**Perfect Doctrine and Life**

Based on [John 8:42-59](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn8.42-59)

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Fifth Sunday in Lent - Judica

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**“*Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me.”***

This Gospel teaches why it is that Christ was rejected by the rulers of the Jews. It wasn’t because he taught false doctrine. It wasn’t because he lived a sinful life. Jesus Christ was rejected, beaten and crucified by the Jews because he told them the truth and because he lived a perfect life. They could not bear to hear the truth, because they preferred to believe their lies. They could not bear to see his righteousness, because they preferred to live in their sin. They received their reward, but those who believe the word of Christ will live forever.

“Jesus said to them, **But because I tell the truth you do not believe me.**” This is an amazing statement. Those who reject Christ and the knowledge of the truth do so, not because of what is said, but because it is the truth. This is the way it’s always been. In pagan Rome 2000 years ago, and in pagan Canada today, you can have any religion you want so long as you don’t say that your religion is the truth, and that your god is the only true God. Truth is an authoritative word. It doesn’t bend or kowtow to feelings or opinions or circumstances. Truth is the way things really are regardless of what you think, feel or believe.

If Jesus’ teachings were only partially true or a part of truth, they might think he was a great sage contributing to the collective wisdom of human thought over the ages. But Jesus didn’t just teach some true things, he taught that his doctrine alone is truth. He said, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me**.” That is the scandal. That is why he was so violently rejected then. And it’s why he’s so violently rejected now.

Jesus was blameless in doctrine and in life, and yet he suffered. We often consider his wounds and stripes, his physical privation and abuse by those who would murder him. But a very real part of Jesus’ suffering is through slander and false accusation. The Jews accuse him of being a “Samaritan,” which sounds among the Jews worse than any other crime. And they accuse him of having a demon.

Moses taught the Jews that only on the evidence of two or three witnesses is a charge of sin to be established. What is the basis for their charges against Jesus? What is their evidence? Nothing; their own rage and hatred, bitterness and cruelty are the grounds upon which they pass the sentence. They murder his reputation as casually and as eagerly as they will later murder his body on the cross. Here is Cain killing Abel all over again. The unrighteous killing the righteous to spite God.

This is an example to all of us of the martyrdom to which we are called. The way the devil--the original murderer and father of lies--suppresses the truth in this world of his is by persecuting those who hold to the truth. He does so either through attacking the *body* or attacking the *reputation*. We are called to bear witness to the truth. That’s what martyr means “witness”, and the perfect witness is one whose story doesn’t change when threatened. The devil tempts us to remain silent about the truth of Christ, by sending his children slander and persecute us so they may continue to live a lie and do what is right in their own eyes.

This is why you are called to be like Jesus who is blameless in doctrine and life…so that when you are persecuted, it is because you hold to the truth, not because of your sin. Peter writes, “**But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil**” (1 Pe 3:15-17).

To suffer for doing good, first we must have perfect doctrine. Then, and only then can we know that what we speak is from God, and if it is from God, that it is the devil who is rejecting it. If someone rejects you because of some false opinion of yours, that is of no advantage to you. You deserve to be scolded for making confident assertion about matters uncertain. **Keep your doctrine pure, and when you speak authoritatively to others, speak only according to the word of God.** Do not judge others based on clothing, or food, or holy days as the Jews did. Do not judge people based on the world’s criteria. Those who judge according to the world will be judged with the world. Those who judge according to Christ will be judged with Christ, who has already made atonement for our sin been vindicated in his resurrection.

Having perfect doctrine is the most important thing in the world. In this world of thousands of types of Christianity, it alone is the basis upon which one must choose a church. Jesus says, “**Whoever is of God hears the word of God.**” Pure doctrine is the only way you can know whether you are listening to the word of God or not; and if a church is built on false doctrine, you can be assured it will teach and live accordingly. Many people join large churches who teach false doctrine because they have a youth group for their children, or because they have soft pews and cup holders, or because they have screens and play video clips during service, or because they are treated like customers, rather than disciples. **Many people tolerate false teaching of churches because they like the people, or because the music is uplifting, or because they aren’t made to feel uncomfortable.** Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But you chose your church based on doctrine. Because even the smallest doctrine, one jot or tittle of God’s Word is worth more than heaven and earth. They will pass away, but the word of the Lord remains forever.

Second, to suffer for doing good you must lead a perfect life and not be guilty of sin. This is of course impossible for man, but with God all things are possible. Jesus says, “**Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matt 5:48),** and he’s not joking” The command to “Be perfect” has been replaced today with the saying, “Do the best you can.” But this is useless advice when it comes to being a good person. By your own strength you can only do evil. And, if you are only commanded to do “the best you can,” you can never really fail can you? And no one can judge you and hold you accountable; and so you are never in need of repentance and forgiveness…and that’s exactly where the devil wants you, ignorant of your need for forgiveness so you won’t seek it where it may be found.

No, when it comes to being a good person, it’s best to teach what God actually says. Be perfect (Matt. 5:48). You are not called to mediocrity, you are called to perfection; and when you fail you are called to repent and desire to do better. //// This call to perfection would be a terrible burden and cruel law, except for one thing...The gospel. Be perfect, but when you fail there is always the gospel of forgiveness won by the blood of Christ, given and shed for you.

Therefore, strive to be perfect, blameless in doctrine and life. This way you can suffer because of Christ and not because of sin. As Peter says, “**For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God**.”

In today’s gospel, Jesus is being persecuted for one doctrine in particular: the doctrine of eternal life in him. He teaches, “**Truly, truly I say to you, if anyone keeps my word he will never see death**.” Of course, Jesus means they will never see ***everlasting death or hell***, but the Jews think he means physical death and they run with it.

They says, “**Now we know you are wrong, because Abraham died and we all know he is from God.**” It’s a good argument. Abraham kept God’s word and yet he did die physical death. But what Jesus is saying is that, even though Abraham died a physical death, Abraham lives eternally with God, and that he will be raised up on the last day, because Abraham kept Jesus’ word.

Listen to Hebrews 11:17-19: “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ***He considered that God was able even to raise [his son, Isaac] from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back***.”

Jesus answers them, “**Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad**.” Now, Abraham did not see the day Jesus conquered death by rising from the grave. **But by faith, Abraham saw God’s plan of salvation fulfilled in his own son Isaac who did not see death**. When God promised, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named”, Abraham believed him. He knew that God doesn’t lie, and that somehow--despite God’s command to sacrifice his son--Isaac would not die eternally. Abraham new God would either deliver his son from death, or else afterward raise him through death to life. On account of that promise, Abraham saw Jesus’ day and showed perfect obedience.

In the same way, when you believe the words “**Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins**”, you can be certain that your sins have been paid for, even if you did not see Jesus die on the cross. Instead you see Jesus’ death proclaimed at this altar, and you hear his body and blood proclaimed under bread and wine for the forgiveness of your sins. Is Christ a liar? Or could it be that, like Abraham, you also are seeing Jesus’ day and rejoicing?

Today he forgives your sins, today he sets you free from sin to live a life of perfect obedience to God. “Go forth, and sin no more”…but remember that if you do sin, you will always have an advocate with the father in Jesus Christ.