The Gospel of John: *Can I Get a Witness?*  
John 5:31-47

As we return to our journey through John’s gospel, Jesus is defending His identity to those Jewish authorities who are eager to see Him dead. Let us pick up his defense speech in John 5:31-47. Please stand and let us read the Gospel together.

31 If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not 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, 38 and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. 39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. 41 I do not receive glory from people. 42 But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. 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. 44 How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? 45 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. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

My message this morning is entitled, *Can I Get a Witness?* and it will fall under three main subheadings: 1) Four Witnesses for Jesus; 2) Three False Hopes of Unbelievers; and 3) One Way to Life.

**I. Four Witnesses for Jesus**

Our thought unit begins with Jesus quoting a well-known saying in vs. 31: “If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true.” In the ancient mindset, whether one was being accused or one was trying to defend oneself, multiple witnesses were necessary to verify one’s testimony as true. In Deuteronomy 19:15 we read, “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.”

Now…why does Jesus make this declaration? Because Jesus has recently made amazing claims to His Jewish opponents: In 5:19 He said, “Whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.” In 5:22 He said, “The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.” And in 5:26 He said, “For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself.”

These claims that Jesus makes about Himself as the Son of God, His identity as the Son of Man, and His relationship with God the Father, are those kinds of claims that cannot possibly be considered true apart from the testimony of other witnesses. Jesus concedes that any man who would say these things about himself should be considered a liar if he has no witnesses apart from his own testimony. So Jesus states in vs. 32, “There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony he bears about me is true.” Jesus will then present four witnesses that verify Jesus’ testimony regarding His identity: 1) John the Baptist; 2) The Works of the
Father; 3) The Father’s Own Testimony; and 4) The Testimony of God’s Word in Scripture. I will unpack each one very briefly.

1) The first witness: John the Baptist. Jesus says to his Jewish opponents in vss. 33-36: 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.

Jesus first appeals to a human witness…a very famous prophet held in high regard amongst the Jews—John the Baptist. Jesus is reminding these Jewish authorities in Jerusalem that they had previously sent a delegation to inquire of John the Baptist back in John 1:24, and that John himself bore witness to Jesus, declaring (vs. 34): “I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God!”

Now notice what Jesus says next: “Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved.”

The accreditation of Jesus as God’s Son can in no way rest upon the witness of a man…even the best of men like John the Baptist…or Jim West…or Billy Graham…or any other man. Prophets and preachers can bear witness to Jesus, but our testimony cannot validate and verify the claims that Jesus made about Himself…that accreditation must come from God. Listen to how Jesus describes John the Baptist in vs. 35: “He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.” John the Baptist did his job…he was a burning and shining lamp. Lamps have no light in themselves…they carry the light…they are used to light the way…and lamps are even consumed by the light that they carry, right? How many of you would agree that Andrew and Norine Brunson are burning and shining lamps of our King? That is the calling of all who would carry the light of Christ in this hurting culture. All who are believers have a testimony…we are all to burn brightly and bear witness to the TRUTH, even at the expense of being consumed by the Light that we carry!

Now notice that though John the Baptist was faithful as a burning lamp, the Jewish authorities found him “interesting.” They willingly rejoiced in his light for a while, but they never believed John the Baptist. Jesus is essentially saying, “It won’t matter who bears witness. You have already made up your minds not to believe. Had you believed John the Baptist and taken his witness to heart, you would believe in Me and you would be saved. You didn’t believe John the Baptist…and you won’t believe even when I present greater testimony than John’s.” And, of course, that is exactly what Jesus does next. In vs. 36 Jesus states, “The testimony I have is greater than that of John.” And that leads us to...

2) The second witness: the works of Jesus that reveal the power of the Father. In vs. 36ff Jesus states, “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.” Here Jesus is appealing to the signs and wonders He has performed…such as healing the man bound to his mat for 38 years. As the great Pharisee, Nicodemus, observed earlier in John 3: “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.” One of the great travesties of the Enlightenment was an attempt to “demythologize” the scriptures. In other words, scholars convinced of an empirical epistemology decided to strip the Old and New
Testament of any reference to miracles or supernatural occurrences based upon the assumption that such signs and wonders likely never happened. Since modern people had never observed the parting of the waters, it probably didn’t happen. Since modern people had never observed the dead being raised, it probably didn’t happen. But how silly is this reasoning? The whole point Jesus is making here makes perfect sense: the One who does those things that only God can do is the One who is justified in saying that He is God’s Son and the executor of God’s will and judgment. The supernatural signs verify the supernatural claims of Jesus. Supernatural signs and wonders are exactly that: super…above or beyond…natural. Thus we would not expect to observe “supernatural signs and wonders” in nature!

Now, the works of Jesus were not always supernatural; but the works of Jesus were ALWAYS in perfect concert with those works we would expect of God the Father. What other human being could ever make that claim? What other human being could stand up in public and say, “Examine everything I have ever done, and I am confident you will come to the conclusion that I am one with the Father.” But that’s exactly what Jesus is saying. He is not simply pointing to the miraculous things He has done…He is pointing to EVERYTHING he has ever done! Let that sink in for a minute. Friends, what we do bears witness to who we are. Jesus was absolutely accurate to point to his works as EVIDENCE of His identity…just as our works will reveal our identity. Many of us claim to believe in Jesus…we claim to believe in God…we claim to be followers of Christ and those committed to the Great Commission. But what do our “works” reveal about who we truly are? If I never heard a word you said, but only observed your “works” over the course of a few weeks, would I be able to discern “who you are?” Jesus said: Look at my works…and you will know that I am the One sent by the Father. Let us now consider…

3) The Third Witness: The Father
In vs. 27 Jesus states: “And the Father who sent me has Himself borne witness about me,” There are likely many ways to unpack Jesus’ appeal to the Father as a witness, but I would remind you of two really, really obvious occasions when the Father bears direct witness regarding His Son. The first time is upon the occasion of Jesus’ baptism. In Mark 1:10-11 we read, “And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

Again the Father bears direct witness regarding His Son on the Mount of Transfiguration. In Luke 9:34-35 we read, “As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to Him!’”

John the Baptist, and likely some of his disciples, were there that day when the Father testified on Jesus’ behalf at the baptism. Peter, James, and John…the disciples…were there when the Father testified on the Mount of Transfiguration. This is strong evidence…God Himself spoke audibly so that human beings could hear every word, and His testimony was clear: This is MY SON!

Now…before Jesus gets to the final witness, He laments that those whom He is addressing here in John 5 simply don’t get it.
Jesus states in vs. 37b, “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.” Jesus goes from presenting His defense to presenting His judgment. These Jewish authorities have no excuse. Had they sought God in His Word; had they sought to hear the voice of the Father; had they longed for the Messiah of God in their hearts…they would now believe and embrace the Son. But alas, these men…though quite religious…missed the point of everything that God had been revealing to their forefathers since the beginning of time.

Jesus goes on in vs. 39, “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. Jesus makes it plain:

4) The fourth witness is the Word of God found in the scriptures. First, Jesus acknowledges that the Jewish authorities devoted themselves to searching the scriptures as the means of obtaining their eternal life. Jesus is no doubt referring to certain strands of rabbinic teaching like that of the great Rabbi Hillel who once wrote: “More Torah, more life. Whoso hath gained a good name, has gained it for himself. Whoso hath gained the words of the Torah, hath gained for himself life in the world to come.”

The scribes and Pharisees were obsessed with the Torah. They literally assigned numerical values to every letter of the Hebrew alphabet and numerical values to the words of the Torah, so that every line of scripture was a mathematical equation. They numbered the center letter of each line of Scripture, the center letter in each book, and the center letter in the Hebrew Bible. In copying the Scripture, a scribe was not allowed to write more than one letter before looking back to the text. This is one of the reasons we have so much confidence about the accuracy and the historical reliability of the scriptures…so that’s a good thing! However, many of the Jewish elite believed that LIFE itself was to be found in the written text of the scriptures…and yet, says Jesus, they completely missed the point. The point was always…is always…will forevermore always be…Jesus.

I going to borrow an illustration I read this week from Dr. Kent Hughes. Imagine that you are on top of the Sears Tower…now called the Willis Tower…in Chicago at sunset. The sky is on fire to the west, and to the northeast the deep blue shores of Lake Michigan are dotted with the lights of the city. In every direction the view is simply breathtaking. Imagine, then, some little man with thick glasses who taps you on the elbow and comments, “Just look at this window! What an amazing piece of work! I wonder what kind of glass this is, and how they framed it so perfectly. I’m going to commit my life to researching this window…give me your email address, and I’ll send you updates on what I have discovered!”

Talk about missing the point! The window and its frame are not there to be admired as an end to themselves, they are there to be looked through to the beautiful scenes made accessible through the window, right? Such it is with the Bible. The Bible is not about the Bible. The Bible is about Jesus! The Bible…all of it…is constantly pointing to God’s love for His rebellious creation made manifest once and for all in His Beloved Son. Everything points to Jesus.
Many of you may recall that great story in Luke 24 when the travelers from Jerusalem meet the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus. The travelers were discouraged and confused, having witnessed the crucifixion of their Beloved King. And this is how Jesus responds in vss. 25-27, “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.”

The law, the prophecies, the Psalms, the Passover Lamb, the Temple, the Tabernacle…everything in the Old Testament points to Jesus! The Scriptures bear witness that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of Man, and the one and only Son of God!

Church: if you are not reading the Bible to see Jesus, you are likely falling into the same error as those whom Jesus is currently rebuking. If you are reading the Bible as an end unto itself, you are missing the point. And as sinful humans, we are famous for missing the point, amen? That leads me to my second subheading:

II. Three False Hopes of Unbelievers

If you listen closely to the judgments of Jesus, He identifies three false hopes of these unbelieving Jewish authorities: 1) the hope of life through religious study; 2) the hope of glory from men; and 3) the hope of justification through the law.

1) Life through religious study. We’ve already addressed this false hope, but let us agree that our study of the Bible is no substitute for a relationship with Our Savior. If you think you know the scriptures, yet you fail to yield to Jesus, you have made the scriptures your hope for life…and that is a false hope. The Bible and your religious activities won’t give you life. They cannot save you. Jesus says in vs. 40, “…come to me that you may have life.” Don’t get me wrong…we all need to devour the scriptures. All Christians need to drink deeply of God’s Word on a regular basis…but never allow your religious business to become your hope…Jesus is our hope, amen?

2) Hope for the glory of men. Listen to what comes next in our text in vss. 41-44, and listen for the rebuke of Jesus against the hope of man’s glory:

41 I do not receive glory from people. 42 But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. 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. 44 How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

When Jesus says, “I do not receive glory from people,” He is clearly saying, “I do not seek glory from people. I do not absorb their glory, nor am I concerned should they withhold their glory.” Why? Because Jesus gets His glory from the Father…His entire identity is in the Father; thus the glory of men is inconsequential. But here is our Lord’s observation regarding His opponents in vs. 42: “I know that you do not have the love of God within you.” This comment had to hit the Jewish authorities right between the eyes. Jesus is judging them; and His judgments are true. The love of God was lacking in these men. How did Jesus know? He states it clearly in vs. 43: I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me. The equation is simple: if the love of the Father is in you, you will receive the Son. If you fail to receive the Son, the love of the Father is not in you.
Listen: you will meet many people who will acknowledge that there is a god, and we should all be moral, and they believe that if they are good, they will go to heaven when they die. These are your basic deists, and according to recent studies, many of our millennial friends and children are more deists than Christian. But listen to what Jesus said: If you reject the Son, you have rejected the Father. Don’t claim to have the love of God within you while you reject the Son…those two realities can not co-exist. If we love the Father, we will receive the Son with joy and thanksgiving.

Jesus restates this truth using the concept of “glory.” We can seek glory from God, or we can seek the glory of men. Those who glorify God will glorify His Son. But those who seek the glory of men find it all but impossible to receive the Son. Jesus states in vs. 43ff: 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. 44 How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

I’m often fascinated by coaches and players who experience the pinnacle of success in their careers, and I listen very carefully to the way they handle success. It is at that moment that we most clearly see what motivates each person. Some coaches and players quickly give all glory and honor to God and His Son. I am always drawn to these players and coaches, even long after they have aged out of the limelight, because these players and coaches tend to go on and lead productive, God-honoring lifestyles long after the glory of men has faded. However, whenever I hear a coach or a player heap glory upon themselves, or they absorb all the glory of men, or God-forbid…they complain that they are not getting their share of the glory they are due…I shudder. Inevitably, those who seek the glory of men will be utterly ruined by the very hope that drives them. And just as inevitably, those who seek the glory of men find it impossible to believe in and surrender to King Jesus.

This quest for the glory of man does not just afflict athletes and coaches; the tendency can often be found in pastors and church leaders as well. Consider our obsession with comments and “likes” on social media. What do people say about our church? What comments do people make about my sermons? How do people rank our church amongst all the churches in the metro? How will our legacy be glorified in the eyes of men?

Listen church: beware of this false hope in man’s glory. Beware of those who tell us all that we want to hear. Beware of the sermon that never offends, or the “friends” who never confront. Beware of a Christianity that costs you nothing and requires you to sacrifice nothing. Beware of those who come “in their own name.” Instead, look to those who come in the name of the Lord…those who seek God’s glory and His glory alone. These will be those who speak the truth, even at the risk of offense. They will risk confrontation out of love for Christ and His Church. They will endure hardships, persecution, and isolation for the sake of the One who sent them! Again…I appeal to our guests from last Sunday, the Brunsons. What a beautiful and honest example of what it means to seek the glory of God as followers of Jesus. May we also seek the Lord’s face…may we seek the glory of God and not the glory of men.

3) Finally, the third false hope is our confidence in our own goodness. Jesus concludes with these words to his critics: 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?

I don’t have much time to unpack this, but take note of what Jesus is saying here: if our hope is set on our ability to be good people who follow the law of Moses; even Moses himself will be our accuser before the Father. Why? Because as one commentator writes, “The law of Moses is not a religion of salvation, it is the categorical imperative of God by which men are accused and exposed as sinners.” In Deut. 31:26 God says to Moses, “Take this Book of the Law and put it by the side of the Ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against you.”

The Law of God, the Moral Law that is written upon the hearts of men and the pages of scripture, is designed to convict us and drive us to repentance and to faith in the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. However, nothing will keep us further from faith in Jesus than our misguided hope in our own goodness. Such is why Jesus concludes: If you do not believe in the writings of Moses, how will you believe my words? We need to see our sin before we will ever be able to see Jesus for who He is.

This leads me to my closing subheading:

**III. One Way to Life**

Everywhere we turn we are constantly hearing an advertisement for a better life. The promise of life comes in the form of products, promotions, professions, and possessions. If we can look a certain way…if we can drive the right car…if we can earn enough money…if our kids get into the right schools…then we will earn the glory of our peers, and we will have life! Or perhaps we have friends on social media who are amazing religious people. They are so disciplined…always quoting the Bible…and they constantly let the whole world know about all the good things they are doing and all the bad things they have resisted doing this past week. Again, they, too, are seeking the glory of men. It’s everywhere we turn…people seeking glory from people.

Let me tell you something friends: the glory of man is a mirage. Discontent is the norm among those who seek the glory of men; religious or non-religious alike. In fact, it is that very discontent that drives them to seek man’s glory all the more…and that quest always leads to sin and sin’s consequences.

But not all people live in this chronic discontent. There are those who have discovered peace…a deep peace…a peace that passes understanding. They are often those who at first seem quite unremarkable…they draw little attention to themselves…and they seem to be little concerned about the glory of men. These are souls who have learned to be content with much or with little; they have learned to endure hardship and still maintain their joy…these are those who are passionate, humble, and hard-working, but you never hear them drawing attention to their passion, their humility, or their hard work.

These are those who seek the glory of God; these are those who have the eternal kind of life in Jesus, and it looks nothing like the advertisements that we see in the media or the religious
posturing of our Facebook friends. Those pursuing the glory of God have a spring of living water within them, and over time, they look more and more like the One they love. And that is because there is only one way to life you’ve always wanted: and that is through the Son.

So here’s your assignment as we prepare to go back into the world. When you begin to complain about how busy you are, or all the things that you lack, or that your life is not fair, or that your marriage is shot and your kids are a mess… I want you to stop and ask yourselves: “Where is my hope right now?” “Whose glory am I seeking?” “Where am I seeking to find LIFE?” And then remember John 5, and remember the One who said, “Come to me that you may have life.” Let us pray.