

Judica Sunday (Psalm 43; John 8):

Vindicate me, O God,

And plead my cause against an ungodly nation;

Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man! – Psalm 43:1

Today is known as Judica Sunday. Judica means judge or vindicate. It comes from Psalm 43 in which we pray, “Vindicate me, O God!” Here we learn to turn to God as our judge. He will vindicate us. He will prove that what we believe and confess is true. He will vindicate us who speak what he has given us to believe and confess. Even if the world mocks us, even if fanatics deceive the masses by mixing lies into the truth of God’s Word, even though the devil constantly attacks our faith in the Son of God, we can know that God will not leave us to fend for ourselves. He will judge and prove his Word to be true. He will vindicate us.

In fact, he already has. By raising his Son from the dead, God has vindicated his Son. He has proven that Jesus is the Son of God, that he has the words of eternal life, that he has taken away the sin of the world, and that those who believe in him will rise to life on the last day.

Jesus makes a bold claim. “I tell you the truth,” he says, “If you keep my Word you will never see death.” No one has ever made a bolder claim than this. Jesus stakes his entire credibility on it. In fact, he swears by it. He says, “I tell you the truth.” He literally says, “Amen, Amen.” This is a public oath: “If you keep my Word you will never see death.” If these words aren’t true, then Jesus is a liar, a deceiver, a demon possessed man, worse than a Samaritan or any other heretic. Not only that, but we would all still be in our sins and pitied more than all people. We stake our eternal destiny upon these words of Jesus. We are baptized into these words. We cling to these words as we eat and drink his body and blood, confessing his death as our own death, his life as our own life, entrusting our souls to everything he promised to us. If these words of Jesus are not true, then we are all deceived and deceiving others, members of a crazy cult, and enemies of everything decent and true. If the words of Jesus are not the words of eternal life, then we are all destined for eternal death and torment in hell. This is exactly why those unbelieving Jews insult Jesus and accuse him of having a demon. To them he is a deranged lunatic.

This is exactly what the devil wants us to believe. He wants us to lose hope and despair over these words of Jesus. He rallies up mobs of people in the media, in universities, and in various kinds of churches, striving to convince us that the words of Jesus we confess are only dead words of dead men. It gets very discouraging. We want God to come down and prove every naysayer wrong right now. But the devil just keeps on attacking. The world keeps on denying. Our sinful nature keeps on doubting. Is God’s Word true? Does he hear us? Psalm 43 expresses this frustration:

You are the God of my strength; why do you cast me off?

Why do I go on mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

Why should we have to put up with all these attacks against our faith? The priests of science tell us that we evolved from animals over millions of years of random selection. The scholars in the schools tell us that the Bible is a combination of myths, fables, and traditions. Many so-called churches deny the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus. And even many who claim to be Bible believing churches deny the power of Christ’s baptism and the presence of his body and blood in his Supper. How long do we need to put up with so much confusion? It can seem as if God is far away and silent in the face of so much false teaching. How can we know that God is our Creator? How can we know that Jesus truly did redeem us? How can we know that our sins are forgiven and that we stand righteous before God? Here is where the Psalmist continues:

Oh, send out Your light and Your truth!  
Let them lead me;  
Let them bring me to Your holy hill  
And to Your tabernacle.

This is how God strengthens us and vindicates us. He sends out his light and his truth. Jesus says that the truth sets us free. This is his Word, which called us to faith and keeps us in the faith. It brings us to his holy hill to dwell with him in his tabernacle. It reminds us of what God foretold through his prophets and accomplished in his Son. While we wait for our Lord to return to prove that our faith is not in vain, we turn to what he has always said in his Word. This is what God's children do. They listen to what he has said from ancient times. He said that he would send his Son into the flesh. He said that he would be bruised for our iniquities. He said that he would be struck down and pierced for the sins of the people. He said that he would bring salvation for all nations. Just look at what the Bible says. Listen to what the prophets foretold, and hear how Jesus fulfilled exactly what they said he would do.

Several years ago, my little sister came home from school very discouraged. She told my dad that one of her classmates argued that the Bible was unreliable. My sister was obviously very depressed about what she heard. I could tell that she was shaken up. My dad responded by saying that her classmate clearly hasn't read the Bible. He then went on to talk about what the Bible says. A thousand years before Jesus was born, hundreds of years before crucifixion was even invented, Psalm 22 describes the crucifixion of Christ in graphic detail, saying that they pierced his hands and his feet. My dad went on to talk about Isaiah who also describes the crucifixion in great detail over seven hundred years before it happened. And we have multiple eye-witness testimonies of our Lord's life, teaching, death, and resurrection written down for us. God has already vindicated his truth. He has already proven his Son's Word to be true. And those who are his children will simply listen to this tested and proven Word of truth.

When people deny the teaching of Scripture, they are essentially accusing Jesus of lying. They are accusing him of sin. Jesus is either who he claimed to be, or he is a criminal deceiver. But no one could prove him guilty of sin. He has only done what is right. He turned water into wine. He healed a man on the Sabbath day. He fed 5,000 people. He has taught only what Moses and the prophets foretold. His works have already proven him to be who he claims to be. He isn't some rogue religious leader starting a strange cultic movement. If he glorifies himself then his glory is nothing. Instead, it is his Father who does this. It is his Father whom he has known from eternity, who sent forth his prophets to prepare the coming of the Savior, who sent him into the flesh to redeem poor sinners. The Father glorifies and vindicates the Son.

Everything Jesus does and says is backed up by the Scriptures. He does everything his Father sent him to do, everything the Holy Spirit said he would do. So Jesus doesn't need to vindicate himself. He doesn't prop himself up. Even though his works speak for themselves, he is confident that his Father who sent him will glorify him. "I'm not trying to get glory for myself," he says, "There is one who wants me to have it, and he's the judge. Amen. Amen. I say to you, if you keep my Word, you will never see death."

When you hold onto these words of Jesus, you aren't holding onto novel sayings of some popular preacher. You are holding onto the words of the prophets and hundreds of witnesses. You are holding onto the words of God, which have never fallen to the ground but have always accomplished what they set forth to do. You are holding onto the words believed by Abraham who was told that in his Seed and Descendant all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

Abraham believed what he could not see. He hoped against hope that what God promised him would come true. Even when God told him to sacrifice his own beloved son, he held onto God's Word. And Abraham was vindicated. His faith was proven to be true. He told his son Isaac that the Lord would provide the Lamb for the sacrifice. He was proven right when God spared Isaac and provided a ram to be sacrificed in his place. He was proven right when God's Son came as the Lamb who bore the sin of the world. He trusted in the Word of the Lord who said, "I am your Shield and your Reward." He trusted in the righteousness of Christ. And when God sent his Son into the flesh to bring righteousness and life for all sinners, he proved that Abraham was not trusting in empty promises. Abraham was not put to shame. He was vindicated. As he approached the altar of God, about to sacrifice his own son, he had the hope of eternal life. He could rejoice that he would see the day of his Savior. This is the same joy we can have even today when God brings us through the trials of this life. As Psalm 43 continues:

Then I will go to the altar of God,  
To God my exceeding joy;  
And on the harp I will praise You,  
O God, my God.

This is because it was at the altar of the cross where God's Son gave his life and poured out his blood for our sins. His death has become our life. And his resurrection proves it. It proves who he is. He is the one who was in the beginning with God and in the beginning God. He is the one of whom all the prophets bear witness. He is the great I AM, one eternal God with his Father, the God of the living, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Everything he does and says proves this to be true. So when you believe his words and hold onto them for your life, then you can be confident that he will vindicate you just as he did for Abraham and all his saints who believed his gospel promise.

It certainly is discouraging when so many people deny our Lord's words. But don't let this get you down. Our Lord warned us that the world would not believe in him. He said that his words would be opposed. But the unbelief of the world doesn't make void the faithfulness of God. Let God be true even if all men are liars. When you see God's Word opposed, don't let it get you down. God has vindicated his truth, and he will vindicate all who believe it. As the Psalm concludes:

Why are you cast down, O my soul?  
And why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God;  
For I shall yet praise Him,  
The help of my countenance and my God.  
Let us pray:  
The fleeting wisdom of this age  
With pompous pride will rant and rage  
Against my faith's confession.  
So vindicate Your Word, O God,  
And bring to light the devil's fraud,  
Which scowls in vain aggression.  
Your light and truth will lead me still  
To Calv'ry's sacrificial hill  
Where Christ, my Lord and Savior,  
Was crucified to save my soul.

Now I approach what makes me whole –  
The altar of Your favor. Amen.