

**SERIES:** Gospel of John: Seeing is Believing?  
**SERMON:** *Accusation, Defense, and Rebuttal*  
**SCRIPTURE:** John 5:30-47  
**SPEAKER:** Pastor Dick High

Today we return to our study in the Gospel of John, stepping into the middle of chapter 5. The chapter begins by recounting an incident where Christ heals a man on the Sabbath. This has stirred a controversy with the Jews, as can be observed in verse 16: "...this is why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath."

Although it will be sometime before Jesus is officially tried, there is a bit of a courtroom flavor to the interaction that ensues. In response to their accusation, Christ's defense is a declaration of deity in verse 17; "My Father is working until now, and I am working." The Jews understand the intent of his statement, but strongly disagree (verse 18). Christ's response is to confront them with truth about his authority as the Son of God over life and death; and to make it quite clear that the only appropriate response is to believe in him (the gospel).

We begin today with the restatement of his identification with the Father in verse 30. Immediately following in verse 31 we'll consider the supportive witnesses that he references in his defense. The chapter then closes as he confronts the entrenched unbelief that he faces.

Would you stand as I read this passage from God's Word.

Here's my **sermon in a sentence**: Christ's authority is confirmed by reliable witnesses and gives him the right to confront unbelief wherever it occurs.

### **Reiteration of Identity – vs. 30**

Verse 30 echoes what Christ had already stated in verse 19. Neither is a statement of inability; rather both are statements that Christ never acts independently from his Father. He and the Father are one in attributes and nature, although distinct in person and role. They always act in complete accord. That was his claim in verse 17 that gave rise to the very strong opposition for the Jews referenced in verse 18. What Christ is clearly emphasizing throughout is that it is inconceivable for him to act in any way other than in complete oneness with the Father. That is something that is evident throughout the Gospels, observable in his response to the devil's temptations and in his submission to the Father's will for him to die on the cross. And in the immediate context it is and will be evident in any judgment that he gives. His actions never arise out of his own will. He and the Father are one!

### **Supportive Witness – vs. 31-37**

Having repeated this essential truth, the attention shifts in verse 31 as Christ calls to his defense various **supportive witnesses** to his claim of deity. The frequency of the words "witness" and "testimony" are quite obvious. (These are incomparable witnesses!)

As we consider the witnesses referenced here, I suggest it may be helpful to try to place ourselves in the minds and hearts of the audience to whom these words are spoken. It is hostile. It considers him a blasphemer. It has just heard another statement of his oneness with the Father. So notice not only who is presented as witnesses to his claim, but even the way that he communicates.

He first makes reference to **his own testimony**; see verse 31. This may seem to be a bit unusual, given the Jews are already contesting what he has stated about himself. Further, even the way that it is stated may initially appear not to be entirely clear. Old Testament law required two witnesses to verify the truth (Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). Christ's statement here, at least in part, may be an acknowledgement of that. Certainly the Jews will not deem his self-testimony as true. **However, that does not mean it is not true.** Look ahead to John 8 where Christ makes himself an exception to the requirement of multiple witnesses (vs. 12-14a). "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.' So the Pharisees said to him, 'You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.' Jesus answered, 'Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true...'" As God, no other witness is needed! I believe that part of what Christ is saying here is that the question of viability of his own witness is really a statement about their unbelief.

I believe that he is also stating that if he were to bear witness to himself independently of the Father, that witness could be deemed untrue. It would be insubordination for him to bear any witness that would not be in complete alignment, agreement, and concurrence with the Father. Arthur Pink states it this way: "The Son can no more bear witness to Himself independently of the Father, than He can of Himself work independently of the Father." When viewed in this light, these words of Christ are further declaration that he is one with the Father. Thus, the very declaration of his oneness with the Father that has triggered the response of verse 18 is emphasized here as well.

In verse 32 a second (**another**) **witness** is called to the stand. Notice as I reread the verse the absence of a clear identification of this witness. "There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true." Both verse 31 and verse 32 are somewhat cryptic statements. Are they intended to invite curiosity, even if only momentarily? But could this not have the effect to further agitate those who hear them. Of whom is Christ speaking? It is someone other than his own witness. It is someone that he claims bears true testimony about him. Could it be John the Baptist? The answer to that question is "No," as we see in verses 33-35.

Notice both what is said and is not said as Christ speaks of John. **John the Baptist** is presented here as a witness that they had sought out. But Christ does not say that John was a witness "about" him. The change in phrasing is noticeable when you consider that all the other witnesses of whom Christ speaks in this context are "about" him. (His own witness – verse 31; the yet to be identified witness that is offered in verse 32; and the witnesses we have yet to consider in verses 36 and 37). But the witness that John bears is "to the truth."

There is no dissonance between any of these witnesses, but the difference in statement is noteworthy. John was a witness to which the Jews had listened, at least for a time. Christ suggests reconsideration of John's message because his desire is that people come to salvation (through faith in him)! Perhaps their resistance to him can begin to be lessened if they would recall what initially drew them to listen to John. There at least had been a willingness to consider the truth, the "light" that he offered; oh that it might be rekindled! Oh that their hearts might be stirred anew! Oh that they would embrace the declaration that John had made, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" D. A. Carson observes that "If the Jews would remember that healthy response to John's preaching and recognize in Jesus the one whom the Baptist announced, then John's witness would prove extraordinarily fruitful. The sad reality, however, was that far too many chose to enjoy his light only *for a time*."

It is rather intriguing to note that even while Christ offers John as a witness, at the same time he says that he is not dependent upon John's testimony to establish his identity (note the first half of verse 34). Please understand that Christ is not negating or minimizing the witness of John the Baptist. Christ is rather suggesting a witness to which the Jews may be less hostile, while at the same time surrounding John's witness with even more weighty testimony.

That is observed in verse 36 where Christ calls **the works** that the Father has given him to accomplish as the next witness to his identity and authority. This again connects back to what had been stated in verse 17. He and the Father are one. They do the same works. Every work he does is testimony that he has been sent by the Father. Repetition, repetition, repetition! These are signs; pay attention to where they point.

The final witness now to be call is **the Father himself!** What has been stated indirectly in verse 32 is now stated with unmistakable clarity in verse 37. This could reference the voice that came from heaven when he was baptized by John (See Matthew 3:17). It could also be a general reference to whatever the Father has done to bear witness to the Son. (That would include everything we've considered here.)

Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament gives an excellent summation of what these verses convey. "Because He is the incarnate Word, because He has come from heaven, when He speaks of God He bears witness to what He has seen and heard. He is the truth and thus to bear witness to it is to bear witness to Him or about Him. For this is always to declare Him as the savior of the world sent by God. This took place, and does take place, through the Scriptures, through the Baptist, through God, through the works which the Father causes Him to do, through Jesus Himself, since in His divine mission He is in the Fourth Gospel the only theme of His addresses (5:31; 8:13f, 18)." Kittel – Vol IV, pg. 498 (My Lord and My God)

### **Confronting Unbelief – verses 37-47**

The remainder of chapter 5 is primarily a rebuke of the unbelief of the Jews in the face of these many witnesses. As the passage builds in crescendo to verse 37, which I view as the capstone of Christ's presentation of supportive witnesses, the attention abruptly shifts from himself to his audience. In rather rapid succession he identifies various ways in which they resist him, his message, and the witness of his Father. Lest we be tempted to think that these verses have less relevance to an audience that we acknowledge profess faith in Christ for salvation, I offer the warning of the book of Hebrews (6:1) to not be dull of hearing and affirm with me that "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." (2 Tim. 3:16)

Immediately Christ makes three accusations; -they are **not listening**, they do **not see**, and they **do not believe** in him. While actually hearing the voice of God was a rare occurrence (Moses did; and as mentioned earlier God spoke at the baptism of Christ), John 1:14 has stated that – "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, **and we have seen his glory**, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." The incarnation provided the opportunity to observe the glory of God in the person of Christ; and to hear God speak through the words of Christ. Many who saw and heard really did not see and hear; they did not believe. As stated in John 1:10-11, "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did **not** know him. He came to his own, and his own people did **not** receive him." That has not only been the case in reference to Christ, because his accusation is that they have **never** heard or seen. Literally "neither the voice of him at any time have you heard nor the form of him have you seen." Further God's word not abiding in them! This is an ongoing response that continues at this moment. The evidence of that to which Christ appeals is that they do not believe him, the one the Father sent.

This reference to God's word and their relationship with it is now expanded in verses 39 & 40. The word "search" is actually an imperative. I think the verb tense used here does not express a command, but it is used to highlight the intensity with which they search the Scriptures. They investigate, they examine thoroughly. The rationale behind all of their effort is acknowledged to be a desire for eternal life. But here's the rub (and this is **an additional accusation**); the judgment that Jesus renders (which he rightfully can do because he has authority as the Son of God to judge!) is that they "**refuse**" to come to him that they may have life." Energy and effort is being invested in the search, yet that is countered by refusal to accept or believe the one to whom the Scriptures bear witness. (By the way, we can add this witness to those already examined which give testimony to Christ's identity.) Christ's accusation is that they have **no** desire, wish, or

intent to come to (faith in) him. Their zeal is misguided, it is wrongly focused; in fact it is blinding. Clearly more than the intellect needs to be involved in the examination and response to Scripture. The response must also involve the heart and the will. There must be a submission to the One for whom and of whom the Scriptures speak. Because only he is the source of life!

Friends, these are strong words! Compare with what Stephen said in Acts 7. “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

What was their response? “Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.” I would suspect the atmosphere is similar in John 5 as it is in Acts 7. Both are intense rebukes!

This astounding claim echoes what Christ has stated earlier in the chapter; see verses 24 and 26. “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.”

Is this radical claim made out of self-interest, with the desire that people pay attention to him? Christ anticipates that thought and so asserts in verse 41 that he is not seeking human acclaim. As D. A. Carson observes, “If he stooped to become the kind of Messiah they wanted, doubtless he could attract their praise. But his entire commitment is to please his Father, receiving the honor that only the Father can bestow.”

The issue here is not what is wrong with him; the issue is what is wrong with them! The issue is not his motivation, because that has been clearly stated (and rejected!); rather the issue is the question of their motivation. Christ testifies in verse 42 that they do not have (**an absence of**) the love of God within them. In contrast to his love of the Father and commitment to do nothing on his own, these individuals are intent on sitting in authority over God’s word, the Scriptures, and over him, God’s Son. If they truly loved God, they would love his Son.

Further, they **lack discernment**; see verse 43. Although Christ comes completely, fully, entirely in his Father’s name, and never once acts independently from his Father (see again verses 19 and 30), they don’t accept him. Instead, “if another comes in his own name, you will receive him.” It is likely that there is no specific individual or incident in mind. The point is that rejection of him leaves them vulnerable to following false messiahs. Again, quoting D. A. Carson, “...the chief judgment on those who deny that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the son of God, is not so much that they have no Messiah, but that they follow false messiahs...” This warning is given more precisely in Christ’s Olivet Discourse found in Matthew 24.

A contributing factor to this very real danger is now addressed in verse 44. Akin to what has already been stated in verse 42, that they are not motivated by the love of God, the flip side of that is that they are motivated by human recognition and praise. They are totally misaligned in their focus! They were so **self-absorbed** in their position and their duties as watchdogs over the Law, and the approval of their peers is of such importance to them that they have become incapable of recognizing Christ as the Son of God. They don’t see his glory; they are blinded by the pursuit of their own glory! Neither do they grasp the grace and truth that could be found through faith in Christ as the Son of God. They stand judged!

As affirmation of this accusation, Christ appeals to one other witness; Moses! And as with the previous witnesses, they are **blind** to this one as well. The very Scriptures they purport to stand on and the very one to whom they appeal as the author of those Scriptures, Moses, condemns them. Earlier in the chapter Jesus has spoken of the authority given to him by the Father to judge. Ironically, he won’t need to exercise that

because those to whom he speaks are already under the judgment of Moses. It won't be a different judgment, please note, because Christ equates Moses' written words with his own spoken words. They are alike in authority. To believe one is to believe the other; and to reject one is to reject the other.

Such a declaration by Christ must have been shocking to hear. In the words of William Hendriksen, "Again and again the Jews would appeal to Moses and would boast, 'We are disciples of Moses,' (9:28). Now Jesus tells them that Moses, the constant object of their hope, to whose scriptures they were always appealing, whose instructions they debated and analyzed with hair-splitting casuistry, would actually prove to be their accuser; the reason being that, in spite of all their boasting about being his followers, they, in reality, did not believe him."

Moses was the revered mediator of the Sinai covenant. It was through him that God had given the law they claimed to venerate. He was the one they trusted for vindication of their actions. There is even evidence that at least some Jews thought that Moses was an ongoing advocate or intercessor for the people of Israel, as he had been in Exodus 32.

Christ's declaration is quite to the contrary. He identifies Moses as their judge; not sometime in the future, but right now! As the lawgiver, he knew the law's purpose. Rather than being an end in itself, it served to show our need of a savior and to point to Christ as that Savior. "But if you don't believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" And with those haunting words this conversation closes.

Well, how's that for a light, relaxed, and casual Sunday conversation!

How are we to respond? Let me suggest some verses to guide our response. You don't have to turn to them, just listen to God's word.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" Romans 1:16-17

- Today let us rejoice in the multitude of witnesses that are given to this gospel and rejoice in the righteousness available in Jesus Christ.
- Let us unashamedly acknowledge our belief in the gospel as our only hope of forgiveness of our sin and assurance of eternal life.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:8-9

- Let us rejoice in God's grace which frees us from every self-effort to win his approval.
- And let us freely invest our life in grateful service to him as our Lord.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" Psalm 139:23-24

- Today let us ask God to search our heart for any areas of resistance to his work in our life.
- Let us ask God to confront any area of unbelief, like Christ did with the two disciples in Luke 24 (verses 25-27). "And he said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” Matthew 28:18-20

- Let us go forth under Christ’s authority to complete his mission of, each of us being a witness to him as the Son of God.