

John 5:30-47

We are continuing this morning with our study of John's Gospel, picking up at verse 30 of chapter 5 and working through to the end of the chapter. If you do not have a Bible of your own, the text is printed in the bulletin for you and there are also a few extra Bibles around the room that you can make use of, if you so desire.

Now, if you were with us last week, then you may remember me saying that we are now in that part of John's Gospel that is recording the beginnings of the "official" opposition to Jesus and his ministry - i.e., the opposition that came from the Jewish religious authorities in his day.

The form that their opposition has taken, to this point at least, has been *verbal*, coming in the shape of questions and criticisms and accusations that they are making about Jesus. And so it is that from verses 16 to 18 we see two of the "charges" that have been brought against Jesus - namely, that he has violated the Sabbath laws and, more seriously, that he has made himself out to be equal to God.

Jesus' response or "defense", if you will, appears in vs 19 and following. In those verses he seeks to justify and validate his actions by talking about the nature of his relationship to God the Father and, by that means, showing how he is not blaspheming in the things he is saying and doing. He is simply being who He is and doing what God the Father has given Him to do. Indeed, he is doing these things not only on his Father's behalf, but as God himself.

Following these opening sections of chapter 5, which really reads as a kind of legal proceeding - a "verbal trial" of sorts - but following on from these verses we see, in verses 31-40, where Jesus appeals to other witnesses, other realities that testify to the truth of what he is saying and doing, and then, in verses 41-47, we see Jesus moving from defending himself and turns the tables to say that it is his accusers who ought to be explaining themselves to him.

These last two sections of chapter five, starting at verse 30, will be the focus of our time together this morning. Before we look at that, let's ask God the Holy Spirit, to come and do those things which only he can do to guide us into the truth. Let's pray....

Father in heaven, hear our prayer for the illumination and enlightenment that only you can give. Please cause the truth of your word to find its mark in our hearts and use it to knock off the edges and smooth out the rough spots, to take our mis-shapen and distorted images and re-form them so that they are once again like the images we once had, like the image that your Son had when he was here. We ask these things in Jesus' name...

(Read John 5:30-47)

Picking up where we left off last week, we see Jesus refer in verse 30 to the Judging role that the Father has given him - which serves as an indicator of his equality with the Father in terms of his divinity and authority. And in referring to this role again, he simply affirms what he has already made clear in the previous section, and that is the fact of *the inseparable connection between himself and his Father* such that, even though the Father has given him the role of being the Judge of all humankind, even this he does not do on his own, nor does he do it to please himself but only as an expression of the will of his Father.

All of which leads him to the next thing that he wants to say to his accusers - and that is to talk to them about the fact that the things he has done and said are *attested to by a number of witnesses*, not the least of which is God the Father himself.

In other words, it is not as if Jesus just showed up one day and started spouting off about everything under the sun and just expected people to accept what he said solely on his own testimony. Jesus knew only too well the problems associated with that.

For one thing, Palestine in that day was the home of a number of self-proclaimed “messiahs” and “saviors”. We know from other sources outside of the Bible that such a thing was not uncommon back then. As a result, there were no doubt people who had come *before* Jesus, as well as people who came *after* Jesus, making some pretty amazing claims for themselves. If all Jesus had was the testimony of his *own* words, then that in itself would leave him undistinguishable from any other person who came along making similar claims.

More importantly, the Scriptures themselves speak of the importance of things being attested to from multiple sources in order to verify and establish their legitimacy. Listen to the words of Deuteronomy 19:15,

“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 three witnesses shall a charge be established....”

And so there was enshrined in the Books of Moses this instruction that underlined the importance of things being established by multiple witnesses - in this case things having to do with legal process. Jesus shows his awareness of this fundamental principle when he says, “If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true”. And the key word here is the word “deemed”. Because the fact is, Jesus testimony all by itself is, objectively true. But in terms of its being *regarded* as such or *accounted* as such in the eyes of others - that sort of thing can only happen by means of other witnesses.

As a result, in verses 31 through 37 Jesus appeals to a number of other witnesses that confirm and establish the things he has been saying and doing. Indeed there are at least four witnesses that can be discerned in these verses.

Firstly, there is the witness of John the Baptist,

“There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light...”

Those of you who have been with us since the beginning of this series may remember how in chapter 1 of John’s Gospel the Jewish authorities sent representatives to John the Baptist, to inquire about the significance of the things he was doing. During that encounter, not only did John make it clear that he was NOT the Christ but he went out of his way to say that he was not even worthy to untie the sandals of the Christ - the Messiah. And then the very next day he sees Christ coming toward him and cries, *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*

John’s witness to Jesus was clear and unambiguous. And the Jews had heard this witness and, as the text indicates, had responded favorably to John, at least for a while and had regarded him as a light and as one who came from God. And yet, amazingly, they did not accept the one that John pointed them toward.

The next witness that is highlighted is found in verse 36,

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.

John the Baptist was a clear witness to Jesus. But as good and clear as John was, in the scheme of things he was actually the *least* significant in terms of sheer power of attestation. Even greater than John were the testimony that the *works* of Jesus provided.

In other words, Jesus was not all talk and no action. He put his words into action. And the Jewish authorities had seen a number of examples of that, most recently in the case of this man who had been an invalid for 38 years who was now walking around like everyone else - clearly and miraculously and supernaturally restored to health and strength. A lame man was no longer lame. That fact by itself was irrefutable evidence that God was in the neighborhood.

The third witness is referred to in verses 37 and 38,

And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent...

The third witness that Jesus appeals to here is the Father himself. How has the Father *himself* testified to Jesus? Well, in a number of ways but let me just highlight two of them. Firstly the Father has witnessed to the Son simply by virtue of the fact of Jesus' inseparable connection TO the Father. Last week we heard Jesus saying that he cannot do anything of his own accord but only does what he sees his Father doing. And so the presence of God the Father with and in the works of Jesus is one way that he directly witnesses to Christ.

More concretely, however, another way in which the Father has done this was at Jesus' baptism which is not specifically described in John's Gospel, but it is certainly alluded to in chapter 1, verses 32-34, in which John describes something that happened on the *occasion* of Jesus' baptism - specifically the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus. We know from the other Gospels, such as Matt 3:17, that on *that* occasion, God himself spoke and said, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.*"

The fourth witness is found in verses 46-47,

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.....If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?

The fourth witness, says Jesus, is the Scriptures themselves which have him as their focal point. And of all the witnesses that Jesus has appealed to thus far it is probably this one that hit them the hardest because, after all, Moses was their "hero". Moses was someone they revered. Moses was someone that they really felt they understood. They were quite convinced that they had him, and the things he had written, all worked out in great detail. But Jesus' words indicate that they were seriously misguided in that belief. Because if they *had* understood Moses, then they wouldn't have a problem with *Jesus*.

And Jesus' words here highlight the very real tension that resulted from his ministry - a tension that pitted the established Judaism of that day against this upstart movement of Christians who were insisting that they were not the opponents of Judaism but, in fact, the fulfillment and continuation of all that God had been doing in and through the Hebrew people up to that point in history. One commentator describes the effect of what was going on in this way,

.... think of what is happening here as a kind of modern Wall Street takeover battle. The old established firm is the Judaism of the first century. The brash newcomers are the Christians and they are claiming the right to take over the company. But what is more, they are claiming that the original founder of the firm had always intended for the company to be run by people like them, according to their principles and beliefs, and that the present management team was ruining the company and perverting all of its founder's original intentions and hopes for his firm. Christ and the Christians laid claim to the entire assets of the company and, in particular, its charter. They claimed that the entire purpose of the law was summed up in the teaching, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ....

He continues,

...It is very interesting, for example, that many of the nouns that the Lord Jesus will use in his famous "I am" sayings in the Gospel of John, were already used by the Jews to describe the Law of Moses. "I am the bread, I am the light, the life, the way, the truth..." All these words had been applied by the Jews to the Mosaic scriptures. But Jesus was claiming that those same Scriptures simply pointed to Him.

Well, after appealing to a number of different witnesses that affirm and confirm Jesus in the things he has been saying and doing, Jesus shifts from the role of defendant to that of prosecutor, at least he does in the sense that he begins to press his accusers on some things, showing them that it is not he who needs to be defending himself.

On the contrary, the burden of proof really is upon them to explain how it is that they could be presented with so many witnesses, including and especially the witness of the Scriptures which they claimed to know so well - and yet in spite of all this miss what these Scriptures had to say about him. We see this in verse 41 and following, to be sure, but even before that we get some of Jesus' perspective on his accusers in vs 37 and 38, which we've already seen once this morning. But listen again for the indictment that Jesus lays upon his accusers,

*And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. **His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent...***

With these words Jesus is highlighting, among other things, the ignorance of his accusers who, quite ironically, think that they are the ones with all the answers! Regarding this verse, Leon Morris writes - and I'm paraphrasing here:

The ignorance of Jesus accusers is three-fold: Firstly, they have never heard God's voice. Moses, whom they revered **had** heard God's voice. And they would have no doubt regarded themselves as true followers of Moses. But they were no true imitators of Moses because, if they were, they would have heard God's voice when Jesus spoke. Secondly, they had never seen God's form. Jacob, whom they also revered, had seen God's form (Gen 32) but they were no imitators of him either because, if they were, they would recognize God's "form" in the person of Jesus. Thirdly, they do not have God's word residing in their hearts. The Psalmists, for example, talked about having the word of God in their hearts. But the Jews in Jesus day were no imitators of the Psalmists in this regard because, if they were, then they would have recognized the words of Jesus as that very same word that they had hidden in their hearts.

In short, what Jesus is saying here is that all of these experiences of God - hearing his voice, seeing his form, having his work abide in you - all these things that characterize the ways in which God had revealed himself to his people in the OT were not descriptive of Jesus accusers at all. They had not experienced any of these things, even though the opportunity to do so was standing right there in front of them!

In Jesus they could hear the very voice of God, they could see the form of God as the Incarnate Son, and they could have the word of God abiding within them as they embraced the things he said. The opportunity to know and experience God in all the ways that their heroes such as Moses and Jacob and the Psalmist had known him – all of those things were available to them right now in Jesus - and they refused to receive it, in spite of abundant evidence, in spite of multiple witnesses all appealing to the validity of these things. And so Jesus says of them,

“I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. 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. How can you believe, when you receive glory from another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? Do you think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope....”

With these words Jesus delivers the devastating declaration that these people did not have a true or legitimate love of God within them, even though they would have no doubt been convinced of quite the opposite reality, even though they had not experienced God in any of the ways that the OT people they revered had experienced him.

Now, to be sure, Jesus doesn’t say these things because he’s angling for them to give him glory or praise. He does not need or even receive their glory. That’s not why he is saying these things. He is saying them because they are true. He is saying them because the Jewish authorities’ rejection of him is, in fact, a rejection of the God they claim to embrace.

And, ironically, while they refuse to embrace Jesus, in spite of the various witnesses to his divinity and authority, they seem to be quite willing to embrace any other person, any other false Messiah that might come along - and with no other witness than their own testimony!

And, while Jesus *could* take these accusations he is making of *them* to his Father, the reality is that he doesn’t have to. Why? Because someone else has already beaten him to it: Moses. Moses wrote about Jesus and testified to him. And the Jews claimed to believe Moses. But in reality they didn’t because they didn’t accept the one to which his writings pointed. Which only goes to show that while they gave great lip service to the importance and place of the Scriptures, in reality they were its biggest rejectors. They appealed to Moses as their justifier. Instead, Moses will be their accuser. They looked to Moses words as way of making themselves acceptable to God and so gaining eternal life. At the end of the day, however, Moses’ word to them will not be a word of liberation and salvation, but one of condemnation and judgment.

And surely as the Apostle John was putting these things on paper, as he was recording these things in his Gospel, he would have known that the people in his *own* day and age would have found these words just as pointed for them as they were for the Jewish authorities in Jesus’ day. They too would have been people who revered Moses and who felt like he was in “their corner”, so to speak. But he wasn’t. And if John is going to see his Jewish listeners and readers come to embrace the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he is going to have to deliver *them* from their misunderstandings and misuses of the OT Scriptures, and in particular the writings of Moses.

And that same thing needs to keep happening among Jewish peoples in our own day. And, thankfully, it is. Just yesterday evening I was in the Mall of Louisiana looking for a last minute birthday gift for a friend in Australia and I saw a number of people walking past who all had the same t-shirt on which read “Jews for Jesus”.

Now, “Jews for Jesus” if you don’t know it, is an evangelistic organization that is committed to helping Jewish people come to understand that they do not need to keep looking and waiting for the Messiah because he has already come in the person of Jesus Christ. In short, they are committed to doing the same thing that we see Jesus doing here and which he does in other places, and that is point out to his own people how they had mis-read and mis-understood their own Scriptures. So the Jews for Jesus are doing an important work. And we need to pray for them and for that ministry.

But it’s not just people involved in Jews for Jesus who need to engage in this sort of “cross-religious” ministry. You and I have a similar sort of task before us every time we talk to *anyone* with any sort of religious background at all. Because when you step back from these verses a bit to take in the larger movement of the text, you see that one of the things going on here is that, in very general terms, Jesus is confronting a group of people who think they know God, and who think they have things all worked out - but he is confronting these people with the shocking and likely infuriating news that they do not know God at all.

In other words, there is no warm and cuddly message coming from Jesus’ lips here about how all roads lead to God. Jesus doesn’t say to these people that the important thing is that they mean well and that as long as there are seeking the truth and seeking God in whatever way makes sense to them then things will work out okay in the end. He doesn’t say anything like that. He says, if I can paraphrase, if you are not willing to accept me for who I am, then you cannot and do not know God.

Now that’s a hard word. And it is not an easy word to have to give to other people. But, unfortunately, it is the word we have been given to proclaim, as difficult as it might be. As one writer put it,

This is our problem as Christians..... [and] unbelievers should not despise us for this. If anything, [they] should have sympathy for us. [Because] we must always go around pronouncing this judgment on others: If they do not believe in Jesus Christ, if they do not receive him as the Son of God, the Lord, the Savior, if they do not follow him, the love of God is not in them.

Its no fun to tell people that. You usually don’t even have to tell them that. Just tell them they must believe in Jesus and they will understand what you are saying about them; they will gather that you are saying that until and unless they become Christians they are not right with God no matter their lives, no matter their religion. And, inevitably, they will take you to mean that you think you are better than them. That is not fun...

And then this same writer goes on to say that, “*A recent book on evangelical Christianity by a Duke University professor reports that most American adults have been "witnessed to" by an evangelical Christian and most of them considered it an unpleasant experience!*”

Well, that may be the case. But the point I am making here is that as unpleasant as it is for the unbeliever, it is equally as unpleasant for the Christian to be the one to bring this difficult truth to bear on a person's life - or at least it ought to be. It's a whole lot easier to just go along with people and to say things that will make them like you. It is a lot more inviting to be popular and well-thought-of and to tell people that their perspective is just as legitimate as yours. It's a lot easier, to be sure. But the fact of the matter is, it's just not an option for Christians. We can't say those sorts of things to people. We can't send them that sort of signal. No one who believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God can do that.

And so we have a difficult task. And the challenge for us in carrying it out is to try and find a way to make sure that any offense that people feel when we confront them with these things is felt toward the *truth* we are telling them, and not toward us, or the manner in which we are telling it, and not because we are saying these things in a harsh, or arrogant, or judgmental or intellectually superior sort of fashion.

We say them because our Savior said them first. And all I'm saying is, I hope that when you say these things to people, they can see the pain on your face, and hear the pain in your voice, as you say them. But don't let that pain stop you. And don't let the *anticipation* of that pain stop you. The God who comforted you at his own personal expense calls you now to make yourself uncomfortable, that others might come to know and love the Son He so dearly loves.