

August 10, 2014
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study John 5:31-47.

1. How many different sources of testimony did Jesus mention in this text?
2. Why do people refuse to believe that Jesus is God the Son?
3. What difference does it make whether Jesus is God?
4. How do you try to convince a sinner that Jesus is God who offers free salvation to those who believe Him?

HOW MANY WITNESSES DO YOU NEED?

John 5:31-47

Some people are gullible and will believe almost anything they hear. They are the ones who buy the gossip tabloids at the super-market checkout. Other people are slow to believe almost everything. They are typified by the nickname for the state of Missouri. It's called the "show me state." People like that demand a lot of proof before they are going to buy into whatever you are selling.

Hesitancy to trust is part of human nature for a few reasons. First is the fact that after being burned a few times, we tend to be a bit slow to jump on the band wagon. The old saying is, "Fool me once shame on you; fool me twice shame on me." Therefore, we tend to need a good bit of evidence before we commit to things. And yet in

vivid contrast to that tendency is our personal tendency to expect everyone to trust us without any validating proof at all.

That demand for proof is often evident when it comes to matters of faith. Many sinners want to fully understand the miracle of salvation by grace through faith before they are willing to exercise faith. Failure to simply trust God, to take God at His word, is proof that God is not drawing the sinner to justification through His grace. That is the scenario Jesus dealt with repeatedly. It is the scenario John describes in our text today.

Jesus was in Jerusalem during one of the annual feasts. While He was there, on the Sabbath, He went to the pool of Bethesda and healed a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years. That a lame man was restored to health seemed to escape the religious authorities. That a man who was considered to be somewhat common just did a mind-boggling miracle for the lame man didn't seem to matter. That this teacher from the hills of Galilee broke their law about work on the Sabbath was a catastrophe in the leaders' opinion.

Jesus responded to their angst by explaining His authority over the Sabbath. Since He was equal with God the Father, He explained, why should He not be doing the work of God the Father? More specifically Jesus taught, "*I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me*" (5:30). Essentially this verse is a recap of all that John wrote in the previous paragraph (vv.19-29). Jesus had to do good and astonishing work because that is the work of God.

We can only imagine how that set with the religious rulers. This is the reason why they decided they had to kill Jesus (5:18). But Jesus didn't stop there. In the text before us, Jesus explained the matter of witnesses to those doubters. The fact that He was able to do marvelous signs and wonders was a significant witness to His claim that He is God. But there are more witnesses like God's Word, Moses' word, John's word. How many witnesses does a person need before he will believe what Jesus said about Himself? That question is as applicable today as it was in Jesus' day. Listen to the witnesses and be convinced.

John Testified to the Truth of Jesus' Deity (vv.31-35).

Was Jesus really God? Should the Jews accept Him as the manifestation of God in the flesh? Should we? God the Son had testimony beyond Himself (vv.31-32). He acknowledged up front that, in the opinion of the masses, an individual's testimony about himself is generally not of much value. He said, *"If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true"* (v.31). In most cultures, a single testimony about self is not going to be acceptable. A person's opinion about self is irrelevant. In God's law, a single witness beside the defendant was not acceptable. God required, *A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established (Deuteronomy 19:15)*. Especially in serious matters, God's law required multiple witnesses. *On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness (Deuteronomy 17:6)*.

But in this statement, Jesus did not denigrate the veracity of His testimony about Himself. Because Jesus is God, His testimony about Himself is really all we need. Jesus affirmed that truth later in John's record: *Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going (John 8:14)*.

Rather this is Jesus' acknowledgment of the doubt and stubbornness of His opponents. They certainly would not trust His own word about who He is. Most humans don't. That explains the plethora of false religions in the world. That also explains the many mixed-up views about Jesus of Nazareth that have floated around virtually since the beginning of the Church. If Satan can keep the world confused about Jesus, He doesn't need to worry about sinners confessing sin and accepting Jesus as their Savior.

But though Jesus did not testify concerning Himself at this point, He is not without testimony about His deity. Jesus assured the Jews that though He would not testify concerning Himself, someone else bore affirming testimony about the Son. *There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true (v.32)*. The implied "someone" is God the Father. Jesus has already alluded to the fact that He and the Father worked in

concert to do the will of God (5:19-21). But consider the list of witnesses Jesus calls to the "stand" who will confirm that He is indeed God: 1) John the Baptist (v.35); 2) Jesus' works that God the Father gave Him to do (v.36); 3) God the Father (v.37); 4) The Old Testament Scriptures (v.39); and 5) Moses (v.45). Is that enough?

First, we learn that God sent John to the people to tell about the Son (vv.33-35). The Jewish leaders heard testimony from John. They sent representatives to inquire about John the Baptist. So Jesus reminded the nay-sayers, *"You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth"* (v.33). Those very people were curious about this preacher who was attracting a huge crowd (Matt. 3:5). They wanted to know if John was a resurrected prophet, the promised Elijah, or maybe the Messiah (John 1:19-28). In answering their questions, John introduced people to *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29). Only God can do that!

How could the people ignore this "burning light"? Jesus told the people that *John was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light (v.35)*. It isn't like John was saying things they didn't understand. His message that Jesus is God was burning like a bright light in a dark corner. These very people, these religious leaders had to admit that John said the same thing about Jesus that He Himself claimed.

Through John's ministry, God graciously provided testimony so that the people would be saved. Jesus assured them, *Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved (v.34)*. Jesus' divine character is not dependant on John's testimony, or any person's testimony. Jesus is God regardless of whether anyone declares the truth or believes the truth. Facts are facts and Jesus taught the facts by laying claim to God-ness. He declared this truth so that sinners could be saved. Sinners do not confess sins and embrace the work of Christ because they believe John or any other preacher. Sinners are saved by believing Jesus. Do you believe what John the Baptist, John the Apostle, or other preachers in the Bible said about Jesus? Jesus' person and work is the object of our faith. Jesus did what He did and taught what He taught because He desires for sinners to come to salvation by faith in Him alone.

The Father Testified to the Son's Deity Through Miracles (vv.36-37).

Then there is the testimony of Jesus' works. His miracles supercede John's testimony (v.36). The people were satisfied with human testimony for awhile. Jesus reminded them, "*And you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light*" (v.35a). At first John's ministry was wildly popular. Matthew told us, *then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins (Matthew 3:5-6)*. The people and the leaders were excited, anticipating the coming Messiah because of John's preaching. Many of them signed up to be first in line by getting baptized, a public identification of repentance of sin.

But, like all human-generated revival services, the folks soon quit attending Sunday night services, soon went back to the worldly lifestyle, and not only lost the excitement of the moment, but lost interest in John's message about the Savior from sin. We should be happy that the people were enthused for awhile at least. They seemed to be impressed with what John said, for awhile.

Then came the great testimony. Then came Jesus Himself— the miracle worker! If John's words about Jesus satisfied at all, then Jesus' works should have been more satisfactory. *But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me* (v.36). John preached great sermons about the Lamb of God and the people, for awhile, seemed to embrace his testimony. But when Jesus came to the forefront, they should have been fully convinced about who He is and what His ministry is. Jesus' works shouted the verifying testimony that He is the only Savior from sin. They shouted so loudly, so impossible to ignore because God the Father gave Him the works to do.

The God who the Jews and most other false religions today claim to serve gave Jesus these specific, stupendous works to do. They were intended as verification that Jesus is God. When people were astonished with the wine Jesus made from water, they should have concluded that only God could do that. When people learned

that Jesus healed the government official's son, they should have been convinced that only God can do that. When the religious leaders descended on Jesus to complain about Him breaking the Sabbath, they should have stood in silent awe, knowing that only God could heal that lame man. But because folks are more willing to trust Satan's lies than God's evidence, they still resist miracles that demand an answer.

Last week an article showed up on the World News Daily website (www.wnd.com/2014/08/hand-of-god-sent-missile-into-sea) telling the story of an operator of the iron dome that has protected Israel from so many of the Hamas launched rockets. The other day, the Hamas launched a rocket, the Iron Dome precisely calculated its trajectory to within 200 meters. This rocket was going to hit Israel's equivalent to the Pentagon, or it would hit a central Tel Aviv railway station. It was going to inflict many casualties. The operator launched the intercepting missile, but it missed. He launched a second interceptor. He was shocked to see it miss. At this point, there were only four seconds left before the rocket slammed into its target. Suddenly, the Iron Dome, registered a very strong wind out of the east. The wind blew the missile into the Mediterranean Sea. The operators were all stunned, stood up and shouted, "There is a God!" In reaction to this event, one news headline read, "Their God changes the path of our rockets in mid-air, said a terrorist."

The same day the Washington DC, CBC news website reported that Daniel Ortega, president of Nicaragua, claims that Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu is "possessed by the Devil."

The world is still a very religious place that loves to talk about religious stuff. But the vast majority of folks don't take any "signs" from God very seriously. Jesus taught that the miracle signs God gave Him to do should have grabbed the people's attention more than John's sermons did.

But wait . . . there's more! God's voice supercedes miracles (v.37). The greatest of all witnesses to Jesus' deity comes from God the Father. So Jesus declared, "*And the Father who sent me has Himself borne witness about Me*" (v.37a). Certainly the Father gave many forms of affirmative witness about the Son in the hearts of those who believe in Jesus. That is kind of what John wrote about in his first epistle. *This is the message we have heard from him and*

proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:5-7). God speaks to the heart of the obedient person.

Also, God speaks in so many affirming ways through teaching and works. But maybe the most obvious such witness on John's mind was the Father's voice at Jesus' baptism. *Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21-22).* What did the people hear? Did they know this was the voice of God the Father? How did it affect them?

People don't know much about God the Father. So Jesus accused His peers, *"His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen" (v.37b).* Maybe this is a reference specifically to the Pharisees who were not present at Jesus' baptism when God spoke. More likely this is a general reference to the fact that when God speaks in so many ways, those sinners never heard. They, like everyone, had never seen God's form. Or most sad is that they heard God's voice all the time and saw God revealed before them all the time, but they could not/would not grasp the truth. After all, Jesus, God the Son, the perfect and fullest expression of God was right in their presence. And they could not hear God or see God.

This is so much like religious people in every age . . . our age. Each time the Bible is opened and read, each time you hear it, you are hearing God speak. But chances are that it just sounds like so much religious speak. Sure you're accustomed to the Bible. You can even quote portions of it from memory. But does God ever speak to you from the Scripture? Jesus pointed out that this was the problem with the deniers in His day. They didn't hear God speak because they never expected Him to speak from His Scriptures. Which is so sad because . . .

The Scripture Testifies to the Deity of Jesus (vv.38-47).

The people were blind to truth because they trusted the wrong things (vv.38-44). The one thing they should have trusted, they only pretended to trust. They proved that lack of faith in Christ reveals a lack of God's Word. Jesus accused them, *"And you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the One whom He has sent" (v.38).* The Bible is not found to be dwelling in people who refuse Jesus. Those Jews were very unlike Joshua to whom God said, *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success (Joshua 1:8).* They were unlike David who they looked to as a hero. But he confessed, *I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against You (Psalm 119:11).* Nor did all the consulting of the Bible to prove the veracity of their multitude of laws cause them to hear God and understand that Jesus is God.

The people were spiritually deaf to God's words and spiritually blind to His form because they refused the perfect expression of God – the One He had sent. No matter how much a person today studies the Bible, until their heart turns to Christ in faith, it will not be clear to them. But, doesn't Bible study prove that the reader has salvation? Some people search the Bible for that reason. Jesus told His doubters, *"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me" (v.39).* They searched the Scriptures in an effort to prove that their opinions are right.

People like this never open the Bible with the desire to hear God speak. When they do open the Bible, it is to prove their personal opinion or religious preference. And it is still true that such people who use the Bible for salvation believe that in it they find the key to salvation. How close to the truth a person can get and still miss it. Bible study is of no value until the reader sees Jesus exalted as God. Millions of Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Muslims claim to study portions of the Bible, and often claim that the Bible is God's Word, but they never see testimony to the fact that Jesus is God in the Bible.

To refuse Christ is to miss salvation. That is because He alone freely offers eternal life. He offered it to the Jews and, *yet you refuse*

to come to me that you may have life (v.40). How incredibly sad this picture is. The Author of eternal life holds out the offer of eternal life to sinners. But they refuse to come to Him. And one day He will say to them, “*Depart from me you who do lawlessness because I never knew you*” (Matt. 7:23).

For Jesus to offer life is for His own glory. “*I do not receive glory from people*” (v.41), Jesus said. He already possesses complete and full glory. No one can do or say anything that will add to that glory. However, we, the creation, are expected to reflect that glory in the way we live. We are supposed to exalt Jesus so that His glory will be seen. And the best way to shine light on His glory is to believe what the Bible says about Him and receive His offer of eternal life.

God pours out His love in the hearts of those who trust Christ (vv.42-44). That was not the case for the people who rejected Christ. They certainly did not know God’s love. *But I know that you do not have the love of God within you* (v.42). God offers His love through Jesus Christ. To reject Christ in favor of our own preferred plan for salvation is to reject God’s love. To reject God’s love is to reject His salvation. Jesus knows the person does not have God’s love within. Jesus shows the reality of his or her condition through conviction. Religious people often prove that they do not have God’s love.

Those religious people would no doubt want to argue with Jesus about this. So He refuted their arguments by offering proof. The fact is that still people trust other people but not the Son of God. Jesus argued, “*I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him*” (v.43). And so it is. Religious people clamor after human heroes. They are often victims of slick salesmanship. They mistake exciting sounds, lights, and popularity for truth. They love to have their itching ears scratched (2 Tim. 4:3). Mostly they love to hear that they can earn salvation their own way which often has nothing to do with faith in Christ and forsaking of sin. All the while they embrace and fawn over false Christs, they reject the true Christ because identifying with His cross is too demanding.

The problem is that lost, but religious, people prefer mutual glory over divine glory. So Jesus asked, “*How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?*” v.44. Religion is content with faded

glory. The brilliance of God’s glory in Christ shows the failure and need of sinners so they turn away from it.

In the end, the Jews who rejected Jesus (like all people who reject Jesus) stood condemned by their Bible (vv.45-47). How amazing that Moses, the guy they looked to as their rock of confidence, accused them. Jesus said, “*Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope*” (v.45). Those folks bragged about Moses being their spiritual forefather. They bragged that they kept Moses’ law. But in reality, Moses’ writings revealed that they were as guilty as they could possibly be. They were so guilty they were rendered by their favorite writer, that Jesus didn’t need to say anything.

The problem is that Moses really wasn’t their rock. They only claimed to believe what Moses wrote. “*If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me*” (v.46). Moses reflected the glory of the Christ that Moses’ so-called followers rejected. An important reminder here that enough of Christ is revealed in the Old Testament for a sinner to understand salvation. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, what did Abraham say to the rich man who requested that Lazarus rise from the dead and go to warn the man’s family? *But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them’* (Luke 16:29). What did Jesus use to open the eyes of the disciple to who He really is? *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself* (Luke 24:27). The first disciples could identify Christ because *Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph’* (John 1:45).

Muslims claim to believe the Torah (Moses) and the Psalms of David (a prophet) and the words of Jesus. But obviously they don’t or they could not reject Jesus as God our Savior. They illustrate a grave danger. Pretending to believe parts of the Bible is a horrible way to plan for reality. Jesus said, “*But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?*” (v.47).

The Bible is the complete story of God’s salvation through the work of God the Son. We cannot break out parts of it and choose to believe them alone. We accept all of God’s Word as testimony about

the Christ or we must reject it all. Since it will be the standard of judgment in the last day, to reject God's word is eternally dangerous.