

Sermon Judica
John 8:46-59
The Benefits of God's Word
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“Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.” The worst thing for a person to do is to reject God's Word; to refuse to listen to it; to find it unimportant. Take all the other vices in the world: murder, adultery, theft, covetousness, drunkenness, slander; a person who commits any of these is in a bad situation. Yet, if he listens to God's Word, he can be convinced to repent, to turn from his ways and ask God for forgiveness. Whatever the sin, no matter how grievous, if someone will *hear God's Word*, there is the possibility of repentance and forgiveness. God's Word is powerful.

But if you refuse to even listen to God's Word, if you regard it as worthless, not valuable in this life, irrelevant to your situation, then how can you get out of your sinful condition? How can you correct yourself if you do not hear God's Word? How can you repent? How can you hear the sweet words of forgiveness that come only from Christ? For this reason, the rejection of God's Word is the most damaging sin. A murderer who will hear God's Word can be brought to repentance and faith in Christ. But without God's Word, there is no faith.

For this reason Jesus says, “The reason why you do not hear [the words of God] is that you are not of God.” Jesus tells this group of Jews that they are not of God. That is a very severe thing to say to someone. If they aren't of God, then, of whom are they? Jesus declares to the same crowd just a few verses prior to the beginning of our text, “You are

of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires." (John 8:44) Now this is quite extreme, don't you think? "Your father the devil?" How could Jesus say such harsh words? Because they rejected God's Word. Jesus even said to his dear disciple Peter, "Get behind me Satan, You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." (Matthew 16:23) Jesus is making very clear that the rejection of God's Word is the work of Satan. Whether it is his disciple Peter or the Pharisees, they reject God's Word according to the devil's influence.

Now it seems quite strange that Jesus would say that they are not of God. Aren't we all of God? God created us! We confess in the Small Catechism, "I believe that God has made me and all creatures, that he has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members..." Satan did not create you. He didn't give you your mouth, eyes, ears, and hands. God did. They are from God. Yet, for *whom* are they? Who determines their use? Does your body and soul live for God? Do your eyes seek that which is God pleasing? Do your ears yearn to hear God's Word? Do your mouth and hands do service to God and your neighbor? Jesus tells the Jews that they are not of God, not because God didn't create them. But because they use their bodies for the devil's use, not God's.

Now, even Christians sin. Even those who believe Jesus' words are tempted in various ways and use their members for dishonorable use. They speak hurtful words, think impure thoughts, etc. Yet, that does not mean that the Christian is of the devil and not of God. Rather, as St. Paul writes, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is good, but not the ability to carry it out." (Romans 7:18) The Christian sins out of the weakness of his flesh, but that does not make him not a Christian. Because a Christian *listens to God's Word*. A Christian repents when

confronted with God's Law and tries to correct himself. A Christian believes God's promise that his sins are forgiven. What makes someone "not of God" is the refusal to hear God's Word.

Now we know what Jesus says of those who will not hear God's Word, but what of those who do? "Whoever is of God hears the words of God." Those who hear the words of God are *of God*. This is more than simply being created by God. Everyone is created by God. No, to be *of God* means that you are God's child. If you hear God's Word and believe it, you are of God's family, God is your dear Father and you are his dear child. There is no greater honor in all the world than to be a child of God through faith.

And what are the benefits of being such a child of God and hearing his words? Jesus says, "If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." Jesus' words give eternal life. For this reason they should be cherished, guarded as a priceless treasure worth more than life itself.

But what word is Jesus talking about? God's Word tells us not to murder, fornicate, or steal. It tells us to speak only honest words and to refuse to hear gossip, to be content with what we have. That is God's Law. It is very good. But God's Law does not give eternal life. Rather, St. Paul writes, "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in God's sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." So even when you try to keep God's Law, you fail. Instead of finding eternal life, God's Law declares death to all who transgress. For this reason many shut their ears to God's Word entirely, not wanting to hear from the Law how they've failed. So if God's Law does not give

eternal life, what words will give us eternal life? The Gospel is the word that gives eternal life.

What is the Gospel? The Gospel is the good news that Jesus died on the cross to earn free forgiveness for all people. This is the word of which our Lord speaks. If you cherish the message that Jesus was delivered over to death, suffered the wrath of God's Law, and rose from the dead and that by this death and resurrection you have eternal life, that is exactly what you have. You will not see death.

Now this makes no sense. "Will not see death?" What is Jesus talking about? People die all the time. *Christians* die all the time! Every Christian since Jesus spoke those words has died until today. This infuriates the Jews too. Abraham died! The prophets died! How can Jesus claim to be better than they? How can he promise eternal life? Jesus responds by saying that Abraham rejoiced to see his day, he saw it and was glad. How can Jesus know Abraham? He's hardly over thirty years old. Abraham died almost two thousand years before Jesus was born!

Jesus answers, "Before Abraham was, I AM." With this statement, Jesus claims to be God. The Jews knew it too. When Moses asked God in the burning bush to tell him his name, so he could tell the people who sent him, God answered, "I AM WHO I AM...say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God's name is "I AM." This is a very descriptive name. Abraham was. God is. There was never a time when God did not exist. There will never be a time when God will no longer exist. Jesus is God. He says so. There never was a time when Jesus didn't exist. There will never be a time when he will no longer exist. This is confusing, because Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary on a certain date. There was a time when he was not a man. The Jews can see his relative youth in his

face. He was born nearly two millennia after Abraham. Yet, Jesus created Abraham, even knew him before he was born.

The mystery of the Holy Trinity is impossible to understand. God is one. The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. Yet there are not three gods, but one God. Jesus, the Son of God has been with God the Father from all eternity. There was never a time when he was not the Son. There was never a time when the Father was not the Father. They are eternal. They are one God.

This is important for us when considering Jesus' words. Jesus isn't just a smart teacher. He isn't a social or political activist. He is God. And his words are God's words. And when Jesus dies on the cross that is God himself paying the immense debt of our sins. When God saw the sinful condition of mankind. When he saw us lost, on a path to eternal death, he loved us. God took his Son, his only Son, whom he loved, and he sent him upon a mountain. He had him carry his own cross of wood to the top. And there on Mount Calvary God provided the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. There could not possibly be a greater sacrifice for sin. And it is impossible for any sin to be too great for Christ's death not to wash it away.

Yes, Abraham died. Yet, he rejoiced to see the day of Christ. He saw it and was glad. That means that Abraham had *faith* that God would send his Son to take away sin. Abraham believed God's Word, he cherished it even unto death. And according to that Word, Abraham has eternal life. Yes, he died. Yet lives in Christ. And on the Last Day, Abraham will rise from the dead and live forever.

Yes, you might die. Perhaps you'll breathe your last before Christ returns. I don't know. But if you cherish Jesus' word, that is if you believe that he is the great I AM,

who died for you and forgives you freely of all your sins, then death is only a heartbeat away from eternal life. The death Jesus speaks about is eternal death. That is the punishment for sins. But Christ bore all sins on the cross. For you who hear and believe Christ's word of forgiveness, you have no sin to worry about. Jesus has taken it away. And you have no eternal death to worry about. You'll never see it. Instead you can look forward to eternal life with your Savior.

The honor of believing God's Word is being a child of God. The benefit of hearing and believing God's word is eternal life. You can be certain that you have eternal life, because Jesus, who is the eternal God gives it to you.

In his name.

Amen.