



SERMON TITLE: Witnesses
SCRIPTURE: John 5:30-47

DATE: December 8, 2019
PASTOR: Charlie Boyd

"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his own biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

If you read the stories of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels, one of the things that hits you right off the bat is how often Jesus ends up in arguments with religious people. Not how often he got caught up in arguments, but how often he actually starts arguments with them. John 5 is a great example of this. And in John 5:31-47 the main point of the arguments has to do with the Scriptures. Basically, Jesus calls us the Bible scholars of his day and says, "You think of the Scriptures *this way*, but I'm telling you that you need to think of them in a completely different way." What is your view of Scripture? How do you read your Bible? How does Jesus say we should read it? READ 5:31-47 with special attention to v. 39 and vv. 46-47.

Now, this argument is the result of Jesus healing a lame man (5:1-18). And the religious leaders are upset with Jesus because he healed the man on the Sabbath. Jesus wasn't actually breaking the Sabbath law, but he was breaking their burdensome Sabbath traditions. As we saw in the message two weeks ago, Jesus deliberately healed this man on the Sabbath to provoke them and to start this argument with them (see John 5:16-18). Last week, Jim walked us through John 5:19-30 where we heard Jesus making outrageous claims as to who he is and what he's come to do. *He claims* that he is the unique Son of God (vv. 19-20). *He claims* to have power to raise the dead and give life (v. 21). *He claims* that he has the authority to execute judgment on the whole world (v. 22). *He claims* that those who *believe* in him will not come under that judgment but they will pass from death to life (vv. 23-29). *And he claims* that one day—at the sound of his voice—all the dead will rise, some to eternal life and others to eternal judgment (vv. 28-30). The question is: Why should anyone believe those claims? Why should you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the World? So to validate those claims, Jesus presents four witnesses who can testify that he is, in fact, who he claims to be.

Witness #1 — John the Baptist (5:33-35)

Witness #2 — Jesus' Works (5:36)

Witness #3 — The Father (5:37-38)

Witness #4 — The Scriptures (with special attention given to Moses in 5:39-47)

Really, to my way of thinking, the first three witnesses have to do with Scripture as well. For example: If they had rightly interpreted the Scriptures, they would have recognized who *John the Baptist* really was and who was coming next—they would have recognized that the *miracles* of Jesus validated that he was in fact the Messiah—and they would have heard YHWH's voice in Jesus and they would have seen YHWH's character in Jesus. Everything Jesus has said so far comes down to rightly interpreting the Scriptures. Now look carefully at vv. 37, 38, 39, 40, 46. In v. 37 he says, "The Father himself bears witness about me, but you did not hear his voice—then he says in v. 38, "nor did his word abide in you."

Jesus says—"The voice of the Father—the witness of the Father—is his word." Then vv. 38-39 tell us what that Word is—"You diligently search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. And it is they that bear witness to me," (v. 40) "and yet you do not listen to them—you do not come to me—you do not believe in me that you may have life." And then vv. 46-47 says "If you believed Moses, you would believe me because he wrote about me, but if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

It can't be any clearer: the key witness of God is the Word of God and the Word of God is the Scriptures. Again, if they knew the Scriptures, they would have believed John. If they knew the Scriptures, they would have believed the miracles. If they knew the Father's true nature as revealed in the Scriptures, they would have believed Jesus. But they did not believe Moses and all the prophets who pointed to Jesus. So how did these religious Bible students miss Jesus? How do we miss Jesus today?

There are two problems:

Problem #1: The Hermeneutical Problem (5:39-40)—that is, a problem with interpretation. The Jewish religious leaders saw their Scriptures as a rule-book that, if obeyed, would gain them acceptance with God. They thought that “in the Scriptures”—*by obeying the Scriptures*—they would gain “eternal life.” But Jesus tells us, that's not the purpose of the Scriptures. God didn't give us the Scriptures for us to try hard to be good and do good. He gave us the Scriptures to show us we can never measure up to God's perfect standards, but that God, through Jesus, has made a way for us to be declared right with God—not by what we do, but because of what Jesus has done for us in his death on the cross and his rising from the dead. The Old Testament Scriptures point us to *Jesus—the Messiah, the Son of God—so that believing, you will have life in his name* (see John 20:31).

That doesn't mean that we find Jesus under every rock in the Old Testament (OT), but we do understand that the flow of the OT—that the orientation of Scripture—is telling the glorious story of redemption, of which Jesus is the hero. It doesn't mean that all the OT ever talks about is Jesus, nor the *only* thing we ever look for in the OT is the person and work of Jesus. But it does mean that the OT is telling a story that points us to Jesus and his redeeming work. It does mean that we “All Scripture is Christian Scripture.” It does mean that we should always read the Bible with Jesus' life and mission in constant view. And it does mean we should see all the little stories in the OT in light of the one Big Story: God's plan to make all things new in and through Jesus. So, to miss Jesus when studying the Bible is to miss the point.

Problem #2: The Heart Problem (5:42-44) The problem wasn't simply an interpretation problem. They had an adoration problem. Jesus says, “You do not have the love of God within you, i.e. you have no openness to God beyond keeping your rigid rules and rituals.” He says, That's why you do not receive me...that's why you have rejected me. You see, the main reason religious and non-religious people reject Jesus is not because of a lack of evidence, but because of a closed heart. It's simply that a person does not want to believe. They “refused” to come to Jesus can be translated as, “You don't want to come to Jesus.” They deliberately set themselves against Jesus. They refused to be saved because they cared more about what other people thought of them than what God thinks of them. Jesus is saying, *How can you believe when you care more about what people think of you than what God thinks of you?* The answer is, you can't. One root of unbelief has to do with a love for the praise of people more than a love of God.

So how should you be reading your Bible? You read it by listening to the witnesses—Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Malachi, Matthew, John, Peter, Paul. Whatever you are reading, you ask how does what I'm reading point me forward to Jesus (Old Testament) and backward to Jesus (New Testament). You read your Bible with your eyes fixed on Jesus and your heart open to Jesus.

Discussion Starters:

- Icebreaker — For some of us, seeing Jesus in the Old Testament may be a new idea. What are some direct references made about Christ in the Old Testament? And indirect ones?
- What are some similarities/differences in these four witnesses that Jesus was explaining? John the Baptist, Jesus' miracles, God the Father, The Old Testament Scriptures. What was the significance of each one for Jesus' audience? How do the first three really point to the fourth?
- Generally speaking, people at FG are students of the Word. What are some dangers of knowing about Jesus, but not loving Jesus? How can we combat this religiosity in our lives today? How can we better apply what we know to how we live each day?
- The last few weeks, we have heard Jesus' claims to who he is and witnesses who back up and support these claims. How does this affect our lives Monday-Saturday? Why does it matter?
- What was impactful to you about this sermon and text? What are some ways that you were challenged to respond?
- As you think of the Bible as one story, how does this change how you read and study? How can we better incorporate the Old Testament as we share the gospel? What difference does it make?
- How does reading the Bible with your eyes fixed on Jesus and your heart open to Jesus help you as you read the Bible? What exactly does that mean?
- What else do you need to discuss from this passage? Do you have any additional questions, insights, “Ah-Hah's?”

