

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Third Sunday in Lent, March 3, 2013

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 294, 283, 284, 358, 364:1-5.
Lessons: Psalm 119:24-37, Acts 17:1-12, John 5:1-36.
Sermon Text: John 5:36-40.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Jesus is in the middle of explaining to the Jews that there are witnesses that point to him and testify that he is the very Son of God, sent by the Father. At the end of our Gospel lesson he named John the Baptist as a witness. Now in our sermon text he speaks of an even greater witness: God the Father has sent him, approves of him and his work, and sent him to redeem mankind from sin.

But he sharply criticizes the Jews, saying *“You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent.”*

Then comes the real heart of our sermon:

IT IS IN THE SCRIPTURES THAT YOU FIND WITNESS THAT JESUS IS TRUE GOD

- 1. The unbelieving Jews did not find Jesus Christ, the Savior, in the Old Testament.**
- 2. What this command *“Search the Scriptures”* means for us.**

If you memorized this passage from the King James Version you will recognize it as a command: *“Search the Scriptures.”* The New International Version presents it as a simple statement of fact: *“You diligently study the Scriptures.”* However, the context clearly indicates it is spoken to the Jews as a command: Search the Scriptures, Jesus tells the Jews. Then you will find out that they testify of me, and in them you will find eternal life.

Today let’s first look at these words *“Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me”* (John 5:39 King James Version) and apply them to the exact situation in which Jesus found himself. Then we will examine them and apply them to our lives.

The trouble wasn’t that the Jews didn’t have access to the Father’s Word. They had his Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, and they supposedly had studied those Scriptures, searching for eternal life.

They studied, but they didn’t learn. They looked, but they didn’t see. The Scriptures were all about Jesus and God’s plan of salvation through him. And now Jesus had come with signs and miracles, and they didn’t believe that he was the promised Messiah, the Savior. They did not want to come to him for the eternal life they were seeking.

We need to read carefully and recognize where the fault lay. Jesus tells them: *“I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent.”*

The Jews refused to believe Jesus was who he said he was. Their wills opposed God’s promised Messiah.

A ceaseless searching of Scriptures is commanded by Jesus. The Scriptures, as the Jews had them in those days, as they were used by them in synagogue and Temple, contained all the books we know of as the Old

Testament. The Old Testament was complete in the days of Jesus. They read these books. They memorized them.

When Jesus spoke of *“the Scriptures”*, the Jews knew exactly to what Jesus was referring. And Jesus appeals to the Scriptures as an authority testifying that he is who he said he is. In this way he acknowledges and confesses the inspiration and the inerrancy of the Old Testament. This fact was supposedly accepted without question by the Jewish people and also by the Jewish teachers. For that reason their belief was well founded that they could find eternal life in the Scriptures; that they had in Scripture the revelation of the way to heaven.

But one thing they no longer knew, or else ignored most shamefully, namely this, that the Scriptures contain eternal life only because they testify of Jesus the Savior. Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end not only of the New Testament revelation, but also of the Old Testament revelation. Thus the Jews should have gotten a correct picture of the Messiah, and they should have applied the Old Testament prophecy to this great Teacher. But their evil wills refused to come to Jesus. They rejected the life which he was offering to them. They deliberately spurned his offer of grace and mercy. Instead they chose the way of damnation rather than to accept the Holy One of God. And if we look at the behavior of Jesus, they had no reason for their rejection. Humanly speaking, Jesus was a good person. He did not seek honor from men. At the time of our text, he had just performed a good work, a miracle. But he didn't even stick around to take credit for the miracle! He was in fact sinless, but that was something they could not see in their blindness to the truth of God's Word.

Correctly understood, the Old Testament testifies to the mission and ministry of Jesus. But the Jews did not understand it correctly. His mission is precisely what God said he would do in Scripture and what God told him to do as he ministered among mankind on earth. Any understanding and interpretation of Scripture that does not lead to Jesus as Savior from sin is incomplete. We read in Deuteronomy that even the king whom God appoints over his people is to *“write for himself on a scroll a copy of [God's] law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees”* (Deuteronomy 17:18-19) And if the king is to read the Word of God, what about all of his people? Even if we have read the Bible cover to cover, there are things we forget. We must read and study in it repeatedly.

Jesus is the greatest revelation of God, revealed in Scripture and manifested in the flesh as John makes abundantly clear in this gospel. Some, including those who confronted Jesus on this day, were among those who claimed to seek and follow God. Yet they refused to believe and follow Jesus. Diligent study of Scripture is fruitless if it does not lead to faith in Christ. Faith, not facts, is the ultimate purpose of Scripture study. Unfortunately, Jewish leaders read the five books of Moses – the first five books of the Bible – to determine rules for living and for judging others. If people will not believe God's revelation in his inspired writing, how will they begin to believe in Jesus, who is more than human, who is God in person?

Jesus is making some very harsh accusations on the Jews who were persecuting him. *“You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent.”*

The hypocritical Jews persecuted Jesus. They followed him around with hostile intentions. They were looking for ways and means to put him out of the way entirely. The fact that he had performed the healing described in our Gospel lesson on the Sabbath was in their eyes a deed that deserved death.

But was this God's fault, or even Jesus' fault, that they couldn't understand? Jesus makes it clear that they did not find him in Scripture, and it was because they were looking for something and someone else in the Scriptures. The fault was with those who were attacking Jesus.

Even today there are people claiming to be Christians who see the Scriptures only as a rule book. Many see the Scriptures only as stories of good men and examples of how to live. And many others, claiming to be Christians, simply pick and choose what parts of the Bible they want to accept.

So who and what is Jesus to us? Is he just a good man and an example for us? Is he just someone who lays down rules – more rules than are found in the Old Testament – for us to obey?

We must examine this command and apply it to ourselves: *“Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”* (John 5:39 King James Version)

The Jews Jesus was talking to obviously had not diligently studied the Scriptures, or they would have seen him for what he is, and recognized him for the one who brings eternal life for mankind. And us? Have we diligently studied the Scriptures? Have we spent even as much time searching the Scriptures as we have for other activities in our lives? The answer sadly is no. We have 168 hours in a week. Subtract the 40 or 50 hours involved in your job and there is still a lot of time left. Even I find it hard to search and diligently study the Scriptures. My sinful flesh leads me away from God's Holy Word.

But even if we are just reading the Scriptures, we must be careful. Going through the motions isn't enough to really get out of Scripture everything it has to say to us.

So Jesus could not really say to us and commend us by saying "***You diligently study the Scriptures,***" for we do not diligently study the Scriptures nearly as often as we could and should. Jesus instead gives us the command, the imperative: "***Search the Scriptures.***"

That is the idea of ransacking them, examining them, studying them, and remembering – even memorizing – what it is that we are reading. All of you who can read know that there are things you read that you must remember – for school, for that test next week, for your job, in order to complete that project or the recipe for the meal you are working to prepare.

Well, the very Word of God – New Testament as well as Old Testament – is one such thing we should study. And it is really more important, too, for it prepares us for eternal life, life after death. Search and "***study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me,***" Jesus tells us.

You know why. "***Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.***" (Acts 4:12)

In our Epistle lesson you heard about the believers in Berea. They studied the Word of God, carefully and critically, examining it eagerly and diligently to see if what Paul was telling them was true. "***Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.***" (Acts 17:11) Did you notice that "***they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day?***" They did this "***to see if what Paul said was true.***" Do you realize how important that is? You, too, are to search the Scriptures diligently to help keep me on the right track, lest I teach anything contrary to the Word of God. I try to study diligently and to write carefully so that every word I tell you in a sermon is clearly the Word of God and nothing but what God tells us. God is clear when he tells us in Revelation 22:18-19 "***I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.***"

There is no other source for eternal life.

You've heard repeatedly that eternal life is found in Scripture, and that God gives that eternal life to us through faith in Jesus Christ. And the Scriptures make it clear how it is that faith comes. "***Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.***" (Romans 10:17)

Lord, give us such a faith as this! Let us Search the Scriptures, so that when we meet our Savior he can gladly tell us that we HAVE diligently studied the Scriptures, for no where else can we find eternal life. Amen.