

Message #19

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John

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JESUS AND HIS WITNESSES

JOHN 5:30-47

I.

In Psalm 19 v. 1 (PROJECTOR ON--- PSALM 19:1) King David wrote, **“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”** For the first eighteen or nineteen centuries of the Christian era, it was generally recognized in Western Civilization that this was true. All of the great scientists saw the created world and universe as evidence of the handiwork of God.

Copernicus, who discovered that the earth revolved around the sun, first presented his ideas publicly in the Vatican gardens in 1533. Galileo, who said that the Bible cannot err, developed telescopes that peered into the heavens. Johannes Kepler, who developed the laws of planetary motion, said, **“I am merely thinking God’s thoughts after Him.”** Isaac Newton discovered principles of gravity and made advances in mathematics. In his most famous work, *Principia Mathematica*, he wrote, **“The most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being.”** There were others like Bacon and Descartes and Pascal and Boyle and Faraday who recognized the same truth that King David expressed in Psalm 19.

Then Charles Darwin came along in the 1800s and introduced the attempt to explain life and the created universe apart from the necessity of a divine Creator. The principle of evolution came to be the predominant explanation for the existence of life and the universe among the cultural elites and members of the most prominent academic institutions in our country and in most of the Western world. These people became blind to the Creator who stares them in the face. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In a similar way, for 1500 years after Moses began to write the Hebrew Scriptures, God provided evidence about the coming of a deliverer who would rescue people from their sin and provide them with the gift of eternal life. But when the Messiah showed up on the scene, His own people would not recognize Him. They would not see Him for who He was and is, the Creator and Redeemer of the universe.

We have been making our way on Sunday mornings through the Gospel of the Apostle John. We have seen that he organized his biography of the life of Jesus around seven sign miracles, which were intended by John to give evidence to the proposition that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. We have come to #5, which describes the third of these seven signs, where a lame man is healed of his paralysis by Jesus in the city of Jerusalem during one of the Jewish feasts.

This miracle took place on a Sabbath, which irritated the religious leaders. It led to a verbal confrontation with the representatives of the religious establishment. In our last study Jesus identified Himself with God the Father and said that He would one day be Judge of the world. Now we take up our study again with v. 30 of #5, which is on p. 890 of the black Bibles, as we consider the subject of "Jesus and His witnesses."

II.

In vv. 30-39 we encounter THE WITNESSES ABOUT JESUS. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE WITNESSES ABOUT JESUS) Jesus has just told these religious leaders in Jerusalem that there will be a resurrection of life and a resurrection of judgment. He will preside over both judgments. This leads to v. 30, which serves as a transition verse.

A.

In vv. 30 & 31 JESUS HIMSELF serves as a witness. (II. THE WITNESSES... A. JESUS HIMSELF) Jesus says in v. 30, **"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."** Jesus has established a legal setting for this part of His discussion. He claims to be the representative of God the Father. He says that He is doing His Father's will and conveying His Father's message. He Himself is a witness.

But in v. 31 He adds, **"If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true."** Jesus always spoke truth. But He is speaking about Jewish law. The Jewish legal system required important legal claims to be verified by at least two or three witnesses. Thus, in the Law of God, provided through Moses, we find (DEUTERONOMY 19:15) in Deuteronomy #19 v. 31, **"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."** So Jesus proceeds to describe other witnesses.

B.

In v. 32 He speaks of GOD THE FATHER. (II. THE WITNESSES... A. ... B. GOD THE FATHER) Jesus says, **“There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true.”** In the preceding verses Jesus said much about God the Father and His authority and Jesus’ connection to Him. So it seems that Jesus is speaking here about His Heavenly Father. At this point, the witness of the Father is indirect. Jesus is perhaps speaking about the messages which He has communicated from the Father.

C.

Then, in vv. 33-35, Jesus describes the witness of JOHN THE BAPTIST. (II. B. C. JOHN THE BAPTIST) According to v. 33, **“You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth.”** John the Apostle never refers to Himself by name in his Gospel. The only “John” in this book is John the Baptist.

We looked at him in some detail in our study of #1. We saw there that John identified himself as the one who came to prepare the way for the Messiah. He baptized people as a sign of their repentance from sins in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. When Jesus showed up, John declared in #1 v. 29 that He was “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

In v. 33 in our passage, the Apostle John refers to a specific incident described beginning in v. 19 of #1. Turn back a couple of pages in your Bible, as we look at that. Beginning in v. 19 of #1, we read, **“And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No.’ 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?’ 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.”** There is a hint here, in this reference to Isaiah, that Jesus is the Lord. He is God.

Back in v. 34 of our passage, Jesus says, **“Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved.”** Jesus is speaking for God the Father. But He is describing these other witnesses for the sake of His human audience. His gracious, ultimate purpose is to provide them with eternal salvation.

In v. 35 He adds, **“He [John the Baptist] was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.”** The past tense verb “was” suggests that John the Baptist is now off of

the stage. It could be that He is imprisoned by Herod Antipas at this point. Eventually he will be beheaded.

Jesus describes John as a lamp. God is the light. Initially, even these religious leaders may have had hope that John the Baptist might be the Messiah. Certainly John enjoyed great popularity for a time. The first century historian Josephus (JOSEPHUS QUOTE) writes in his book *The Antiquities* (18.5.2), **“Now, when [many] others came in crowds about him, for they were greatly moved by hearing his words, Herod... thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause.”**

John the Baptist made it clear that he was a witness for Jesus. The Jewish leaders would not accept that testimony. Unfortunately, lamps and lights also attract moths. These critics were like moths which swarmed around John and around Jesus. The critics would not accept their witness.

D.

The next witness is the WORKS OF THE FATHER (II. C. D. WORKS OF THE FATHER), which are described in vv. 36 & 37. Jesus continues in v. 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.”**

These works of the Father must include the miracles that Jesus performed. In the first appearance of Jesus in Jerusalem after the beginning of His public ministry, he did various healing miracles. If you would turn back with me a couple of pages in John’s Gospel, you will find beginning in #2 v. 23 these words--- #2 v. 23: **“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.”**

In the next chapter, Nicodemus, a member of the high council of the Jews, comes to see Jesus. Beginning in v. 1 of #3 we are told, **“Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.’”**

The Apostle John has stressed three of these sign miracles thus far in his book. In #2 Jesus turned water into wine. At the end of the chapter He healed the son of the royal official. Now at the beginning of #5

He healed a lame man at the pool of Bethesda. The Jews could not deny these miracles. Their only recourse was to attribute the power behind them to Satan.

Yet these miracles were consistent with what had been prophesied in their own Scriptures. In Isaiah #35 vv. 5 & 6 (ISAIAH 35:5-6), this had been foretold about their coming Messiah: **“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.”** It was these things that Jesus was doing.

These works of the Father also included the words of Jesus, the place and manner of His birth, His life and eventually His death and resurrection. Then some of His followers would see Him ascend into heaven.

In vv. 37 in our text, Jesus adds, **“And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen...”** The critics of Jesus are putting themselves in a dangerous position. Jesus has had a close relationship with God the Father from eternity past. He has heard His voice and seen His form.

There were other key figures in Biblical history who also had this exposure, which these critics have not. There were a few who literally heard God’s voice. One was Moses. In Exodus #33 v. 11 (PROJECTOR ON-- - EXODUS 33:11) we are told, **“Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”** At Mt. Sinai we are told that the children of Israel heard thunder from God.

Those who were present at the baptism of Jesus also heard the voice of God. (MATTHEW 3:17) According to Matthew #3 v. 17, **“...and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’”** At least some of the disciples of Jesus heard this voice. These critics did not.

Jesus in v. 37 of our text also points out that these religious leaders have never seen the form of God. (PROJECTOR OFF) Jesus claims that He has. A few other people in Biblical history claimed to have seen some manifestation of God. Jacob claimed to have a wrestling match with the angel of the Lord. Isaiah, in his book, claimed to see some manifestation of God in heaven. The main point is that Jesus claims to have all of these experiences, to have participated in the works of the Father, while His adversaries have not.

E.

In vv. 38 & 39, Jesus speaks of a fifth witness. It is the witness of GOD'S WORD. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. D. E. GOD'S WORD) Jesus charges that these religious leaders not only have not heard God's voice and not seen His form, but also they do not have God's word abiding in them. Verse 38: **"...and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent."**

This was bound to get these religious leaders worked up. They prided themselves on knowledge of God's word. They had large portions of it memorized. They studied it in great detail. Thus in v. 39 Jesus charges, **"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me."**

Tradition and early testimony indicate that the scribes and rabbis studied the Hebrew Scriptures in great detail. They counted the letters in every book. They knew the middle word and the middle letter of each book. They memorized large portions of the Bible. A rabbi from the first century AD by the name of Hillel (HILLEL QUOTATION) is quoted in the Talmud as saying, **"...the more study of the Law, the more life... ...if he has gained for himself words of the Law, he has gained for himself life in the world to come."** (Aboth 2.7) Yet, they missed, or ignored, the passages about the Messiah. Now He was standing right in front of them, and they did not recognize Him. (PROJECTOR OFF)

There are liberal seminaries and theological institutions today who likewise study the Bible in great detail. They talk about theories of how the Bible was composed and about the historical Jesus and social justice. They pick out verses that support the conventional wisdom of the day. Yet they, too, fail to recognize the real Jesus.

Even in evangelical schools and churches and individual Christians it is possible to study the Bible objectively and for the purpose of gaining knowledge, and yet to miss the claim that He is seeking to make on our lives.

When the wise men showed up in Jerusalem to ask where the king of the Jews was born, the rabbis knew that Bethlehem was the place. They read about the virgin birth prophesied in Isaiah and the one who would come before the Messiah to prepare the way. They knew about the miracles that the Messiah would perform. Yet these rabbis refused to acknowledge the Messiah who was standing before them, in a similar way in which so many of our scientists refuse to recognize the Creator who is staring them in the face.

III.

Verses 40-47 in our text describe THE CAUSE OF THE REJECTION OF THE WITNESSES. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE CAUSE OF THE REJECTION...) Jesus says in v. 40, **"...yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."** Some translations say, **"You are unwilling to come to me that you may have life."** It is ultimately a matter of the will. People don't want to come to Jesus. They don't want to turn the control and direction of their lives over to another. Yet the stakes are huge. One's eternal destiny is at stake.

Verse 41: **"I do not receive glory from people."** Jesus' motive for what He did was not to get glory, or praise, from people. He was primarily motivated by a desire to do His Father's will and to receive His praise. For the most part, Jesus received a lot of rejection from people. The religious establishment was already out to get rid of Him.

According to v. 42, **"But I know that you do not have the love of God within you."** The problem of will in these religious leaders was related to their lack of love. Jesus elsewhere identified love for God and love for people as the greatest commands in the Old Testament. These religious leaders were wanting to kill Jesus, who was the Son of God.

Today, religious leaders, even some who call themselves Christians, can miss out on this love for God and for people. Like these first century rabbis, we can be so caught up by the desire to have approval from others and to follow rules and to live by religious traditions that we lose, or never have, the love of God.

Jesus continues in v. 43, **"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."** The Jewish historian Josephus identified 64 false messiahs who showed up in Judea before 70 AD. Some among the religious leaders supported some of these who claimed to be the Messiah. Now, almost all of them are rejecting the One before them who is fulfilling the Biblical requirements to the letter.

Verse 44: **"How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"** These religious leaders were concerned about political correctness. They did not want to risk the disapproval of their peers. Nicodemus was part of the religious establishment. He recognized that this Jesus must be from God. But in #3 he came to Jesus at night and alone, seemingly because he did not want the disapproval of his peers.

So these religious leaders did not accept these witnesses about Jesus because they were unwilling, and they lacked love for God and others, and they did not want to risk disapproval from their peers. This latter factor is an important issue in the scientific community. For younger scientists in academia to express doubts about Darwinism is to risk losing tenure in colleges and universities. It means disapproval from the scientific establishment. To express belief in a creator God is to risk being called a Creationist or a Bible believer. How backward and unscientific such a conviction would be!

Concern for what others think holds some back today from becoming Christians. We might lose respect and instead receive disapproval from a mate or other family members or fellow workers or friends. It can be a powerful force.

Finally, in vv. 45-47, Jesus says, **“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. For 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?”**

Moses was recognized as the human author of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. The religious leaders before Jesus prided themselves in their understanding of Moses and the Law of God that he recorded. They were convinced that Jesus was breaking that Law in His activities on the Sabbath.

Jesus here says that Moses wrote of Him. In my sermon last week from Luke #24 we were told that Jesus began with Moses and interpreted the Scriptures to explain to the two disciples walking to Emmaus how they described things about Himself. What things in the writings of Moses describe Jesus? In Genesis #3 the Bible speaks about the seed of Eve that will destroy the devil. The Law describes the problem of sin and the need of sacrifice to pay the penalty for that sin. In Deuteronomy #18 Moses spoke of a future prophet who would have special importance and authority. On Good Friday, in our Lord’s Supper service, I explained how the Passover feast pictures the coming Messiah who would be the perfect lamb of God and who would die to pay the penalty for the sins of the world.

The critics before Jesus were rejecting the testimony of Jesus. They were unwilling to believe the witnesses whom Jesus was describing. They lacked genuine love for God and for people. They were falling back on their own good works and commitment to the religious system that they had developed. They would not acknowledge their Creator and Redeemer and Messiah who was standing right in front of them. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In the same way today, scientists who are experts in the created world have a multitude of witnesses all around them that there is a creator God. But they choose to reject Him.

Last year, science writer and journalist and Oxford University graduate Tom Bethell wrote a book entitled *Darwin's House of Cards*. In it, he describes how advances in science are continuing to undermine Darwin's theory of evolution. Charles Darwin had been confident that researchers would find many fossils of transitional forms that represented intermediate stages of evolution. They have yet to be found. Scientist Michael Behe has pointed out that even the simplest of life forms require a number of parts to be functioning before these life forms can exist. But the principle of natural selection argues that parts necessary to form a functioning life form would be selected out of existence because they would serve no useful purpose until a functioning life form was in existence.

We now know that the simplest of cells are complicated systems that depend upon a detailed code in order to function and reproduce. Yet no one has been able to figure out how these codes could come into existence without a programmer. Meanwhile, radio astronomers continue to search the heavens for evidence of civilizations elsewhere in the universe without any success.

In 2002, a speech was published in which a senior paleontologist at the Natural History Museum in London by the name of Colin Patterson spoke at a seminar at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. He said this: **"One of the reasons I started taking a non-evolutionary view was my sudden realization that after working, as I thought, on evolution for 20 years, that I knew nothing whatever about it: It was quite shock to learn that one could be so misled for so long.... Over the last few weeks, I've tried putting a question to various people and groups of people. The question is 'Can you tell me anything you know about evolution--- any one statement that seems to be true'? I tried that question on the geology staff in the Field Museum [of Natural History], and got no answer. I tried it on the members of the evolutionary morphology seminar in the University of Chicago. After a long silence, one person said 'I know it ought not to be taught in high school.'" (Darwin's House of Cards, p. 142)** **"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."** Yet so many scientists will not recognize the God who is there.

Jesus fulfilled the prophecies made about Him in the Old Testament in exact detail. He provided multiple witnesses that He was the Son of God who had come to save His people. Yet the religious leaders staring Him in the face would not believe.

The Lord Jesus has provided multiple witnesses of His reality to us. He has provided us with the historical evidence in the Bible and in secular history. He has provided us with people around us whose lives have been changed by Him. He has shown us what happens in the world around us when people turn away from following His principles of life. He has sent His Holy Spirit to tug on our heart strings, to give us an inner conviction that this is true, that we need to follow Jesus, that we need to be truly committed to Him. How will we respond?