search the Scriptures . . . they . . . bear witness about me,” (John 5:39, ESV)*** It is this very Scripture that assures us of the salvation offered by God through the Gospel of which St. Paul reminds us, ***“faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17, ESV)*** Thus, unlike these Jews who are confronting Jesus, we are to be more like the Bereans who responded to St. Paul’s preaching of the Gospel, ***“with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” (Acts 17:11, ESV)*** Obviously, they believed that Holy Scripture contained the truth of God, and when hearing an unknown preacher proclaim a message of salvation through faith and not through works of the Law, they were compelled to judge this new message against God’s Word. And to their delight, Scripture revealed to them the truth of what St. Paul preached, salvation comes by faith alone in Christ Jesus.

Thus, *the Scripture Loving Christian* is one who hears the Word of God and teaches it. But there are those who call themselves Christians who do not rightly hear the Word of God. Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, Jesus said, ***“This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.” (Matthew 13:13, ESV)*** Furthermore, St. Paul, also quoting from Isaiah, said, ***“God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.” (Romans 11:8, ESV)***

Those who are not of God do not hear His Word or teach it. Therefore, those who rightly hear the Word of God are compelled to judge those who claim to be followers of Christ on the basis of what they believe, teach, and confess. If they deny that salvation is by faith in Jesus’ atoning sacrifice alone, teaching that man must do something to aid in his salvation, they are not of God. Salvation through faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9) is the truth of Holy Scripture which every *Scripture Loving Christian* recognizes.

Just like many today, the Jews, in our text this morning, resent the charge that they do not hear God’s Word. Did they not regularly attend worship in the Temple or Synagogue and hear God’s Word recited from the Torah. Sure they did. But although they were gathered to hear, their ears were deaf, and their hearts were cold. These are those of whom Isaiah prophesied. Those who could not recognize Jesus as the prophesied Messiah. But not all the Jews were like this.

Yes, the religious leaders rejected the Word of Christ, but the people eagerly sought Him so they could hear Him speak. Scripture tells us that tax-collectors and sinners flocked to Him, but the Pharisees grumbled (Luke 15:1). Thousands upon thousands were compelled to come to Jesus, drawn by His words and His miracles of healing. They pressed in on Him by the Sea of Galilee, they went with Him in the mountains, they followed Him throughout Galilee and Judea with the hope of hearing Him proclaim God’s desire to forgive, to hear Him remind them of the truths of the Torah, that salvation awaited all who believed in the promised prophet. They followed Him remembering that Habakkuk had said, ***“the righteous shall live by his faith.” (Habakkuk 2:4, ESV)*** They followed Jesus because the prophet Isaiah had said, ***“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”” (Isaiah 52:7, ESV)*** Indeed, the people were drawn to our Lord ***“And they were***

astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.” (Mark 1:22, ESV) For these people, Jesus was the Messiah.

Like these people who followed Jesus in His day, *the Scripture Loving Christian* relies on God’s Word for creating true faith, for building true hope, and for giving the true assurance of forgiveness and life eternal. *The Scripture Loving Christian* knows that God’s Word contained in the Old and New Testaments is the only source and norm for the doctrine of the church and to which all doctrine and teaching must be appraised and judged. The Psalmist tells us, **“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105, ESV)** and St. Paul reminds us, **“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:8, ESV)** Holy Scripture tells us that God’s Word is the light which guides us to His holy Son, who is the only path to heaven, and if anyone, including an angel, should preach a false Gospel, they are to be accursed, that is set aside to receive God’s wrath for their willingness to lead souls away from Christ.

Such were the religious leaders of the Jews. God had given His people the Ten Commandments, but their religious rulers added to the Decalog, another 613 commandments and then another 13,600 regulations in the Talmud, declaring each of them to be divine obligations more important than God’s Law, thus setting aside God’s Word for the sake of tradition. Sounds much like the Christian church in the days of Dr. Martin Luther. Christian leaders had taken on the curse of the Jewish leaders who decided the people needed more rules and regulations, more traditions to live by to assure salvation. To such leaders Jesus said, **“Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.” (Luke 11:46, ESV)** and St. Paul instructed the Colossian church, **“Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath . . . If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (referring to things that all perish as they are used)— according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.” (Colossians 2:16, 20–23, ESV)**

Moreover, God commands that we neither add to nor subtract from His Word (Deut. 12:32). To help us safeguard God’s Word, Jesus sent us the Spirit of Truth, but the question is, are we relying on the Spirit of Truth to help us guard God’s Word? When pseudo-Christians mix in preconceived and erroneous ideas with or subtract from that which God has given in His Word, God calls on *the Scripture Loving Christian* to guard His Word and to speak out correcting the errors of false teachers.

All too often God’s people are enticed to consume bologna when they are told they are eating steak. They sit and listen to men who chatter day and night without ever expounding the truth of God’s Word. Such are the revivalist, the pietist, the mystics, and the enthusiast. Instead of proclaiming God’s Word, they proclaim the opinions of men, they speak about income, position, power, privileges, and all manner of useless trifles. Trifles which have no bearing on the salvation of souls. Their preaching comes in every variety except God pleasing and edifying. They point souls to worldly things while denying the inspiration of Scripture, the efficacy of Scripture, and the inerrancy of Scripture. Moreover, what is worst, their denials are believed by many and thus, their false doctrine convince their listeners that they are blessed. Many, though, rather than being blessed, are miserable, lamenting every day, “I hope I am good enough to get into heaven.” They are uncertain of their salvation because their teachers, through false teaching, have led them to doubt the truth of their salvation revealed in the Gospel. Others, believe their teachers who say the Law is no longer relevant, and therefore, sin is no longer sin. Such as these

immerse themselves in sin, fully believing there is no longer a need for repentance. Still others, like the Jews of old, believe that through their effort, through their following of the Law, through their piety, they can obtain the glory of heaven. Their leaders have convinced them and burdened them through false doctrine that to obtain sainthood one must follow all the ordained rules and regulations of men. St. Paul has a harsh word for such teachers, he says, let them be accursed.

Teaching that denies the efficacy of God in the Sacraments, teaching which insist there is only one correct way to be baptized, teaching which says baptism is your work, teaching which denies the true body and blood in and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion, teaching which insists man can make a decision for Christ, that musical instruments are forbidden in church, and the like, these are all contrary to Holy Scripture and thus fall in the category of false teaching. Yet so many who call themselves followers of Christ believe in these false teachings and, as such, they are prone to take credit for what only Christ can do, thereby robbing Christ of His glory. This is a dangerous position to place yourself in.

However, if one is a true Christian, they will be a Berean, searching the Scripture to ensure that what their being taught conforms to the Word of God. Again, St. Paul has a word of warning for the lazy Christian who simply relies on what men are saying without investigating their veracity. Speaking to the Christians in Galatia, who believed the Judaizers who were telling them they must be circumcised to be saved, St. Paul said, ***“Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.”*** (Galatians 5:2–4, ESV)

The Scripture Loving Christian believes, teaches, and confesses that the Church is bound to the written Word of God, both the Old and the New Testament. St. Paul reminds you that your faith is, ***“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,”*** (Ephesians 2:20, ESV) Moreover, rather than make things up, we repeat and preach what we have heard and learned from the Apostles being fully convinced of their truth. The apostle John confessed, ***“that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”*** (1 John 1:3–4, ESV) Thus, we cleave to the unadulterated Word of God because we are convinced that through it the Holy Spirit leads us to faith by hearing of the Word of the Gospel in all its truth and purity (Rom. 10:17).

Convinced though as we are, we are also often criticized for our unwavering, orthodox position on the inspiration, inerrancy, and efficacy of God’s Word. But *the Scripture Loving Christian* does not waver in their faith and reliance of God’s Word knowing that Jesus has told us, ***“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*** (Matthew 5:11–12, ESV) Be not a Scripture denier, but a Scripture lover. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.