

THE WITNESSES FOR THE CHRIST

John 5:30-47

A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. (Deuteronomy 19:15).

One of the cornerstones of the Jewish legal system was the requirement of substantiation through multiple witnesses. If a man was accused of committing a crime, he could not be found guilty unless there were at least two or three corroborating witnesses to confirm his guilt.

There is a reason for this. A single witness might be mistaken or in error or he might be lying for personal gain. Even given the best of motives, it is easy to think you have seen a certain thing when the reality is quite different. If you do not believe me, then ask any policeman about accident investigations. They will tell you that the story of a single witness can be quite unreliable.

The testimony of several witnesses is another thing altogether, especially when they are all in agreement. This is the kind of testimony we have concerning the person and work of Jesus. He did not come on the scene declaring Himself to be the Messiah. To the contrary, He seems to go out of His way NOT to declare His true identity. There is a reason for this. He wants other people to recognize Him on their own. This way, they will be unbiased witnesses.

AN AFFIRMATION OF DEPENDENCE

I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (John 5:30).

Our passage opens with Jesus speaking to the Jews in the Temple. He has just healed a crippled man. This created a problem, not because of the healing, but because it was done on the Sabbath day. This was contrary to the traditional interpretation of what constituted permissible activity on the Sabbath. The Jews taught that you could save a man's life on the Sabbath, but you could not heal him on the Sabbath from a sickness that was not life threatening.

As this miracle was done in the proximity of the Temple area, it had come to the public attention of the Jewish authorities. Up to this point, they had watched Jesus from afar.

Now they have their first open confrontation with Him. It will not be their last.

These Jewish leaders look at Jesus as a renegade. He does not conform to any of their preconceived ideas. He believes in the supernatural and in angels, but He is not a Pharisee. He is not bound by the multitude of traditions, but neither is He a Sadducee. He teaches holiness and piety, but He is not one of the Essenes. He is proclaiming a coming kingdom, but He is not of the party known as the Zealots.

Jesus stands before them and He tells them that He is not a renegade. He is not here “doing His own thing.” He is doing what He has been directed to do. He is not acting as an independent agents. He is under authority and He is following orders.

This means when He heals on the Sabbath day, it is not because He is saying that the Sabbath has been invalidated and can now be ignored. Rather, He maintains that He has not really broken the Sabbath because it is proper and appropriate for the Son of God to do the work of God on the Sabbath.

This is important. Jesus was not starting a new religion. He is a part of something that goes all the way back to Abraham and back before that all the way to Adam and before that to all of eternity. Christianity is not a new religion. It is as old as the heavens and the earth.

THE NEED FOR A WITNESS

If I alone bear witness of Myself, My testimony is not true. ³² There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the testimony which He bears of Me is true. (John 5:31-32).

Anyone can claim spiritual status. It has been done many times. In the year 1167 there arose a man in the land of Arabia who claimed to be a prophet sent from God. He said that he had the power to perform miracles and, when he was brought before the local Caliph, he announced that, if they cut off his head, he would return to life again. The king took him at his word, promising to believe him if he were successful. The man’s head came off and stayed off.

Jesus points out that His witness of Himself is no guarantee of authenticity. Anyone can make such a claim. The real question is whether there are witnesses to back up His claims. In the following verses, He presents four such witnesses.

- The witness of John the Baptist (5:33-35).
- The witness of the works of Jesus (5:36).
- The witness of the Father’s Testimony (5:37-38).

- The witness of the Scriptures (5:39-40).

In the same way that the Mosaic Law calls for a plurality of witnesses, so now Jesus calls forth the witnesses to His Messiahship.

THE WITNESS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. ³⁴ But the witness which I receive is not from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. (John 5:33-35).

The first chapter of John's Gospel tells us how the Jewish leaders sent a delegation to John the Baptist to find out who he claimed to be. There may have been some who were a part of that delegation who now stand before Jesus as He speaks of John's witness.

Do you remember John's answer? He said that he was not the Christ. He pointed out Jesus as the Messiah. His testimony had been that Jesus is the Christ, the lamb of God.

1. John's Witness was from Heaven: *But the witness which I receive is not from man (5:34).*

John the Baptist did not come to the conclusion that Jesus was the Messiah simply because John was a perceptive theology student. He came to know this because it was revealed to him from heaven.

The truth of the gospel is not something that was invented in a philosophy class. It was not conceived by a human mind. It was revealed from heaven.

2. John's Witness is given for your Salvation: *I say these things that you may be saved (5:34).*

Jesus says in effect, "I do not need the witness of John to find out who I am. His witness was not given for My sake; it was given for your sake. It was given so that you might be saved and I am saying these things about that witness so that you might be saved."

There is a principle here. Human testimony about God is not given for God's sake. God knows who He is. It is given for our sake. It is given so that we might know and so that we might believe and so that we might be saved.

3. John's Witness serves as a Light-Bearer: *He was the lamp that was burning and*

was shining (5:35).

Jesus is still speaking of John the Baptist. John is described as a lamp. This is seen in contrast to the way Jesus is described. Do you remember how Jesus is described? He is the light.

John the Baptist	Jesus
He is a lamp	He is the light
A lamp does not have its own light	Light is light by its very essence

When you read of John being a lamp, you have to be careful not to read in a 21st century culture into a first century passage. Jesus is not speaking of an electric lamp. He is speaking of a small, clay oil lamp. Such lamp does not have its own light. It has to be lit by someone else and then it only lights up a very small area.

John said that he was not the light. He had come to bear witness of the light. He was a lamp. He drew people to Jesus as a lamp draws moths. The light that he gave off was caused by the burning message of Jesus.

4. John's Witness was Initially Accepted: *You were willing to rejoice for a while in his light (5:35).*

John had enjoyed an initial period of popularity. At the beginning of his ministry, the Jews had been willing to come and to listen to him. Many even sought to be baptized and identified with his preaching. It did not last. They did not like it when John started getting personal with his message of repentance. It was okay as long as he spoke about sin in general, but when he started talking about THEIR sins, he had gone too far. He had moved from preaching to meddling. They had gone to hear John, but they had been insincere and soon their rejoicing had turned to hatred.

They had once been drawn to the light, but then the light drove them away as it threatened to expose them for what they really were. They began to hate the light. Now they want nothing to do with the message of the light.

THE WITNESS OF THE WORKS OF JESUS

But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I

do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. (John 5:36).

The next witness cited by Jesus to bear testimony that He is indeed the promised Messiah is the witness of His works. Jesus did more than to merely talk. He put His words into action. The Jews had just seen an example of that work. There was a man who was now walking around the temple, carrying a pallet, who should not have been walking at all. There was a lame man who was no longer lame. This fact was a declaration that God had been there.

Nicodemus recognized this principle. He had said that no man could do the things Jesus was doing unless God were with him.

There is an application here for us. In the same way that Jesus called for men to judge Him by the nature of His works, so also we will one day be judged by the nature of our own works.

Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. (1 Corinthians 3:12-13).

A new building usually must pass an official inspection before a certificate of occupancy can be issued. Government officials come out to the site of the building and test its structure to make sure that it is built according to the proper codes. This is to insure that the building is sound.

God also has a set of standards. He will use this set of standards to judge the quality of our works. The standard is Himself. He is going to look at us and He will see if there is a family resemblance.

THE WITNESS OF THE FATHER'S TESTIMONY

And the Father who sent Me, He has borne witness of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. ³⁸ And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. (John 5:37-38).

The third witness Jesus calls upon is the witness of God Himself. The Father has borne witness of Jesus. When did He do this? It was at the baptism of Jesus. When Jesus came up out of the water, John the Baptist saw the Spirit descending and he heard a voice from heaven. It was the voice of the Father. He said, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased*" (Matthew 3:17). The very voice of God came down from heaven and

testified that Jesus is the Son of God.

There is a contrast here between the spoken voice of God attesting the identity of Jesus versus those to whom Jesus now addressed Himself. It looks like this:

John the Baptist	Unbelieving Audience
John the Baptist heard the voice of the Lord identifying Jesus	<i>You have neither heard His voice at any time</i>
John has given us an abiding testimony	<i>You do not have His word abiding in you</i>
John believed the words from heaven	<i>You do not believe Him whom He sent</i>

The Jews prided themselves in their possession of the oracles of God. This was what set them apart from the Gentiles. Out of all the other nations of the world, God had chosen them and had revealed Himself to them.

Now Jesus tells them that they have not heard God unless they believe in Him as the promised Messiah. Their opinion about Him is the deciding difference in whether they are believing or unbelieving. Do you want to see God? Look to Jesus. If you have seen Him, then you have seen the Father.

THE WITNESS OF THE SCRIPTURES

You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; ⁴⁰ and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life. (John 5:39-40).

The Jews had made a religion of studying the Scriptures. They studied the Scriptures with an uncommon frenzy. In this were the seeds of their error. They treated their study of the Scriptures as an end in itself. They studied the Scriptures in order to expand their knowledge of the Scriptures rather than that it might change their lives. They studied for what they could get out of the Scriptures rather than for what the Scriptures could do in their lives.

It is possible for us to fall into that same trap. If your study of the Bible remains on an academic plane, then you are following in the footsteps of these unbelieving Jews.

You might be inclined to protest at this point: "I'm not academically inclined; I flunked fourth grade. I study the Scriptures for higher purposes." What are those higher purposes? Is it in order to learn about eternal life? Notice what Jesus says.

You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life (5:39).

The reason for their study was a search for eternal life. Hillel, the rabbinic scholar who lived in the years just before Jesus, had said, “Whoever has gained a good name has gained it for himself; but whoever has gained for himself the words of Torah has gained for himself life of the world to come.”

The Jews studied the Scriptures diligently, but they had been blinded. They could quote every passage in their Bible and they could even tell you how many words were in each book, but its primary message eluded them. Why do I say such a thing? Because the Old Testament Scriptures are filled with prophecies and shadows and pictures of Jesus.

- They tell where He would be born.
- They tell when His birth would be.
- They give the miraculous nature of His birth.
- They list His ancestry.
- They allude to the assassination attempt against His life.
- They mention His sojourn in Egypt.
- They foretell the town of His upbringing.
- They describe His forerunner.
- They predict His ministry.
- They foretell His eventual betrayal.
- They prophesy of His sufferings.
- They describe numerous details of His death, His burial and His resurrection.

The reason the Jews would not come to Jesus in that day is the same reason people do not come to Him today. It is because they do not want to. It has nothing to do with a lack of evidence. It has everything to do with a spirit of rebellion and pride.

I used to think I could argue people into heaven. I used to think that if I presented a case that was intelligent enough and compelling enough and convincing enough, that I could cause people to believe. That is wrong. Not even Jesus was intelligent enough or compelling enough or convincing enough. Men heard His preaching and they still turned away. The reason they turned away is because they wanted to. They had determined to ignore the witness of Jesus, no matter what the consequences.

THE RESULTS OF IGNORING THE WITNESSES

41 I do not receive glory from men; 42 but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves.

43 I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another shall come in his own name, you will receive him. 44 How can you

believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?

⁴⁵ Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words? (John 5:41-47).

We have already seen that the Jews rejected the testimony of the various witnesses of Jesus. It was not that they disclaimed John the Baptist or the miracles or the Father or the Scriptures. It is merely that they chose to ignore these witnesses. I know a lot of people like that. They have not overtly rejected Jesus or the Bible or the Lord. It is only that they have chosen to ignore them. The results are the same as if they had denied Christ.

1. The Result of Superficial Affections: *I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves (5:42).*

This was one of the most scathing rebukes that Jesus could have possibly delivered against these Jews. They would begin each morning by quoting the Shema:

*⁴ Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!
⁵ And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).*

Of all the Law, this was considered to be the most holy. It was the summation of the entire Law and Jesus is accusing them of breaking it.

Do you see what was happening? They had affections for God, but those affections were of a superficial sort. They did not extend down to the very being of the person. They were more concerned with their own status and their own wealth and their own desires than with loving the Lord.

What do you love? As you ponder that question, let me add that the one thing you cannot do is to have no love. The one thing that is impossible for you to do is to not have any affections. You cannot help yourself -- you WILL love someone or something. What is the object of your affections. If it is anyone else than the Lord of the universe, then you have placed your affections upon a superficial and undeserving object and you are therefore doomed to disappointment.

2. The Result of Spiritual Gullibility: *I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another shall come in his own name, you will receive him (5:43).*

Denying Jesus begins a process of gullibility. You cannot believe in nothing.

There is something that is built into human nature that demands faith. You WILL believe in someone or in something. You cannot help yourself. Once you have denied Christ, there is no telling what will become the new object of your faith.

The True Messiah	False Messiahs
If have come in My Father's name...	If another comes in his own name...
And you do not receive me.	You will received him...

The history of the Jews bears witness to this condemnation. Throughout their history they have been guilty of following those who came in their own name.

- When Theudas rose up claiming to be somebody, there were 400 Jews who went out to follow him (Acts 5:36).
- When Judas of Galilee organized a revolt against Rome, people flocked to his side (Acts 5:37).
- When Simon bar Kochba -- the "Son of the Star" -- came on the scene as a military Messiah, he was heralded as a savior in 132 A.D. by the Jewish scholar Rabbi Akiba. Thousands of Jews followed after him and were dispersed and destroyed by the Roman legions.

Even today you will find Jewish people following after this religious leader or that Jewish superstition while denying the truth of their own Scriptures.

What is true for the Jew is also true of the Gentile. When someone rejects the truth of the gospel, they do not come to the place where the believe in nothing. They will inevitably seek another, lesser object or principle in which to believe. What we said earlier about the necessity of love is also true about faith. You WILL believe in something.

3. The Result of Scriptural Condemnation: *Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope (5:45).*

This must have been a slap in the face to the Jews. Moses was the one person of whom it could be said that he stood at the center of the Hebrew faith. They revered the Mosaic Law. Everything Moses said or did was gospel to them. Even the Sadducees who rejected most of the Scriptures and who denied the supernatural and who said there was no resurrection; even they held to the writings

of Moses. Moses could do no wrong in the eyes of the Jews. They thought of him as their spiritual father.

Moses is not going to be their spiritual father. He is going to be their spiritual accuser. Why? Because they have not believed in the One of whom he bore witness. There is a contrast here between the results of belief and the results of unbelief.

Results of Belief:	If you believed Moses...	Then you would believe Me
Results of Unbelief:	If you do not believe his writings...	How will you believe Me word?

This brings us to a question. Where have you set your hope? Is it on your own good works? Is it on your church membership? Is it on the strength of your own faith?

There is only One who can save you. Salvation is only found in Jesus. Have you believed in Him? If you have not, it is not for the lack of evidence. The witnesses have spoken. The evidence has been presented. It is evidence that now demands a verdict. Be careful how you judge, for one day, it will be the basis by which you yourself are judged.