

THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel - Part twenty-one

Sunday, July 21st, 2013, 10 a.m. - Teaching #1666

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

JESUS TELLS US WHY THE WORLD SHOULD LISTEN TO HIM

John 5:30-37 - "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. [31] If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. [32] There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. [33] You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. [34] Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. [35] He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. [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. [37] And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen...."

It's important to remind ourselves that, as far as the text reveals, all of the events of the fifth chapter take place in one time stretch. There is no break between the healing of the lame man, the retaliation of the Jewish leaders, and this sermonette from Jesus on the credibility of His witness to the truth. The events of this chapter all seem to take place on the same day.

The reason this matters is the healing of the lame man gives proof to all the comments that follow. Jesus healed the blind man in a miraculous burst of divine power and the Jewish leaders, far from *worshipping* Jesus, wanted to *kill* Jesus. In what follows Jesus carefully ushers in witness after witness validating that what He does and what He says and who He is carry enough proof to be accepted without reservation or hesitation.

Then, very strikingly, the chapter ends with Jesus stating He still has no expectation whatsoever that these people will accept all this evidence. So the chapter is quite stunning when taken as a whole. Jesus marshals His credentials like He does nowhere else in the New Testament. And then He tells them flat out they will never receive a word of it. And the plan forward in this today's teaching is an examination of *why* people don't accept the vivid, redeeming truth of Jesus Christ, God the Son.

We'll consider this text in two portions. The first, this week, and the second, next. **Verses 30-37** deal with the credentials validating Jesus' authority. He isn't just a single voice blowing in the breeze. Jesus sites *witnesses*. Then **verses 38-47** reveal the two reasons people reject such clear testimony to Jesus.

1) **THERE IS MORE THAN JESUS' PERSONAL CONVICTION BACKING HIS IDENTITY AND AUTHORITY**

Let me explain. The whole musical "*Jesus Christ Superstar*" (experiencing somewhat of a revival) is based on the assumption that Jesus had views of himself that, while sincere, were somewhat delusional. He wasn't so much a liar as He was pathetic. He was a good man. He was full of compassion. He had charisma. The people gathered around in masses. Jesus began to love the spotlight. He began to believe their accolades. His death was a rather sad, pathetic end. The main theme song ends with a haunting question of Jesus' psychological state. It's repeated twice for emphasis: "*Jesus Christ, Superstar, do you think you're what they say you are?*"

This is what my first point is drilling down into. Is this all the evidence we have? Do we finally have to rest our faith in a *personal conviction* of Jesus about His personal identity? Is it *just* because He said so that we bow before Him as the Messiah, God the Son?

This issue is what makes today's rather difficult text so important. In our text, like nowhere else in the entire Bible, Jesus gives us *witnesses outside His own person*. He gives *reasons* for the credibility of believing in Him. We don't have to just hope He was a well balanced person. We don't just rely on the hope He wasn't delusional about His own identity.

John 5:30-37 - "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. [31] If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. [32] There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. [33] You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. [34] Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. [35] He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. [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. [37] And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me...."

There is more than just *humility* in Jesus' words in **verse 31** - "If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony *is not deemed true.*" This doesn't mean Jesus can't be trusted in what He says. It doesn't mean Jesus says untrue things. He's telling us - and we should be *grateful* for this - He's telling us we don't have to just *take His own word for His authority.* That's what Jesus means when He tells us that *just* His own witness to Himself isn't *deemed* true.

In other words, Jesus was *aware* that we needed *outside verification* about His authority and identity. This *isn't* because Jesus alone isn't trustworthy, but because of the nature of our condition. And Jesus announces divine provision for our confidence.

Jesus lists witnesses *in addition* to His own testimony about Himself *not* because He was a liar, but to further *deepen the foundation for our trust.*

I'm sure the Apostle John jumped all over these words from Jesus. He records these words from Jesus in greater detail than any other gospel writer. And that's because they amplify John's stated purpose in documenting his whole account - **John 20:30-31** - "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [31] but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

You can and you should place total, obedient trust in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, God the Son, and make Him the ruler of your whole life. Here are the three external witnesses for your confident trust in Christ:

- a) ***There is the divine witness of God the Father - John 5:32, 37*** - "There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true.... And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me...."

We shouldn't rush past these words too quickly. When Jesus cites the Father as His witness He is saying ***Father God has committed Himself exclusively to the Son.*** Father God has *gone on record*, so to speak. He has made Himself *known* and *defined* by Jesus Christ.

Christians need to remember this because it answers to a very common objection. Our world *hates* our *closed-mindedness* about Jesus Christ. Our testimony to God the Son is seen as arrogant and intolerant.

But where does such a witness to Christ come from? What is the *source* of such exclusive witness to Jesus Christ as exclusive Messiah and Redeemer and Lord? It comes, Jesus claims, ***from Father God Himself.***

What I'm saying here - what *Jesus* claims here - is if or when the church alters the message of the *unique* saving, ruling role of Jesus Christ she makes Father God a *false witness*. She makes Father God a liar. The Father hasn't given us His *opinion* about Jesus, the Son. He has revealed ***the truth*** about His only Son, whom He sent to be the Savior of the world and the Lord of the Church.

- b) ***There is the witness of John the Baptist and fulfilled prophecy - John 5:33-35*** - "You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. [34] Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. [35] He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light."

John the Baptist's witness was a costly witness. It is likely that when Jesus says the Baptist ***"was a burning and shining lamp"***(35), He means John was in prison at the time or had already been executed. Human witnesses to Christ don't usually have an easy time of it. Not all rewards for faithfulness come in this present life.

Jesus mentions John the Baptist as a *witness* and the Apostle John took note of those words when he recorded the opening prologue of his gospel account - **John 1:6-7** - "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. [7] ***He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.***"

John the Baptist's witness to Christ carries more weight than one might sense at first glance. It's not just that the Baptist is *another* testimony along side Jesus. John's witness carries the validation of ***fulfilled prophecy.***

John wasn't just a *self-appointed* spokesperson for the Messiah. That's why John ties in his own message with that

of the prophet Isaiah - John 1:22-23 - "So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" [23] He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

So John's witness was a *predicted* witness. He didn't just happen on the scene. There was a *divine plan* to the Baptist's words and mission. When Jesus mentions John the Baptist as one of His witnesses He means for us to see the unfolding of sovereignly calculated and designed history.

This is why the people needed to think through the depth of their response to John's witness. Notice carefully what Jesus said about the response many gave to the Baptist - John 5:35 - "He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light."

They were happy to have John around. They were certainly impressed and moved by John. But we know that the leaders in particular didn't really *believe* John's witness to the Christ. We know this from Jesus' words in Matthew 21:23-25 - "And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" [24] Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. [25] The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'"

So the people "*were willing to rejoice for a while in John's light*" (John 5:35) more than they were willing to repent and be pointed exclusively to Jesus Christ. We see this same counterfeit faith today just as people today are more willing to admire Billy Graham than be brought in humility to the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus still warns of a *thin* response to the witness to Christ that we receive.

c) *There is the visible witness of the works of Jesus Himself* - John 5:36 - "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."

Do you remember when John the Baptist was in prison and began musing over some doubts about Jesus as the Christ? He sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus if He was in fact the promised one or should John perhaps look for another.

And Jesus responded to John on the basis of the *witness of His works* - Luke 7:18-23 - "The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, [19] calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" [20] And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?' " [21] In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. [22] And he answered them, Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. [23] And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

Do you remember when Jesus was preparing His own disciples for the kind of rejection and persecution they would experience *just* for professing loyalty to Christ? He told them that the guilt of those rejecting Him would be calculated on the basis of their rejection of His mighty works among them:

John 15:21-25 - "But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. [22] If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. [23] Whoever hates me hates my Father also. [24] If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and

my Father. [25] But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'"

Powerful words, these. The works of Jesus stand. They are recorded in the pages of the New Testament. They are witnessed in the church of Christ. Remember Jesus' words to doubting John the Baptist when He listed one of His mighty works as being the people still have **"the good news preached to them"** (Luke 7:22). You hear the works of Jesus in such preaching. Listening to preaching makes you accountable for the truth you hear. Jesus said so.

The works of Jesus condemn every false ambition and empty materialistic desire. The works of Jesus get this world ready for judgment. That's why it is so striking that these remarks about the witness of the **works of Jesus** come right on the heels of the healing of the lame man by the pool. And the people wanted to **kill** Jesus after that mighty work.

This is a hard text to wrap up a sermon with. Going to God's house is and should be both **joyful** and **serious**. The sincere and humble receive the grace they need and don't deserve. Happy people these, indeed.

But there's always a needed seriousness - an alertness to every witness to divine truth. We are always being made **more accountable** for increased hearing. God demands a hearing of the truth that is always accompanied by repentance and obedience. That's what ongoing faith looks like. Let the truth **inside** your life. Drive out whatever makes witness to Christ seem irrelevant or unimportant. Slay those idols. And let every hearing of divine truth make your soul increasingly free.